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Flesh

Our
historical
faith

William Lane Craig • Miracle of faith • Church directory

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editorial

One of the most impressive features of Christianity is that it is firmly rooted in history. All the New Testament writers are explicit in their claim that the Christian faith is tied inextricably to certain historical events.

For instance, Luke says that his account of Jesus' life was the subject of painstaking historical research. He relates how many people had been involved in the project and that it was conducted with a concern for accuracy and eyewitness detail. He fully intended the narrative to record events that were known to be true and capable of verification (Luke 1:2-4).

Likewise, the apostle Paul anchored his gospel in the historical certainty of certain saving events in the life of Jesus. He was well aware of the consequences should any of those details have proved to be false: if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith (1 Cor. 15:14).

Why is this issue of the historical reliability of the Gospels so important? For this reason: if significant events in Jesus' life, such as his virgin birth, crucifixion or resurrection were nothing more than myth, then it's hard to see how we could treat Jesus seriously as Saviour. He would have no more power than Superman.

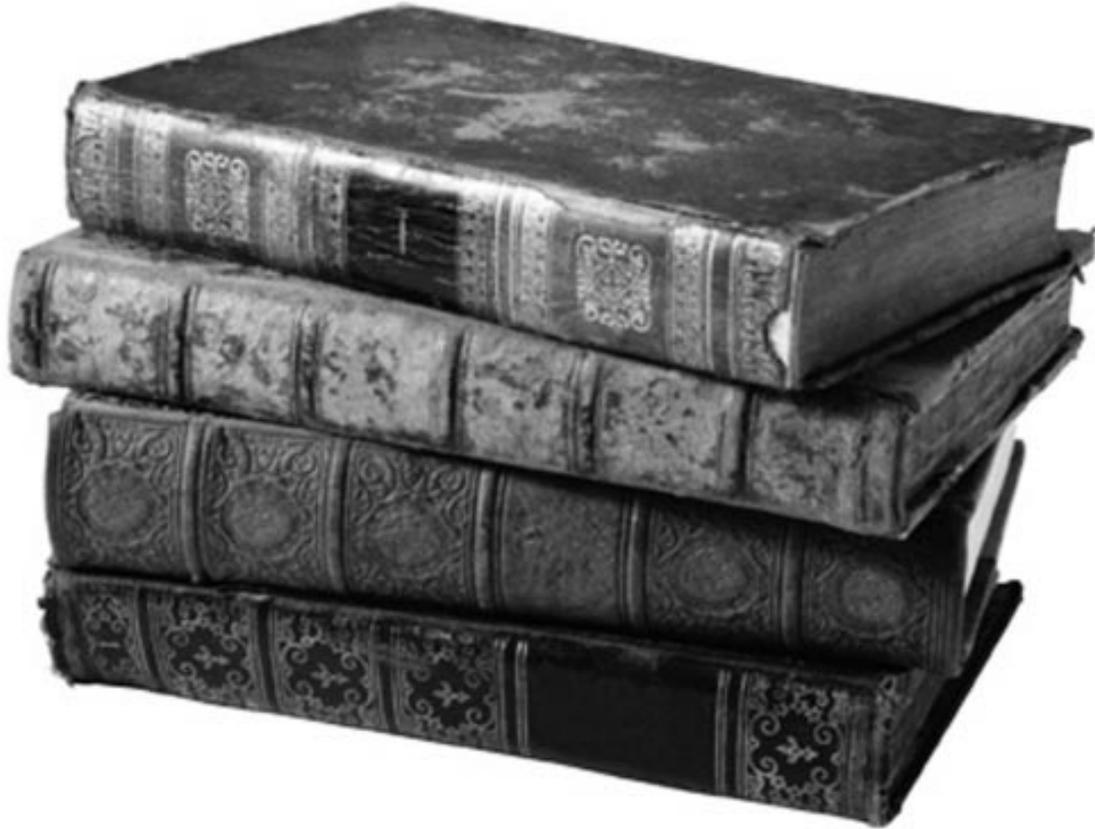
For example, while Superman has become modern legend, everyone knows that he's not real. There is no one called Clark Kent; no Lois Lane, no Jimmy Olsen, no Daily Planet, no city called Metropolis and no planet Krypton. It's enjoyable make believe which has no real bearing on our lives. No one seriously believes that Superman rescues us from our human predicament. But with Jesus it's different. The Apostle Peter says of Him, "We did not follow cleverly invented stories ... but were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Peter 1:16).

Christmas is a reminder that the eternal Word really became flesh, born of a woman, to redeem us from our sins. It's not myth or make believe. It's historical reality.

Peter Hastie 

At history's heart

Christianity, uniquely, stands or falls on historical events.



The most distinctive claim about Christianity in relation to other world religions is that Christianity says that God has revealed himself in history. As British theologian Alan Richardson has stated: "The Christian faith ... is bound up with certain happenings in the past, and if these happenings could be shown never to have occurred, or to have been quite different from the biblical-Christian account of them, then the whole edifice of Christian faith, life and worship would be found to have been built on sand."

At Christmas, we celebrate the central event in world-history – that God became man in Jesus Christ. Today this claim is under assault in a variety of ways. Some claim it's a myth; others assert that it's a meaningless statement because it is impossible to really know the past. *AP* asked William Lane Craig, research professor in philosophy at Talbot Theological Seminary, Los Angeles, what he thought about these views.

Why is history so important to the



**William Lane Craig
talks to
Peter Hastie**

Christian faith?

History is crucial to Christianity because it keeps the Christian faith from degenerating into mythology. Unless the Bible is rooted in actual historical events, there is no reason to think that Jesus of Nazareth should be any more determinative for my life today than so-called gods like Thor, Odin or Zeus or any other mythological deity. History is the vital component in Christianity because it grounds faith in fact.

Do other religions have a similar interest in history?

Yes, but only in a relative sense. Other religions certainly have an historical component. One thinks of Judaism, for example, where at least among orthodox Jews, God's acts in history like the Exodus are very important. God's rescue

of the Israelites from Egypt is the central miracle of the Old Testament. Again, history plays some role in Islam. For instance, the coming down of the Qur'an out of heaven to Mohammed is reported to be an historical event and is believed by Muslims to be God's revelation to him.

So there are historical elements in these faiths, but they don't have the same significance as historical events in Christianity. The reason for this is that one's salvation in Judaism and in Islam is not a matter of historical facts; it's a matter of being obedient to certain sorts of prescribed activities or regulations. Although these regulations arose in a certain historical context, that context doesn't really affect the practice of the piety of those religions in any way. However, in Christianity it's entirely different. In Christianity the saving acts of God are themselves historical acts. So if you were to remove the historicity of Jesus or the historicity of the cross, the whole basis for atonement and salvation would be removed.

G.E. Ladd has said: “The uniqueness and the scandal of the Christian religion rests in the mediation of revelation through historical events.” What does that mean?

Ladd is right, of course. Christianity is not a code for living or a philosophy of religion; rather, it is rooted in real events of history. The reason it’s scandalous is because it ties up the truth of Christianity with the truth of those historical facts. This means that if these historical events are shown to be fraudulent or fictional, then the whole basis of Christianity is removed. To put it as simply as possible: the truth or falsity of Christianity stands or falls with individual events within history.

Islam, on the other hand, is not nearly as dependent on history. For instance, you can follow the five pillars of Islam: make the confessions, say the prayers, give the alms, go to Mecca and so forth, but none of these things is directly dependent upon historical events. However, Christianity is quite different. The offer of salvation that we receive in the gospel is real only if the specific events upon which the offer is based are real.

On the other hand, I think this makes Christianity a truly great religion because it gives us a means of verifying the truth of the Christian faith. We can actually investigate history to see whether Jesus of Nazareth lived, died and rose again and made the claims that we find in the New Testament. So the Christian faith provides a touchstone for the assessment of its claims that isn’t present in most other religions of the world.

Has the historical element of the Christian faith always been considered important in the Church?

Traditionally, it has. Right from the beginning, Christianity’s earliest creeds are affirmations of historical events. For instance, the Apostles Creed says of Jesus: “He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried ... on the third day he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven.” These historical events are important elements in the early creeds.

Tragically, with the rise of liberal theology in the 19th century, the importance of history for Christian faith was depreciated and lost. Liberal scholars no longer believed that Jesus was really central to the heart of the Christian faith. They looked elsewhere for the central core: the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. They believed that this was the one

doctrine that was fundamental to Christianity. Everything else was secondary, including historical events.

Thankfully, liberal theology has come and gone. I think the 20th century has been characterised by a strong appreciation of the centrality of history for the Christian faith. And we should be really grateful for that.

Didn’t the church in the Middle Ages also lose contact with history through its preoccupation with philosophical theology?

