

2008

CHRISTMAS JOURNEYS

Did you know that the ingredients of a typical Christmas dinner might have travelled a total of 24,000 miles to arrive on your dinner table for Christmas Day? That fascinating but utterly useless piece of information was contained in a *Christmas Facts and Figures* leaflet, which I was sent a few years ago. I know you will be itching to hear how people work such things out, so here goes!

- The *Brussels sprouts* may have travelled a few hundred miles from the farmers' fields to your dining table.
- But the *carrots and potatoes* may have come from much further away: 1,000 miles from Spain, and 1500 miles from Italy, respectively.
- Your *runner beans* could have come all the way from Zambia, 5,000 miles away.
- The *turkey* may have been produced in Thailand, 11,000 miles away – and that's just the first course!
- Add in the *currants, raisins, and sultanas* for the Christmas pudding (not to mention the mince pies) and the total comes to 24,000 miles - or once around the world.

Of course, Christmas has always been about journeys. **Mary and Joseph** had to make a 70-mile journey from their hometown of Nazareth, in the north of Israel, to Bethlehem, a few miles south of Jerusalem. But several other highly significant journeys also took place that first Christmas.

The shepherds made a short journey to find God's Saviour

The shepherds' journey was a short one, from the fields around Bethlehem where they had been keeping watch over their sheep, to the place where a newborn baby was lying in an animal's feeding trough, as a make-do cot.

The shepherds journeyed to see for themselves God's long-promised Saviour, whose birth had just been announced to them:



"Do not be afraid," the angel said to them. "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." [Luke 2.10-12]

As with many journeys we make, the shepherds had to leave certain things behind them to go in search of Jesus. They left behind their place of work, the fields where they looked after their sheep. Perhaps they

even had to leave their sheep behind them as they went in search of God's Saviour!

Similarly, if *we* are to find the Saviour whom God has provided for us, there are certain things *we* must leave behind.

- We must abandon any feelings of *self-sufficiency* - the assumption that we can go it alone through life, without any outside help from anyone.
- We must also leave behind our *pride*, which is apt to say, "Other people might need God, but I can manage on my own."
- We must leave behind our *prejudices*, too - our preconceived ideas as to what being a Christian is all about; or our dismissal of the Christmas story as being no more than a fable from the past, with no real basis in history.
- At Christmas, we have to leave behind all our *preconceptions* about how God should do things and simply accept what he has done, how he has done it, and why he has done it. Jesus came, not to help us on *our* terms, but *to die the death we deserved* for our many faults and failings, our sins.

"Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." [Matthew 1.20-21].

None is so good that we don't need a Saviour; the shepherds realised that, otherwise they would have stayed where they were, in their fields. But, equally, none is so bad that they are beyond hope and help; perhaps the shepherds, notorious for being scoundrels, realised that too.

This, of course, is the good news of the Christmas story. *Christ the Lord* is a *Saviour* is for all the people. The provision is universal; but it's also very personal – it's for you! It demands a response from each individual. That's what the shepherds realised. They were rough, tough working men; but not so big, bold or bad as to pass up the opportunity of finding God's Saviour.

The Magi made a significant journey to own Jesus as their Lord

The journey the Magi made was a much longer one, and a highly significant one too. The shepherds had been told that the baby lying in the manger was none other than *Christ the Lord*. The Magi recognised this also, for we're told that when they reached Jesus, after their long overland



journey, they did something truly astonishing. They *bowed down and worshipped Jesus* [Matthew 2.11]. That meant only one thing: the Magi recognised that Jesus was God, for God alone is worthy of our worship.

Grown men do all sorts of strange things when setting eyes on a newborn baby for the first time. They may admire the baby and exclaim, "Isn't he lovely" or "Isn't she beautiful!" They often take plenty of photos of the baby (something the Magi *didn't* do!). Some may fall to their knees and thank God for his precious gift of life, and ask God for his blessings on the child.

But there is one thing grown men *never* do with a newborn baby (at least, not literally!): *worship it*. No grown man in his right mind bows down before a newborn baby to pay it homage as God. Yet that's what the wise men did, and what wise hearts still do. For, if the writers of the first Christmas story were right about Jesus, this is where our Christmas journey must take us. It must take us to the point where we bow down before Jesus and acknowledge him to be Lord - not just in a vague, general sense but as *my Lord and my God* to borrow Thomas' famous words [John 20.28]. We each have to journey to the point where we recognise Jesus has the right to direct *my* life in its every detail.

JESUS made a sensational journey to become God with us

There's no doubt who made the most extraordinary journey 2,000 years ago for the first ever Christmas - Jesus himself! It wasn't simply the traumatic journey that every newborn baby makes - from the safety and comfort of its mother's womb, to emerge into the harsh and hostile environment of the outside world. The journey that lay behind the birth process of Jesus was truly sensational! It was a journey from the glory of his Father's eternal presence to the confines of a human body, which would be his chosen home for the next 33 years of his life. What an extraordinary journey *that* was! *Our God contracted to a span* [a mere hand's breadth], *incomprehensibly made man*, as Charles Wesley put it so well, in one of his lesser known Christmas carols.

The eternal Son of God journeyed from heaven to take up residency in a human body, here on earth. And there is a very profound sense in which Jesus wants to make that same journey over and over again - not physically, but spiritually for every man, woman and child on this planet. It is what's described so well in the greatly loved Christmas carol, *O little town of Bethlehem: where meek souls will receive him, still the*

dear Christ enters in. This is what we mean by being *born again*. It is about us receiving a new life - the life of Jesus - by him coming to take up residency within us, through the indwelling presence of his own Holy Spirit: *Christ in you, the hope of glory* (Col 1.27).

Fond Farewells

Talking of journeys, this month we are bidding a fond farewell to two people who have become very special to us at DRBC over the past few months and years.

- We have greatly appreciated all the work that **Matthew Johnston** has done amongst us over the past five months as our USA Youth Interim. He has run our weekly *Rock Solid Club* and *Fit for Life Club* each Friday night, and he has also taken the Bible Class for us each Sunday morning. His work in the Joseph Swan School has been greatly appreciated by the staff and pupils alike, as has his contribution to the junior Christian Union at Emmanuel College. Members of our two five-a-side football teams have enjoyed Matthew's support over the first part of this season too. So, we wish Matthew well as he goes back to College for his final year of studies and pray that God will guide him into the good plans he has for him in the future.
- Sadly for us, but quite understandably for family reasons, **Sarah Xu Ji** is returning to China this month, after six very enjoyable years with us. All of us have grown to love and appreciate her deep spirituality and cheerful Christian character. She helped pioneer our Overseas Bible Study Group in its early days, which resulted in the first Baptism Service at DRBC for many, many years. We will miss her greatly, but wish her well as she returns to her family and fellowship in her homeland.

Christmas Celebrations

Here is a reminder of our special Christmas services taking place at DRBC later this month.

- **Sunday 21st December: All-age Christmas service, 11.00am-12 noon. Christmas Carol Service, 6.30-7.45pm**, followed by coffee and mince pies.
- **Christmas Day 25th December: All-age service, 11.00am-12 noon.**
- **Sunday 28th December: Morning service with Guest Speaker, Mr Frank Oliver, 11.00am. Informal evening gathering at Paul Harris' home.**

David Hunt