

Easter celebrations

An asylum seeker, who converted to Christianity from another religion, was asked at his appeal hearing, "What is the most important time in the year for Christians?" "Easter," he replied correctly. Many less-informed people might have answered "Christmas", for Christmas is the time of year when the most extravagant celebrations take place in our society, which is now a largely *post-Christian* society of course. But for every true believer, Easter is the more important time of year for us, because this is when we remember the sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and both of these events are absolutely fundamental to our faith.

I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel, you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. ... For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance : that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. [1 Corinthians 15.1-4]

It is no exaggeration to say that **Christmas happened only in order for Easter to happen.** Every other human being is born to live; but Jesus, extraordinarily, was born in order that he might die.

Since we, God's children, have flesh and blood, Jesus too shared in our humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death - that is, the devil - and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. ... For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order ... he might make atonement for the sins of the people. ... When Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me. ... We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. [Hebrews 2.14-15,17; 10.5,10]

In his great chapter on the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15), Paul reminds us of just how significant our Lord's resurrection is for our own faith and destiny.

- Christ's resurrection means we have **a message of good news** to share with the world (v14).
- It's a message of absolute **forgiveness** for our many faults and failings (v17).
- It's a message of cast-iron **hope in the face of death** for every true believer in Jesus (v18).
- It's a message of **hope for the here and now**, as we experience the power of Jesus' living presence in our lives day by day, by his Spirit within us (v19).

*If Christ has not been raised, our faith is useless.
But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead!*
[1 Corinthians 15.17,20]

Because Easter is such an important time of year for us as Christians, let's seek to **make the most of every opportunity we have to share the good news message of Christ's death and resurrection with others.** Here's a brief run-down of what we will be doing as a Church.

➤ **Hot-Cross Buns Easter Special, Tuesday 8th March 7.00-8.30pm.** This is part of our 'Fun and Food for all the Family' programme. We will be running a few games and quizzes, then showing a video called *Easter Promise* about a young boy who was forced to change his mind over the kind of king Jesus was – not a disappointment, as he thought initially when he saw him riding into Jerusalem on a donkey; but the victor over death. Come along yourself and bring your friends and family. We will round off the evening with some hot-cross buns!

➤ **Jesus Video distribution.** Wanda Stockdale has kindly agreed to co-ordinate this in the run up to Easter. We will probably be returning to some of the homes we visited for our Christmas Carol singing.

➤ **Good Friday Service, 12 noon – 1.30pm.** Ted Maughan has kindly agreed to lead this once again. Our time together will begin with a 'frugal' lunch (soup and bread) before we spend time meditating prayerfully on some of the Scriptures that relate the events of the first Good Friday.

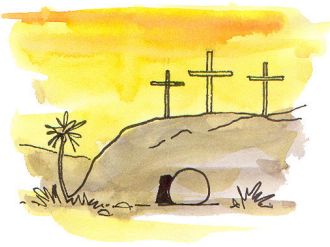


➤ **Easter Day All-age Service, 11.00am – 12 noon.** This is will be a time for young and old alike to celebrate the joy of Christ's resurrection.

➤ **Easter Day International Tea, 5.30pm.** I am hoping to ask one of our recently arrived overseas friends to share a little of his/her country with us. It may provide with some insights into how Easter is celebrated in another culture.

➤ **Easter Day Evening Celebration, 6.30-7.45pm.** The first Easter Sunday evening was a very precious time for the first disciples. Jesus himself came and stood amongst them, making his presence real to them. In doing so he brought them great reassurance, hope and joy. We will be praying that Jesus will draw close to each one of us by his Spirit, in a similar way, as we

celebrate his resurrection together on Easter Sunday evening. Plan to be there! Our newly formed singing group will be helping to lead us in our worship.



Beyond Easter - more celebrations!

Immediately after Easter, there are two other events we can use evangelistically.