In one sense it did. But that shouldn’t lead us to think that people in the medieval period didn’t sense the importance of history. They believed that events like the resurrection of Jesus really occurred; they

understood that these were not just fictions or myths. For them, Jesus of Nazareth really lived, died and did these things.

The difficulty was that they didn’t have any way of demonstrating that this had happened. The most that they could do was to appeal to the miracle of the church itself. To them, it seemed incredible that this universal edifice, now spread throughout all of known civilisation, could have been predicated upon a falsehood.

What impact did this renewed interest in history have on apologetics in the period after the Reformation?

At the time of the Renaissance, scholars developed a new consciousness of history. They became intensely interested in rediscovering the past. This desire to develop an historical understanding expressed itself in the love and search for documents of antiquity. There was a great interest in recovering Greek documents and in mastering the ability to read Greek once again.

This interest in the classics had a flow-on effect for New Testament studies. Scholars became interested in the historical roots of Christianity, and began the task of establishing the text of the New Testament as reliably as they could. As a result, the first glimmerings of an interest in an historically oriented apologetic for

the Christian faith began to appear. Scholars such as Philippe de Mornay and Hugo Grotius soon began to use historical arguments to defend the truth of the gospels and Christianity.

Why are people so sceptical today of the idea that history is an objective reality?

I think that some people are sceptical about this because of the popularity of relativistic views of truth. Postmodernism denies the existence of objective truth. Postmodernists believe that the past is merely the construction of the present. They believe that since the events of the past are gone, they are lost – they’re no longer accessible. They think the historian’s task is to reconstruct the past using present resources. And, moreover, since they claim that no historian is a neutral observer, but is inevitably caught up in the historical process, he cannot reconstruct the past objectively as it really was. This has led some thinkers to a relativistic view of history where as one person put it: “History is a series of lies that everyone has agreed to agree upon.”

Is there any point in trying to discover the historical facts about Jesus, when so many have come up with different assessments?

Yes, I believe there is. I think that the diversity of opinions about the historical Jesus can be largely tied to the sort of philosophical presuppositions that critics bring to the table. Their conclusions are not really being determined by the evidence so much as by the presuppositions that they bring to it. You see this clearly in their published works.

For instance, the members of the Jesus Seminar explicitly state what their presuppositions are in their introduction to their edition of *Five Gospels*. For them, the number one pillar of scholarly wisdom is the presupposition of scientific naturalism. In other words, they don’t believe that there are supernatural events in history. They think that whenever you find a miraculous event in the narrative, this is an automatic sign that you’re in the presence of either legend or mythology. They simply begin with the assumption that miracles are fictional in character. Extraordinarily, they make no attempt to justify this presupposition. If you begin with the assumption of scientific naturalism, then of course events like the virgin birth, the incarnation, the miracles of Jesus and his resurrection will have to be assessed as non-historical.

Again, some critics like Marcus Borg make it very clear that what he's looking for is a Jesus who will be religiously available to people in the contemporary scene. Borg deliberately sets out to re-interpret Jesus to be a sort of cross-cultural, spiritual person – a kind of mystic – who will appeal to persons in all cultures and in all religions. That's why he comes up with a very politically-correct Jesus – a Jesus who is not offensive or jarring to the modern mind.

However, if you do not force these critical presuppositions upon the Gospels, then there is quite a remarkable consensus emerging among scholars about the person of the historical Jesus, what he taught, and about events in his life such as his death and resurrection. So I think we need to be careful not to exaggerate the diversity of views among scholars today. Certainly there has been a diversity of views in past quests to recover the historical Jesus – but contemporary scholarship has actually recovered, I think, the broad outlines of a portrait of Jesus that can be largely agreed upon.

Since we cannot directly observe the past, can we know it? Could our ideas of the past be an elaborate fabrication, as untrustworthy as a dream?

Well, the difference between a dream and history, of course, is that history leaves a residue and a dream does not. And it's through this residue, whether in the form of literary documents or archaeological debris, that historians are able to reconstruct the past. True historians work within the constraints of the remaining evidence. And that's the difference between actual history and a dream. It is only on the basis of the evidence that we can reconstruct the past; we are certainly never justified in going against that evidence.

How do we know that historical facts are real? The events themselves have gone and all we're left with is an historian's statement – e.g. Matthew and Luke on the Christmas story.

In the first place, it's important to notice that the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. When you think about it, we have no evidence at all for most historical events – yet they really happened. For example, we have no evidence that on 2 April 1802 Napoleon spat in a puddle. Perhaps he did, but we have no way of knowing.

Most historical events don't leave sufficient evidence to reconstruct them, so the absence of evidence isn't itself proof that

an event didn't occur. In the case of the gospels, I find it extraordinary that we have any evidence at all for some of these events. For instance, consider the events of the virgin birth or the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. In this case, we have evidence from a variety of sources. This is very interesting when we compare it with the evidence that we have for other persons in antiquity. In their case, we have almost no evidence at all.

In cases where we do have evidence, historians have worked out a number of objective rules that we can apply to the sources so as to establish whether they are historically credible accounts as opposed to mere fiction. We call these criteria "the criteria of authenticity".

For instance, let's consider the criterion of "multiple attestation". If we have

The absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. We have no evidence at all for most historical events.



independent accounts of the same event, this rule says it's more likely to be historical than fictional because it would be most unusual if two authors independently made up the same story about the same event. Isn't it remarkable that we should have two, independent virgin birth narratives about Jesus? If you apply this rule of multiple attestation to Jesus' birth narratives, then we have good grounds for believing that he was born in Bethlehem and born of a virgin. Why? Because we have it attested in independent narratives – Matthew and Luke are independent of one another in their sources at least.

Another rule for establishing the historical nature of an event is the principle of dissimilarity. This rule says that if you can show that an event or saying of Jesus' life is unlike anything in prior Judaism and also unlike anything in the Church that followed him, then it's highly probable that it belongs to the historical Jesus himself. So this criterion of dissimilarity can be a very positive help in establishing events as historical. Incidentally, this rule doesn't mean that if some of Jesus' statements are similar to those found in Judaism or the early church, then this

indicates that they've been borrowed from these sources. Critics misapply the rule when they do that.

Another rule is the criterion of embarrassment. This rule says that if you find elements in the narratives that are awkward for the early Christian Church, or perhaps even embarrassing, then these too are most likely to be historical rather than to have been invented by the Church.

A further criterion would be the execution of Jesus. His crucifixion is such a firmly fixed anchor point in history that events in the gospels can be assessed by their likelihood of leading up to Jesus' execution/crucifixion. For example, Marcus Borg's portrait of him as gentle Jesus, meek and mild, is incompatible with his crucifixion for being the king of the Jews.

There are other criteria as well. In fact, there's a long list of them.

Some historians, especially revisionists like neo-Nazis, are very selective in their use of facts. They write histories that are more a reflection of their prejudices than actually what took place. To what extent can we be assured that the gospel writers were not revisionists themselves?

It's important to understand that all ancient historians wrote from a point of view. Herodotus, Thucydides, Tacitus – all of them had a case to make. For them, history was a means of defending their understanding or position. So in that sense, all of Greco-Roman history is based upon documents that reflect a certain bias. However, that does not prevent the classical Greco-Roman historian from reconstructing the past as it actually happened.

Similarly, the gospels are written from a certain point of view: they have a story to tell – the story of Jesus. They are proclamations which have an intense interest in certain events of history. But that doesn't mean that they cannot tell the truth about the past, or that we cannot assess their credibility.

Now the "criteria of authenticity" that I've already mentioned are aimed precisely at getting past the sort of bias that may influence historians as they write the story of the past. These rules are designed to assist us in establishing what really happened. They help us to see if a historian is telling the truth. For instance, when Jewish historians write about the Holocaust, they clearly have a point of view and are as passionately committed to it as the neo-Nazis. Nevertheless, we usually don't write-off their work as unhis-

torical because of their bias or put it on a par with that of the neo-Nazis. Rather, we assess both versions of the Holocaust by the evidence. If the Jewish account falls within the constraints of the evidence, then their point of view doesn't necessarily falsify what they write.

In other words, if a historian's understanding of the past is wrong, the reason it's wrong is because it doesn't fit the evidence; it's not wrong because he has a point of view. So it all goes back to what the evidence indicates.

What other problems are there with the view that says that we can never know the past as it really was?

I can think of at least three significant problems that historians face if they take the view that we can't know the past as it is. The first difficulty they face is that there is a common core of historical events that is accepted by all historians, whether Catholic or Protestant, Marxist or capitalist, 19th century liberal or 20th century revisionist. For instance, I don't know of any historian who would deny things like the date of the Declaration of Independence, Lincoln's assassination, Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo and so forth. These form a sort of back-bone of history, upon which all historians are agreed. I think it was Isaiah Berlin, who said, "If someone were to claim that the plays of William Shakespeare were actually written in the Court of Ghengis Khan, we wouldn't say that he was merely mistaken, but that he was out of his mind." So there is this common core of historical events that everyone agrees upon. I think this is a powerful argument which simply overwhelms the relativist claim that there is no objective history.

The second difficulty that relativists face is that there's a difference between history and propaganda, and historians insist on this difference. When the Soviet Union, in the aftermath of the Stalinist takeover, began to rewrite history, vast amounts of material – newspapers and all sorts of documents – were pulped. Stalin did this so that he could rewrite the history books. Quite naturally, he wanted people to think that he was at the forefront of the Bolshevik revolution. I guess we shouldn't be surprised that everybody recognises that this sort of Soviet rewriting of history was pure propaganda.

Finally, the third problem with the view that says that we can't know the past objectively is that on this basis it becomes impossible to criticise bad history.

Numbers of historians have suggested that the birth narratives of Jesus are implausible because it seems almost fanciful that people like the Magi would have appeared. What do you think?

When people say things like this, it's probably due to the fact that they have great difficulty accepting the supernatural elements of the narrative. They find it too hard to swallow the idea that a star appeared in the East that led the Magi to Jesus. Again, I think this is going to depend largely upon your openness to a supernatural view. I mean, there have been attempts to show that this could have been a providential coincidence of certain planets that produced a bright light in the sky. Some argue that such an event was astronomically plausible. But as I read the narrative, it seems to me that Luke describes this as a supernatural event. If you believe in the existence of God, I don't see any reason to think that he couldn't have drawn Zoroastrian priests to come from the East to find Jesus and worship him in that way.

Critics' conclusions are not determined by the evidence so much as by the presuppositions that they bring to it.

What about the claim by some schol-

ars that Luke is mistaken in his view that there was a census that was taken throughout the known world at the time of Jesus' birth?

That's more of a problem, I think, because we do have positive evidence that there was a census taken by Quirinius around AD 6 or 7. But it's very interesting that Luke refers to this census when he talks about the revolt of Judas the Galilean. But when he talks about the census that drew Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem he says this was the first census which suggests that Luke is differentiating this census from the later one taken by Quirinius. So he doesn't seem to be confusing the two; he's aware of the latter one and he's saying this is an earlier one. So once again it does become an argument from silence, namely, that since we don't have any independent attestation of this earlier census, Luke must be wrong. Well, he could be, but then again these arguments from silence are very tenuous. We should note that he doesn't actually say that Quirinius was the governor at this time. The word he uses in the Greek is not the Greek word for "governor", and it could have been that Quirinius, as a military commander, directed this census at the behest of the authority in power.

Again, I need to say in favor of Luke that his accuracy on other matters is just impeccable. He gets it right over and over again in so many other cases that this gives him a certain credibility that makes us reluctant to say, "He's made a major *faux pas* here." ap

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Mary, our model

The real Mary demonstrates unswerving faith and a servant's role.

Nine months can seem like an eternity. Just ask any woman who has been pregnant. There is generally an enormous crescendo of events that culminate in the birth of the long-awaited child. Doctors' visits grow more frequent as the due date approaches, the finishing touches in the nursery are applied, babies' clothes are bought, hospital bags are packed and stand at attention by the front door.

We have myriad books that detail the various stages of the child's development in utero, antenatal classes help parents to prepare mentally and physically for the event which is soon to take place, baby showers are held so that friends and relatives can express their joy and delight at the impending addition.

And yet, I have often wondered what those nine months were like for Mary. How did she relate to Joseph day to day? What was the reaction of her family and friends when they heard? What did she think as she felt her belly expand day by day? How did her faith in God change as a result of the momentous news the angel delivered to her?

There is a considerable body of literature devoted to Mary. The way in which she is regarded spans the spectrum from veneration to neglect. As writer Luci Shaw points out, "At Christmas, most Protestants are tolerant enough to allow Mary limited access on to our greeting cards and into our crèches and carols. But



**Tracy
Gordon**

the rest of the year she is a victim of simple neglect."

Yet, if we explore the Biblical account of Mary's life more closely, we see her in a new light – as a model of openness to the power of God and a template of a faithful, submitting servant of the Most High.

We first meet Mary in the Bible as a young girl engaged to be married to Joseph. We do not know much about her, except that Luke clearly states her sexual purity as "a virgin, pledged to be married..."

Our next glimpse of Mary occurs as an angel appears to her saying, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you."

What a greeting! What can she have thought? To be given the audible assurance by an angel of the Lord that he was with her and that she was highly favoured. While Mary is sometimes portrayed as being cool and calm in the face of these extraordinary circumstances, we read that she responds by being "greatly troubled at his words".

The angel is quick to reassure her. "Do not be afraid Mary, you have found favour with God." As he explains what is about to take place in her life, Mary reacts with a depth of faith in God that is a model for us today.

Mary's response, "I am the Lord's servant! Let it happen as you have said" (Lk 1:38) stands in dramatic contrast to the response of Zechariah, recorded just a few verses earlier. Although Zechariah was a priest who had spent his life serving God, he couldn't believe the angel's promise of a child to him and Elizabeth (Luke 1:18-19). Mary, however, not only believed, she rejoiced, despite the fact that an unwed pregnancy was likely to have unpleasant consequences.

Elisabeth Elliot writes that discipline is the totality of the believer's response. "Discipline is the believer's answer to

God's call. It is the recognition, not of the solution to his problems or the supply of his needs, but of mastery." Mary believed that God was the master of her life, and she was therefore able to place her confidence and trust in him. "The disciple is not on his own ... He is not 'doing his thing' to find his own life or liberty or happiness. He gives himself to a Master and in doing so leaves self behind," writes Elliot.

Kenneth Kantzer notes: "It is difficult in a sexually casual age to realise what depth of trust Mary displayed. For Mary, this was a threat to everything she held dear on earth – her honour and respect in the community, and her betrothed husband. She knew what righteous Joseph's attitude might well be. At best, it was the end of her prospective marriage. But there was no hesitation. After the first shock at the news, she quietly accepted what God had done."

Just as motherhood does not end at the birth of a child, so we meet Mary again at various points throughout the life of Jesus. The brief encounters between Jesus and Mary are sometimes puzzling. As Mary displays a natural motherly concern, Jesus' words often disclose a higher loyalty. "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know that I had to be in my father's house?" and "Who are my mother and brothers?" Yet these incidents never drove Mary away from her faith in God. She was present at the cross when Jesus committed her into the hands of the beloved disciple, and later she takes her place within the community of believers in the Upper Room.

Mary's faith held firm in the midst of an extraordinary set of God-ordained circumstances and demands. She maintained a servant's heart and trusted in the sovereignty and wisdom of God without question. Kantzer writes: "Unswerving faith in God and the servant role she models for the whole church represent the essence of the biblical and evangelical view of Mary, the mother of Jesus."

Tracy Gordon is a Sydney journalist. She worships at Ashfield Presbyterian Church.

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Shadow of the dragon

The birth of Christ in John's Revelation.

Every year, around the beginning of December, I can predict what sort of decorations I am going to see in and around the house of my friends, neighbours and family. The little statues that depict the visit of the three wise men gathered around the little baby Jesus and offering their precious gifts is a household staple.

The shepherds assembled around the infant with the appropriate animals looking on reverently is a "can't miss". Some have been quite creative in their marketing of the Christmas spirit. I have, for several years now, observed images of Santa Claus bowing in worship before the Christ child.

I wonder how well Christmas decorations would sell if they were to give us John's vision of the birth of Christ? A dragon, a woman and a child; try putting those figurines in a nativity scene. John's description is arguably one of the most intense portrayals of the birth of Christ and yet it often goes unnoticed during the Christmas season.

There are probably very few of us who would think to go to the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, for reflections on the birth of Christ. Come to think of it, I have never once heard an advent sermon preached on John's version of the birth of Christ in Revelation chapter 12. Why is that?

Perhaps it is because the book of Revelation remains largely obscure to the average reader? With so many images and symbols, most people think that a fairly detailed map is needed to navigate through the shifting scenes to the grand finale. I will admit that the book of Revelation does take a bit of concentration and work, but it's every bit as profitable as the rest of the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16).

I believe that Revelation 12 is particularly relevant during the Christmas season because John skilfully ties the beginning and the end of Christ's earthly ministry together in one verse. What takes multiple chapters in the gospels is expounded in 12:5. True to his word, the book of Revelation is a letter to the churches. John does not leave us guessing,



**Daniel
McManigal**

but goes on to show us what we must expect, what we must do, and how victory is to be reached.

John begins by describing a woman with three characteristics. She is clothed with the sun, has the moon under her feet and a crown on her head consisting of 12 stars. The woman symbolises the covenant community in both the Old and New Testaments. This woman is also in pain as she is ready to give birth. The verb that John uses to describe the woman's pain is used elsewhere as a means of communicating persecution or the great struggle between the forces of good and evil. In the book of Revelation, this is always the context in which we find this verb. It is the struggle between the elect of God and the forces of evil. Therefore, we are not surprised that her great enemy, "the dragon", is Satan (cf. v. 9).