➤ **Songs of Praise from the Sage, 11th & 12th April.** We have ordered 50 tickets for this event. They will be distributed on a first come, first served basis – but think about taking a friend along with you, perhaps someone who doesn't normally attend church. It might be a means of kindling a fresh spiritual interest in their heart. There is also an opportunity to join the choir that is being formed for this event. A rehearsal will take place on Thursday 7th April. See me for further details.

➤ **Church Anniversary Weekend, 23rd & 24th April.** As I mentioned last month, we are looking forward to welcoming Revd Craig Dyer, of the Harper Memorial Baptist Church in Glasgow, as our anniversary Guest Speaker this year. We are also hoping to incorporate into our Saturday night programme an official 'opening ceremony' for our church refurbishment project – provided it is completed in time! It will be a good opportunity for us to invite to a church event representatives from the various bodies who have given us such generous grants, enabling the work to go ahead, as well as representatives from bodies in the local community. Jane Kitson has kindly agreed to be our guest soloist for the evening

Building refurbishment work

As you will have noticed, scaffolding is now up to help Matthew Charlton's undertake the much-needed repairs to our roof, and we hope that Beacon Builders will start work on 14th March to construct our new **access ramps** and **accessible toilet facilities**.

- We have recently received an **electrical report** for our premises and we will be sharing some recommendations arising from it at our Church Members' Annual General Meeting on 23rd March.
- We have also had a **structural engineer** visit the Church to look at some areas of concern at the front of the building, and we hope to be able to share some of his preliminary findings at the AGM too.
- To remedy the defects that have been reported, we will have to raise some further sums of money over the next few months. Please pray that we will be granted wisdom as we apply to various grant bodies for this funding; and pray too that the Lord will supply all our needs in the future as he has done so remarkably in the past.

Doors of Opportunity

Let me update you on what has been happening since our last News Letter regarding some of the 'doors of opportunity' God is setting before us at this time.

➤ **A Welcome card** and a flyer about our church activities, together with a letter from the Pastor, have been dropped through the letter boxes of the new homes recently built close to the Church. Around 90% of them are occupied by Jewish families. Pray that they will read the literature that has been delivered to them, and not simply discard it because it has come from a church.

➤ **15+ group.** This was an idea that came out of the very fruitful Deacons Away Day we held last month. For some time, we have been concerned that we have nothing to feed our young people into once they pass through the upper age limit for our Rock Solid Club. So Paul Harris has kindly agreed to look into the possibility of organising some occasional events for those in the 15-plus age bracket (School Year 10 through to mid/late 20's).

➤ **Men's Daytime Group.** A questionnaire is circulating amongst men in the fellowship to sound out the possibility of starting up a daytime group for those available during the day on weekdays. So far, the returns have been very positive with most favouring a monthly meeting, with the possibility of expanding it to once a fortnight if it is successful.

➤ **Tall Ships Race and River Festival.** We are hoping to welcome a local representative from the festival to our **April Games Night** (Tuesday 19th). The organisers are looking for people with language skills to act as befrienders, and we are exploring the possibility of hosting a meal at the church for some of the crewmembers (not all 4,000 of them though!).

➤ **An Evening with Syd Little, Friday 18th November.** This will be our main outreach event for the autumn and we have sent out notices to 70 local churches inviting them to join with us for what should be a memorable occasion. We have applied to the Baptist Union for a 'Green Shoots Fund' grant to help cover the costs. Pray for us to be successful.

➤ **Week of Prayer, 4th-11th September.** Note the dates in your diary!

➤ **Prom Praise.** Exploratory talks have taken place to bring this prestigious event to The Sage music centre in the autumn of 2006.

People for our Prayers

We extend our heartfelt sympathy to **Margaret Bonham** on the recent loss of her mother, **Anna**, one of our church members. We also extend our very best wishes for a speedy recovery to **Phoebe Newton**, following her recent operation for a broken-hip.

David Hunt