The woman proceeds to give birth to the child Jesus. In verse 5, John gives us an abbreviated account of the birth, death and resurrection of Christ. "She gave

birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron sceptre. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne" (Rev 12:5). This is not an uncommon phenomenon in the Scriptures. John, in particular, is fond of giving this sort of summary (John 3:13; 16:28; cf. Rev 1:5).

What flows out of this great redemptive-historical event is a heightened struggle between our great adversary and the followers of Jesus. Though Satan has continually opposed God, he is unable to stop God's plan of redemption. The guarantee of our salvation at the resurrection of Christ is at the same time a crushing defeat for our adversary. This is a climax of all the Scriptures.

As early as the third chapter of Genesis, Adam and Eve were given this assurance of victory. Once the fall of Adam was complete, Satan stood trial for his crime. His "guilty" verdict is recorded for us in Genesis 3:16, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; *he will crush your head*, and you will strike his heel."

Satan and defeat often go hand in hand in the Scriptures. Leviathan, who is an ancient symbol of evil, will be punished by



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the sword proceeding from the mouth of Christ for his opposition to the Lord and his people (Is. 27:1; Ezek. 29:3; Rev. 19:15).

Early in his ministry, Jesus begins to do battle with the dragon. Jesus went into the wilderness to bind him (Mt. 4:1-11). He then continued on a new spiritual conquest of Canaan, plundering Satan's house and expelling Satan's demonic forces everywhere (Mk 1:34, 39; Lk 11:17-26). Hardly the picture that comes to mind when we are celebrating the birth of Christ, I know! Yet this is the reason why Christ was born – to defeat Satan and purchase salvation.

In Revelation 12:4 John shows us that the dragon yielded considerable power in persecuting the church before the time of Christ. Dealing out blows to God's saints is the likely meaning of the stars being hurled to earth by the dragon (cf. Rev. 1:16 and 20 where the church is represented by the stars/angels). However, with the resurrection of the King on high (Rev. 12:5), comes the expulsion of the dragon down low (Rev. 12:8-9). Now Satan receives the beginning of his reward for his violent acts. The blood of Christ has been shed and his peoples' sins have been paid for. Jesus is snatched up to heaven, incapable of tasting death again. Satan's defeat has begun (Col. 2:14-15).

No longer can Satan (falsely) insist

that their sins be punished. Satan has been hurled to earth and has lost his coveted position as accuser of the brethren. Heaven's doors have been sealed shut to the serpent's accusations against God's elect (Rev. 12: 10). What this means is the venom has been removed from our

enemy's fangs. But it does not mean that our enemy is without teeth!

The opposition to the church before the incarnation is resumed after the

ascension of Jesus. Having been dealt the decisive blow that has removed any hope of victory, the enraged dragon turns his eyes again towards the church. John is not the only one alerting us to the capability of our adversary. Peter urges us to "be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). Paul also insists that Christians must "Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes." (Eph. 6:11)

John tells us that the dragon spewed water from his mouth to carry the woman away in a flood (Rev 12:15). Unsuccessful, the dragon "went off to

make war against the rest of her offspring — those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus." (v 17). Who would have thought that the arrival and subsequent conquest by the King would have produced this kind of enmity for his servants?

Christmas is a time to remember that we face a defeated foe with whom we must still do battle.

In J.R.R. Tolkien's book, *The Two Towers*, Tolkien introduces us to a forest of talking trees called the Ents. When asked why it is that the Ents decided to get involved in the war of middle earth, their leader Treebeard remarks, "Indeed I have not seen them (the Ents) roused like this for many an age. We Ents do not like being roused; and we never are roused unless it is clear to us that our trees and our lives are in great danger."

As Christians we have a reason to be roused if we are engaging in the work of the kingdom. If we are faithful to our calling, we will inevitably arouse opposition from our enemy. The book of Revelation reminds us that when we proclaim the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus we will always invite hostility. Yet even in the heat of that opposition, we are, as William Hendriksen said, "more than conquerors".

We overcome our enemy first and foremost by the blood of the Lamb. The manger loses all meaning and, dare I say, "significance", without the cross of Calvary. The descent of Jesus in his incarnation was always intended as a means to an end. That end was reached through his suffering and subsequent ascension into glory. In this way, the verdict has been rendered. Victory is secure.

The basis for our triumphing over the devil lies not in our imaginative efforts to market the church, or to make our services more "relevant" and the like. Rather, we succeed on the basis of Christ's sacrificial death and triumph over the grave.

We, in turn, are required to take this gospel outside the walls of the church and proclaim it to the world. In so doing, we conquer. Christ's church will be victorious because Christ was victorious. Christ's birth anticipated his death, but much to the frustration of the dragon, his death atoned for his people's sins and his resurrection guarantees them eternal life.

Daniel McManigal is a recent graduate from Westminster West Seminary, Escondido, California and is working with his wife, Jill, in joint Chaplaincy at Presbyterian Aged Care, Sydney.

The verdict has been rendered. Victory is secure.

SUMMER CONVENTION
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- Daily meetings at 10.30am, 2.30pm & 7pm (No 7pm meeting on 1st January)
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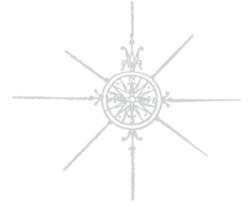
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Isabella Plains: Isabella Plains Primary School,
Ellerstone Ave.

Worship Service & Sunday School 10.00am.
(02) 6292 6772

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ANNANDALE

Hunter Baillie, Johnston & Collins Sts.

10.00am, 6.30pm. 2nd & 4th Sunday.

S.Clerk. Mr M. Beveridge (02) 9969 8071.

I.M. Rev. A. Van Ash (02) 9817 0587.

Welsh Church: Chalmers St, Surry Hills.

3.00pm. each Sunday.

ARMIDALE

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Rev. Richard O'Brien (02) 6772 3093

ASHFIELD

Liverpool Rd. & Knox St. 10.15am & 6.00pm

Rev Peter Hastie (02) 9798 6572.

BEACON HILL-NARRAWEENA

244 Warringah Rd. 9.30am. & 7.00pm.

Rev. Trevor Cheetham (02) 9521 2361.

BEECROFT

Mary St., 8.45am. 10.30am. & 6.30pm.

Rev Martin Levine (02) 9876 2478.

BEGA — EDEN

Bega -Upper St; Eden — CWA Rooms,

Imlay St. Clerk: Mrs J Gill (02) 6495 6062

BLACKTOWN (EAST)

Gallop Grv. & Heffron Rd. Lalor Park,

Service Times: 10.30am. & 6.00pm.

S.Clerk: Mr B. Clark (02) 9624 5027.

BONDI

Cnr. Castlefield & Miller Sts.

10.00am & 7.00pm.

Rev John Graham: (02) 9597 5214

BONNYRIGG

Western Regions Chinese Church

14-16 Bibbys Place. 9.30 am. (English) &

11.00 am. (Mandarin)

S.Clerk: Stanley Chen (02) 9753 2073

BOWRAL — MITTAGONG

Bowral: 20 Bendooley St. 10.30am.

Kid's Church: 9.30 am. 1st & 3rd Sunday

Mittagong: Cr Alice & Edwards Sts. 9.00am.

Rev. Doug McPherson: (02) 4872 4052.

BURWOOD

46-48 Belmore St. 9.15am (English)

Session Clerk (02) 9745 3935

Burwood: 11.00 am (Cantonese)

Rev. Dennis Law (02) 9715 3889

5.00 pm (English).

Rev Eugene Hor (02) 9715 3889.

CAMPBELLTOWN

34 Lithgow St. 8.30 am. 10.00 am. 6.30 pm.

CARINGBAH

393 Port Hacking Rd.

Rev Graham Flick (02) 9524 6406 (O).

CASTLE HILL

247 Old Northern Rd. 9.30am. & 6.00pm.

(02) 9634 2911.

CHATSWOOD

St Andrew's, Anderson St.

9.00am.& 7.00 pm.

Lane Cove, St James, Farran St. 11.00am.

Rev. Jeff Read (02) 9419 5932 (W) 2077 (H)

CHERRYBROOK

John Purchase Public School Hall, Purchase

Road, Cherrybrook 9.30 am

Rev John Irvin (Minister) (02) 9875 4894

CHINESE CHURCH

Cnr Crown & Albion Sts. Surry Hills.

English/Cantonese/Mandarin/Bilingual

Services. Office (02) 9331 4459.

Rev Joe Mock (02) 9642 8861 (H).

Rev Daniel Ng (02) 9797 2342(H).

Rev Ezra Tseng (02) 9500 1259(H).

COFFS HARBOUR (St Andrew's)

187 High St. 8.00am. 9.45am. & 6.30pm.

Rev Peter Moore (02) 6652 3183(O).

CONCORD

Cornerstone Community Presbyterian Church

Meets Concord Public School 9.30 am.

Cnr Burwood Rd. & Stanley St. Concord

Rev. C S Tang (02) 9688 7880 (H)

COOTAMUNDRA (Scots)

Cnr Parker & Francis Sts 11.00 am.

I.M. Rev F. Monckton (02) 6977 1642

COWRA

46 Macquarie St. Also Gooloogong,

Morongla. Ph (02) 6342 1467.

CRONULLA

13 Croydon St. 9.30am.

Rev. Russell Stark (02) 9523 5875.

EAST MAITLAND

George St. **Beresfield:** Beresford Ave.

Raymond Terrace: Irrawang St.

Rev Donald Smith (02) 4933 7443.

EPPING

Bridge & Rawson Sts.

Rev David Tsai (02) 9876 1188.

FORSTER/TUNCURRY

Bruce St. Forster, 9.30am.

Rev. John Thompson (02) 6552 1082

GILGANDRA (St Stephens)

14 Myrtle St. 11.00am. & 9.00am. (4th Sun).

Rev. Tony Adams (02) 6847 2036

GOSFORD

14-16 Young St. West Gosford. 8.00am.

9.45am. 6.30 pm. Office: Ph (02) 4323 2490.

GRIFFITH

Opp. Collina Oval, Blumer Ave. 9.30 am.

Rev. Peter Gobbo (02) 6962 4827.

Dr L. Thorpe (02) 6962 1934

GUNNEDAH

Marquis & Barber Sts. **Boggabri:** Court

House (02) 6742 0551

HURSTVILLE

Cnr. Park Rd. & McMahan St. English:

9.30am. & 6.30pm. Indonesian: 4.00pm.

Rev Kevin Murray (02) 9153 8176.

KIAMA

Terralong St. 9.00am & 5.30pm.

Pastor: Noel Creighton (02) 4233 1554

KOGARAH

Cnr Kensington & Derby Sts.

9.30am. & 7.00pm. (02) 9587 5577.

KOREAN, SYDNEY (Young Nak)

7-9 Manson St, Telopea. 9.30am. 11.00am.

3.00pm. S.Clerk (02) 9816 3807

LEETON

Cnr. Sycamore & Cypress Sts. 10.00 am.

Rev. Richard Keith (02) 4272 9407

LISMORE (St Paul's)

188 Keen St. 9.00 am. & 7.00 pm.

Rev Peter Playsted (02) 6624 7050

MACQUARIE

Herring & Abuklea Rds, Marsfield

Rev. Rex Swavley (02) 9878 4202

MANLY (St Andrew's)

Raglan St. & Augusta Lane. 9.45am.

Quarterly (Communion) 5.30pm.

Rev. Derek Bullen (02) 9976 2801

MAROUBRA, Kingsford

8 Robey St, **Maroubra.** 9.30 am. 7.15 pm.

94 Houston Rd, **Kingsford** 11.15am

Chinese Service, **Maroubra** 4 pm.

Rev Johnnie Li (02) 9349 1312

MOREE (St Andrew's)

Cnr Albert & Auburn Sts, 10.00am.

Rev. L. Fowler (02) 6752 1083

MOSMAN (Scots Kirk)

Belmont Rd. (nr Military Rd), 9.00am.

Rev R J McCracken (02) 9969 6101.

MOSS VALE (St Andrew's)

Browley St., 10.30am. Kids Club: 5pm,

1st & 3rd Sunday (School Term Only).
 S.Clerk: Mrs Flora Walker (02) 4883 6557.
MURWILLUMBAH (St Andrew's)
 Wollumbin St. 9.00am. & 7.00pm.
Tyalgum: 11.00am. (3rd Sun).
 Rev. Philip Strong (02) 6672 1088
NEWCASTLE (St Andrews)
 Cnr. Laman & Auckland Sts 9.15am & 7.00pm.
 Office: (02) 4929 2857
NORTH SYDNEY-GREENWICH
 (St Peter's) 234 Blues Point Rd. 10.00am.
 & 6.45pm. Wednesday 1.15pm.
Greenwich: (Taylor's Memorial)
 86A Greenwich Rd. 10.00am.
 Rev Dr Paul Logan (02) 9955 1662.
ORANGE (St James)
 Cnr Anson St. & Matthews Ave. 10.00am.
 Rev. William Stewart (02) 6362 6304
PARRAMATTA CITY
 Cumberland High School, Dunmore Ave.
 Carlingford. Rev. Luke Tattersall.
 S. Clerk: Mike Whiteman (02) 9484 1240.
PENRITH (St Andrew's)
 Doonmore St. near High St, 9.00am. &
 7.00pm. Rev William Morrow (02) 4721 2440.
PORT MACQUARIE (St Andrew's)
 Cnr William/Munster Sts, 9.00am., 10.30am
 Rev S Donnellan (02) 6582 2505
RANDWICK
 Alison Rd. & Cook St. 10.00am. & 5.00pm.
 Rev. Grant Thorpe (02) 9399 3183.
ROSE BAY (St Andrew's)
 Cnr Dover Rd. & Carlisle St.
 10.00am & 6.00pm.
 Rev Bruce Christian (02) 9388 1206(O).
RYDE
 Bowden & Squire Sts.
Putney: Douglas St.
 Rev Andrew Unwin (02) 9809 3197.
SOUTHERN CROSS
 Park Ave. East Lismore
 Rev. Stephen Cree (02) 6621 3655
SPRINGWOOD
 160 Macquarie Rd. 10.30am. & 6.00pm.
Winmalee : 481 Hawkesbury Rd. 9.00am.
 (02) 4751 1188(O).
 Rev. Robert Benn (02) 4751 9968
STRATHFIELD (St David's)
 Barker Rd. & Marion St. 10.00am. & 6.30pm.
 Rev Robert McKean (02) 9746 8123.
SUTHERLAND
 Cnr Flora & Glencoe Sts. 9.30am & 5.30pm
 Rev Andrew Clausen (02) 9521 2361
SYDNEY (Scots Church)
 St Patrick's Hall, 20 Grosvenor St. (temporary).
 Service Time: 10.30 am.
 Rev. Adrian Van Ash (02) 9817 0587.
TAMWORTH (St Stephen's)
 23 Matthews St, also at **Moonbi**.
 9.00am. & 6.30pm
 Rev Stuart Andrews (02) 6765 8754.
Tamworth Community Presb Church,
 Oxley High School Piper St Nth T'worth
 10 am. Rev Keith Walker (02) 6762 5759
Manilla: Court St.
 Rev. Vic Johnson (02) 6785 1627.
TAREE
 Albert St. 9.00am.
 Rev John Thompson (02) 6552 1082(O).
TENTERFIELD
 117 Logan St. (07) 6977 1642

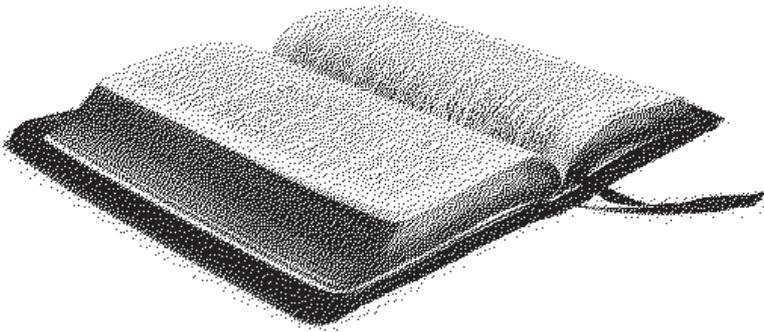
TERRIGAL (Scots Kirk)
 2 Willoughby Rd.
 Rev Phillip Paul (02) 4385 2240.
WAHROONGA
 Wahroonga Presbyterian Church,
 Cnr. Illoura Ave. & Stuart St. 9.30am.
 Rev. Murray Fraser (02) 9489 3690
WEE WAA
 Mitchell St. Rev. Mark Powell (02) 6795 4259
WENTWORTH FALLS (St Andrew's)
 Falls Rd. 9.00 am. Session Clerk: Mr Bernie
 Tucker (02) 4757 3518
WENTWORTHVILLE
 7 McKem St. 9.45am & 6.00pm.
Girraween: 15 Tungarra Rd. 8.15am.
 Rev. David Griffin Phone: (02) 9896 3297.
WESTLAKES
 Warnervale Community Hall, Warnervale Rd
 S.School 8.30 am. Service 9.30 am.
 Rev. Esa Hukkinen (02) 4393 5530
WEST WYALONG
 Pioneer Memorial, Court St. 9.00am. &
 11.00am. Also at **Barmedman, Mahda,**
Talimba & Weethalle.
 Mr. Lance Jackson (02) 6972 2143.
WOLLONGONG (St Andrew's)
 Cnr Kembla & Burelli Sts. 9.45am. &
 6.00pm. Rev Bruce Hammonds
 (02) 4271 1545(H) (02) 4226 1725(O).
WOOLGOOLGA
 Cnr Scarborough St. & Landrigan Cl.
 9.00am. Rev. Peter Moore (02) 6651 2301.
WOONONA
 7 Gray St. Rev Peter Currie (02) 4284 4057.
WOY WOY
 120 Blackwall Rd. 9.00 & 10.30 am.
 Rev. Jamie Newans (02) 4342 2856

CAIRNS
 85 Sheridan St. 9.15 am. & 6.30 pm.
 Rev Donald Broadwater, (07) 4036 0421(H).
 Rev Russell van Delden, (07) 4054 3241 (H).
CALLIDE VALLEY
Biloela: Cnr. Kariboe & Melton Sts.
 10.00am. & 6.00pm.
Jambin: Three Ways 8.30am.
 Pastor Walter Posthuma (07) 4992 1441
CALOUNDRA
 Cnr Kalinga & Ormutz Sts. 9.30am. &
 7.00pm. Rev N. Thomason (07) 5493 3594
CAPALABA
 74 Lyndon Rd. 8.30am
 Rev B Enchelmaier (07) 3824 0958
CHARLEVILLE/BLACKALL
 78 Galatea St. 9.00am.
 Pastor Alan Grant (07) 4654 3100.
CHARTERSTOWERS
 Blackthorn Hall, Thornburgh College,
 King St.
 Mr. S. McDonald (07) 4787 3395
CLAYFIELD (Scots Memorial)
 29 Bellevue Terrace, 9.30am.
 I.M. Rev. Robert Herrgott (07) 3300 6158
CLEVELAND
 Cnr Bloomfield & Ocean Sts.
 10.15am & 6.30pm.
 Rev Brian Enchelmaier (07) 3824 0958
COORPAROO
 Emlyn St. 10.00am. & 7.00pm.
 I.M. Rev D. Mihailovic (07) 3800 3799
CREEK ROAD
 PCYC Centre, 27 Narracott St., Carina
 9.00 am & 5.30 pm.
 Rev Peter Barson (07) 3398 3607.
 Rev D. McDougall (07) 3397 5244.
DALBY
 Condamine St. (cnr. Patrick St).
 Rev Roland Lowther (07) 4669 7074
EUMUNDI
 Memorial Drive, 10.45am. (weekly) &
 6.30pm. (2nd & 4th Sunday).
 I.M. Rev. Noel C. Thomason (07) 5493 3594
GAYNDAH
 Warton St. 10.00am.
 I.M. Rev. Noel C. Thomason (07) 5493 3594
GLADSTONE (St Andrew's)
 Goondoon & Bramston Sts. 10.00am. &
 7.00pm. **Benaraby:** O'Connor Rd. 8.00am.
 Also **Calliope.**
 Rev. David Secomb (07) 4972 1058
GOLD COAST (I)
Arundel: 132 Allied Drive 9.15am.
 I.M. Rev. John Morrow (07) 5571 5676
Robina: Cnr University & Cottesloe Drives
 10.00 am. & 6.30 pm.
 Rev. Kevin Ridley (07) 5571 1416
GOLD COAST (II)
Mudgeeraba: Cnr Mudgeeraba Rd &
 Regency Pde. 9.00am. & 6.30 pm.
 Rev. Glenn Samuel (07) 5530 7003
Mudgeeraba Korean Congregation:
 11.30 am. Rev. Jo Kim (07) 5574 4001
Palm Beach/Elanora: 'The Meeting Place'
 Cnr. Coolgardie & Guineas Creek Rds.
 (cnr. Pines Shopping Ctre) 9.00 am.
 Rev. Glenn Samuel (07) 5530 7003
GYMPIE
 11 Crown St. 9.30am. Woolooga 11.00am.
 Rev. D Cranney (07) 5482 7629(O).



ACACIA RIDGE
 Cnr. Mortimer & Beaudesert Rds.
 8.45am. & 6.00pm. Pastor Stephen Teale,
 (07) 3277 0010, (07) 3344 5022 (H).
ASCOT
 68 Charlton St. (Near Airport).
Nundah: 14 Rode Rd
 Rev Guido Kettniss (07) 3216 4151.
 Rev Les Hall (07) 3267 0558
ATHERTON
 Cnr. Alice & Jack Sts. 10.00am & 6.00pm.
 Rev. John Trappett (07) 4091 1375.
BALD HILLS
 58 Strathpine Rd. 8.30am. & 7.00pm.
 Rev Peter Bloomfield (07) 3261 4305.
BRISBANE KOREAN
 145 Ann St. 8.00am. 12.00 noon, 7.30pm.
 Rev Dr M. M. Y. Kim (07) 3300 3132
BRISBANE (St Paul's)
 53 St Pauls Tce. Spring Hill.
 Rev A. Gardiner (07) 3831 7458(O).
BUNDABERG (Scots')
 Cnr. Water & Alice Sts. 9.00am & 7.00pm.
 Rev David Newman (07) 4153 2954
CABOOLTURE
 24 Cottrill Road. 9.00am & 6.00pm.
 Rev. G. Watt (07) 5494 1181

Word for the wise



20 daily bible studies about Christmas

Christmas is a cosmic event. At best, the world treats it as a religious festival alongside the Jewish festival of Chanukkah and the Moslem festival of Ramadan as if it is some humanly devised way of celebrating something that helps Christians feel good about their beliefs. At worst, the world treats it as a holiday-cum-gift-exchanging season of unknown origin that is often spoilt by people trying to bring religion into it so that the abbreviation 'Xmas' has become quite prophetic!

The Bible treats the birth of Jesus as an historic event that is right at the heart of God's eternal plan for the whole of his Creation of heaven and earth. It is anticipated from the very beginning of God's inspired revelation.

This month's Bible studies look at some key Old Testament passages that make a clear reference to the coming of the Saviour and then follow Luke's account of the actual historical events surrounding it. I hope these studies will help you and your family to make this Christmas a truly Christ-centred celebration that will impact on your small corner of the world – a world that more than ever needs to acknowledge Jesus as the only Prince of Peace.

Bruce Christian

DAY 1 *Cloud with a silver lining*

THE PASSAGE **GENESIS 3:8-20**

THE POINT Man's disobedience in the Garden incurred God's wrath and judgement. Right in the middle of his pronouncing his curse on Creation as a result of this disobedience God gives a message of hope: a human child will be born – the offspring of the woman – who will conquer man's relentless enemy, the serpent (Satan), although he will suffer in the process. There is mercy and hope in the midst of Judgement – this is God's way of doing things.

THE PARTICULARS

- Adam and Eve's disobedience changed the nature of the Creation and its relationship to the Creator. What was perfect and harmonious (Gen. 1:31) became dominated by tension, disharmony and alienation at every level and in every sphere (see also 3:23-24).
- The promise of a future Saviour was given as an integral part of the pronouncement of the curses resulting from the Fall. The Fall did not take God by surprise: its cure was already in mind.
- Even Eve's name contained a message of hope (verse 20).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What is the significance of God foreshadowing that the future triumphant Saviour would be the 'seed' of the woman without mention of the man? When did God first think of 'Christmas'?

DAY 2 *A single 'seed', a single hope*

THE PASSAGE **GENESIS 12:1-7; 13:14-17**

THE POINT Like 'offspring' in English, the Hebrew word behind it uses the singular form to serve as plural also. So the promises given to Abraham could refer equally to ALL his descendants in general or to just ONE in particular. In Galatians 3:16 Paul uses this 'accident' of language to show that God had in mind Abraham's one descendant, Jesus, when he gave him the promise. The same word is used for Eve's 'offspring' (singular) in Gen. 3:15. Here is another prophecy pointing to the birth of the Saviour.

THE PARTICULARS

- God's promise to Abraham and his offspring was forever. At first the offspring could be understood as many (the Jews); but that can no longer apply because the offspring (singular) is now seen to be Jesus who brings blessing to people of all nations (see Genesis 12:3), and the 'land' is now symbolic of heaven. This is the only way sense can be made of 'forever'. There is no Biblical basis for national Israel's claim on the land today.
- The coming Saviour (offspring) will be born in Abraham's line.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- How can Jewish people today participate in God's promises? What do Galatians 3:16, 28 imply about OT promises to them?

DAY 3 *A Kinsman-Redeemer*

THE PASSAGE RUTH 4:13-22

THE POINT From a human point of view the birth of little Obed was the result of Ruth benefiting from Israel's 'kinsman-redeemer' law and marrying Boaz. In the midst of seemingly hopeless circumstances this law enabled the royal line from Judah, the son of Jacob (Israel) and father of Perez, to continue through to David, and ultimately to Jesus. From God's perspective it was part of his predetermined Plan leading to the birth of our Kinsman-Redeemer.

THE PARTICULARS

- Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth (whose husbands had both died) had given up any hope of a future family line.
- The levirate law provided for an available man to produce children for a male relative who had died childless. He thus became his relative's 'kinsman-redeemer'. This law brought Ruth and Boaz together, producing Obed, David's grandfather.
- Through David, and finally Jesus, Obed did in fact become 'famous throughout Israel'. God was in control.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Perez was the result of an illicit relationship between Judah and his daughter-in-law, Tamar. Ruth was a Moabitess and not an Israelite. How far did our Redeemer go to become our kinsman?

DAY 4 *My heart rejoices in the Lord*

THE PASSAGE 1 SAMUEL 2:1-10

THE POINT Hannah was unable to fall pregnant so she prayed earnestly to the Lord for a child. God granted her request and when Samuel was weaned she dedicated him to serve the Lord in the Temple with Eli the priest. She then sang this song to express her feelings about God's providence. It turns out to be quite prophetic as seen in the songs of Mary and Zechariah concerning the births of Jesus and John the Baptist respectively. She even mentions his 'king' (verse 10) when it is actually Samuel himself who will later establish the monarchy and anoint Saul and then David!

THE PARTICULARS

- The sovereign Lord protects and honours all those who are his.
- God judges all who mock or oppose his ways and his people.
- God turns the world's value-system completely upside-down: the strong are defeated but the weak triumph; the rich go hungry but the poor have plenty; he elevates those who suffer shame.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- How does Hannah's song prepare the way for the coming of Jesus' Kingdom and its radically different value system?
- What in Hannah's song challenges you to adjust your beliefs?

DAY 5 *David ... Solomon ... Jesus*

THE PASSAGE 2 SAMUEL 7:1-13

THE POINT Through Nathan the prophet God gave David a truly wonderful promise: 'I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever.' Like most OT prophecies this was a multi-layered promise. It applied first to Solomon who built the earthly Temple; but it looked forward to Jesus, David's offspring whose throne and kingdom are forever.

THE PARTICULARS

- Although Solomon's Temple was to be part of God's Plan in history he wanted David to see its limitations and problems.
- The concept of the caring Shepherd-King was fundamental to God's Plan for the oversight of his people.
- The promises given to David about his offspring from his own body cannot be exhausted in Solomon or any earthly throne.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- In the light of the passages we've looked at so far this month, should we expect to see either direct or indirect references to Jesus throughout the pages of the OT? Do you look for them?
- How do Jesus' life and teaching portray him as a shepherd-king?

DAY 6 *The virgin will bear a son!*

THE PASSAGE ISAIAH 7:1-14

THE POINT King Ahaz of Judah was in real political trouble. Humanly speaking he was about to be overrun by hostile forces. Isaiah encouraged him to trust in God and to seek a reassuring sign from him. Ahaz refused, so the Lord determined to give him a sign anyway – one that was nothing short of a supernatural miracle.

THE PARTICULARS

- Ahaz's situation was so hopeless only God could save him. But God could save him because he controls all human history!
- Scholars argue whether the Hebrew word used in v.14 really means a true virgin or just a young woman ready for marriage. But the argument is settled by the fact that the Greek word used to translate it 160 years before Christ was born and then to quote it in Matthew 1:23 only ever refers to an actual virgin.
- Whatever the sign meant to Ahaz and those with him in their own context, it is clearly a prophecy of Jesus' virgin birth. Immanuel means 'God is with us': Jesus is both God and man.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Do you think the doctrine of the Virgin Birth is essential to a proper understanding of the Gospel? Why? Is it important to a right view of the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture? Why?

DAY 7 *To us a child is born*

THE PASSAGE ISAIAH 9:1-7

THE POINT Once again the Lord reveals to Isaiah that the future rescue of his people will be achieved through the birth into the world of a male child who will rule over the nations. The Jews have always accepted this as a reference to the promised Messiah, a descendant of King David.

THE PARTICULARS

- In spite of God's judgement on his people he gives them a ray of hope, a promise of a Saviour who will usher in a reign of peace. This promise has an historical-geographical setting (Galilee, 1).
- The male child will be entrusted with governing the nations.
- He will have four titles appropriate to his office: Wonder of a Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. It is clear he will be both human and divine in origin, God and Man.
- He will restore perfect harmony to the whole of Creation.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Why does the Bible place such emphasis on the actual birth of the Messiah as a human baby, both in prophecy and fulfilment?
- How do each of the four titles of the Messiah help you to relate to him personally in your daily life? ... in what you face today?

DAY 8 *The branch & root of Jesse*

THE PASSAGE ISAIAH 11:1-10

THE POINT Ultimately, the picture Isaiah gives us here is that of heaven, the New Creation. This is the end-point to which the Bible's story of Redemption is heading. The birth of the Peace-Child, the Redeemer, is depicted in this passage as a shoot, or branch, springing out of the Davidic line at a time when it seems only a stump.

THE PARTICULARS

- Another Messianic figure is that of a Branch, sprouting and bearing fruit from the firm stock and root of Jesse (David's father).
- He will be indwelt by the Holy Spirit's wisdom, understanding, counsel, power and knowledge – delighting in the fear of the Lord.
- He will not be fooled by appearances but will, by his very nature ('belt and sash'), judge rightly throughout the whole world, vindicating the poor and needy, and destroying the wicked.
- Again, his rule will restore harmony to creation, people everywhere will gather to praise him, and the whole earth will be saturated with the knowledge of the Lord (as it was in Eden).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What specific prophecies here have been fulfilled in Jesus?
- How can the Church today be a picture of the new creation?

DAY 9 *O little town of Bethlehem*

THE PASSAGE MICAH 5:1-6

THE POINT Micah's prophecy is firmly rooted in history. It speaks of victory for Israel against her traditional enemies and lasting peace in an historical context. But, while still rooted in history, it also speaks of victory and peace in a context that transcends history. At the centre of this wider context lies insignificant Bethlehem!

THE PARTICULARS

- God's final victory for his people will not be without the suffering of Israel's King (1). This suffering conqueror will be identified by two specific, yet paradoxical, features: he will be born in the minor town of Bethlehem (albeit 'David's city'); he will have a pedigree that is firmly established in 'eternity' (2).
- The Lord's Victor will be a strong Shepherd, one who rightly bears the Lord's Name, and the source of peace for his flock.
- This prophecy was clearly seen by the Jews as Messianic, as evidenced by their reference to it to help the Magi locate Jesus.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- It seems to be God's usual practice to achieve great things from humble and insignificant starts. Does knowing this help you?
- How does this passage help us to trust in the reliability of the Bible and the authenticity of its predictive prophecy?

DAY 10 *Gracious oath remembered*

THE PASSAGE LUKE 1:1-13

THE POINT In his version of the Christmas story Luke is careful to show us the details of the historical setting in which it occurred so that we will be convinced, not only of its authenticity, but of its continuity and consistency with God's revelation of his Plan of Salvation throughout the OT. He starts with John the Baptist.

THE PARTICULARS

- Luke was careful to write an accurate account of the facts concerning Jesus so that Theophilus could be sure of their truth.
- 'In the time of Herod' locates the story in actual human history.
- The situation of Zechariah and Elizabeth is reminiscent of the same circumstances surrounding the birth and calling of Samuel.
- God's miraculous intervention made John special to his Plan. 'Elizabeth' means 'God has sworn', 'Zechariah' could mean 'the Lord remembers', and 'John' can mean 'the Lord is gracious'.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Zechariah and Elizabeth are role models of persistent and humble devotion to God in the face of disappointment and perplexity. Does your life model these same qualities to a watching world?
- How do you answer critics who say the gospels are fiction?

DAY 11 *Privilege & responsibility*

THE PASSAGE LUKE 1:14-25

THE POINT Zechariah was dumbfounded by the significance of Gabriel's announcement. The difficulty he had in coming to grips with it caused him also to be found dumb. But can we blame him? The son he was promised was to be the herald of Israel's Messiah!

THE PARTICULARS

- John's job description is prefigured in the OT, not only in Elijah, but in Samson and Samuel. The OT sets the scene for the NT.
- John will be the fulfilment of the very last written word Israel had received from the Lord, 450 yrs earlier (see Malachi 4:5-6).
- Special tasks require special people and special preparation.
- The name 'Gabriel' is similar in meaning to the title 'Mighty God' in Isaiah 9:6. There is a sense in which the pre-incarnate Son of God is participating in the preparation for his coming.
- Infertility was considered a disgrace in Israel.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- It is a great privilege to be at the coalface of the Lord's work in the world. But it also carries great responsibility. God is serious about our need to trust him fully and obey his call without question. Are you trusting him like this as you serve him?

DAY 12 *...born of the virgin Mary*

THE PASSAGE LUKE 1:26-38

THE POINT Dr Luke leaves us in no doubt that the conception of Jesus was a unique medical miracle. When Mary conceived she was still a virgin (the Greek word is unambiguous). Her ovum was fertilised by the Holy Spirit. Gabriel ('God is mighty') made sure she understood the implications of this, that the child she was to bear would in a very real sense be the Son of God, and he reassured her of the high favour in which she was held by God.

THE PARTICULARS

- Joseph was to be Jesus' legal father (although not his biological father) and in that sense he must be a descendant of David.
- Although pledged to be married to Joseph Mary was a virgin at the time Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit.
- Mary was especially and highly favoured by God.
- The child was to be called Jesus ('saviour', see Matthew 1:21). He would be the promised Messiah, son of David, Son of God.
- With God, nothing is impossible, because he IS God.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What does it indicate about our view of God and of his inspired Word if we have trouble accepting the virgin birth?

DAY 13 *Bearer of Good News*

THE PASSAGE LUKE 1:39-45

THE POINT Gabriel told Mary about Elizabeth so that the 2 could rejoice together over their respective miracles: a pre-normal and a post-normal pregnancy. Even the unborn John was excited! The Holy Spirit was moving everyone to acknowledge this unique, cosmic, world changing event in human history. Its significance was not lost on any of those present.

THE PARTICULARS

- Mary would have been glad to have a close ally in Elizabeth with whom she could share her joy in an understanding way.
- The Holy Spirit was very much in charge of all the proceedings.
- Mary is depicted in all of these events as being a person of immense faith and trust in God, never doubting his word, and submitting humbly to his will even when there was no rational explanation for the strange happenings. She is a good role model of unquestioning obedience.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Do you sometimes struggle to take God at his word? What factors can contribute to our doubting God's promises?
- What does the unborn John's Holy Spirit-inspired reaction to Mary's arrival tell us about when human life begins?

DAY 14 *Mary's song*

THE PASSAGE LUKE 1:46-56

THE POINT After gaining further confirmation of the divine nature of her pregnancy from her relative Elizabeth, Mary bursts into a song of humble gratitude and submission to the Lord. It reflects the same attitude we have seen in Hannah and Elizabeth, acknowledging the Lord's goodness and his power to turn the arrogant and false ways and value system of the world upside-down.

THE PARTICULARS

- The central theme of Mary's song is praise to the Lord for his greatness, his power, his loving kindness, and his gracious act in showing favour to such an ordinary, insignificant person of lowly birth and humble circumstances.
- Mary acknowledged her own sinfulness by referring to God as her Saviour (47). The Bible knows nothing of a 'sinless' Mary!
- Mary knew "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom".
- Mary saw her pregnancy as the fulfilment of OT prophecies.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- When did you last pour out your heart in unrestrained praise to God for the great salvation he has graciously given to you?
- How does Mary's song contrast with how the world thinks?

DAY 15 *When little things matter*

THE PASSAGE LUKE 1:57-66

THE POINT Why can the simple matter of naming a child be such a hassle? Surely long-standing family traditions are more important than the whims of pedantic parents! It does matter when obedience to God's word is involved. Zechariah had received specific instructions about the naming of this very special child God had provided – and, after all, he did want to be able to speak again (see v.20)! John's circumcision was another act of obedience.

THE PARTICULARS

- At the circumcision ceremony tradition determined the child's name; there was no need, or even place, for discussion.
- In their rejoicing over the Lord's gracious provision, Elizabeth and Zechariah were utterly committed to obeying his will.
- Elizabeth's 'impossible' pregnancy, coupled with the 'sign' of Zechariah's speechlessness for over 9 months, impressed on all the people that John was to be no ordinary child in God's sight.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Are you pedantic about obedience to God's revealed will in the Scriptures in even the seemingly 'harmless' matters, especially when there is pressure from family and friends to compromise?
- Do you recognise God's sovereign hand at work in your life?

DAY 16 *Zechariah's song*

THE PASSAGE LUKE 1:67-80

THE POINT Luke makes it clear (67) that in this song Zechariah was speaking prophetically under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (just as Luke himself was doing in giving us this information!). The wealth of OT quotations and allusions it contains bear this out, but Zechariah's lifetime of godly attention to his priestly duties (see vv 5-6, 23) also placed him in a very receptive position. In his song Zechariah refers to the promised salvation Mary's son will bring and to the part his own son will play in preparing for it. The focus of John's ministry will be God's forgiveness of sin.

THE PARTICULARS

- Announcing the Messiah made redemption as good as done (68).
- The coming of the Messiah was the fulfilment of all God's promises through the pages of the OT given to Abraham, David, the prophets, etc (see 2 Cor 1:20). Zechariah quotes many examples.
- God's rescue plan would be thorough, complete and far-reaching.
- Like Moses and Elijah, John's training college was the desert.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- In what way does the salvation Jesus brings 'enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days' (verses 74-75)? Do you make good use of this enabling?

DAY 17 *No room for the Saviour*

THE PASSAGE LUKE 2:1-7

THE POINT Luke outlines for us the important circumstances of Jesus' birth: it was firmly rooted in time and place in human history; the sovereign Lord devised an amazing ploy to get Mary and Joseph from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in the south (over 110 km) at just the right time; it endorsed the fact that Jesus was in the line of David; the manger demonstrated how far God was willing to descend to reach us; the lack of a room showed our indifference.

THE PARTICULARS

- Luke's details allow us now to locate Jesus' birth at 4-6 BC.
- The (secular) Roman decree provided the opportunity for Jesus' place in David's line to be confirmed publicly for later proof.
- Mary was pledged to Joseph but they were not yet married.
- The timing, location and circumstances of Jesus' birth were determined by many human decisions (including Caesar's decree!) but they were also exactly as God had foretold in his Word.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- If God is able to arrange all the details of the Saviour's birth exactly according to plan, even though many 'free-will' decisions of human beings are involved, why can't we trust him more completely with the simple details of our daily lives?

DAY 18 *Angels and shepherds!*

THE PASSAGE LUKE 2:8-20

THE POINT What a contrast! The angels from heaven are commissioned to announce the Saviour's birth ... and they announce it to a tiny band of working-class fellows! The news is unique in all human history, the all time, one-off scoop ... and it gets told to shepherds! "The Saviour of the whole world is born ... and you will find him ... a baby in a feed trough in a cattle shed!" Surprisingly, this is how God does things but it is foreign to human pride.

THE PARTICULARS

- The reality of the angels' heavenly origin is seen in the terror they instilled in the tough, 'street-wise' shepherds.
- The angel's description of the Saviour in verse 11 shows there was general knowledge and expectation concerning the Messiah.
- The stark contrast between the glorious heavenly messenger and the location of the baby King would certainly be a 'sign' to the shepherds who would have expected something quite different.
- The Messiah was the bringer of peace to all God's elect people.
- The shepherds could not help but tell others what they'd seen.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Do you cope with God doing great things through 'outcasts'?

DAY 19 *Simeon's song*

THE PASSAGE LUKE 2:21-35

THE POINT Simeon's was another heart God had prepared to recognise the true Messiah when he came. As he became old he knew the time must be close at hand. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit he wasn't deterred by the fact that this child's parents were so poor they could only afford the minimum sacrifice required for circumcision. He knew he was holding the future hope of the whole world, Jew and Gentile, according to God's promise.

THE PARTICULARS

- Simeon was chosen to play an important part in God's revelation and he remained patiently faithful to that calling all his life.
- Jesus, the Son of God, was submitted to all the Law's demands.
- Simeon, the very devout and traditional Jew, was able to see the point of the OT prophecies that included the Gentiles in God's Plan of Salvation through the sending of his Messiah.
- Under the Holy Spirit's inspiration, Simeon was able to foresee that the Messiah's mission must include conflict and suffering.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- If God had 'prepared' his 'salvation' 'in the sight of all people' why did so many miss it? What causes this blindness? Why was Simeon so different? What does this teach us about grace?

DAY 20 *Faithful devotion blessed*

THE PASSAGE LUKE 2:36-40

THE POINT Anna had been dealt a hard blow as a young wife. But rather than turn against God in bitterness she devoted the next sixty years of her life to serving him with constant and utter devotion. God enabled her also to recognise the baby Messiah and to proclaim him to others who were looking forward to his coming. It would be 30 more years before any evidence would be seen that the prophetic utterances of Anna, Simeon, the shepherds, or Zechariah were confirmed. Patience is a fruit of the Spirit!

THE PARTICULARS

- Like Simeon, Anna's patience, hope and devotion were rewarded by a glimpse of the Messiah as a baby. In faith, they rejoiced!
- People who in faith are prepared to take God at his Word are more likely to be receptive to, and understanding of, his purposes.
- Even in the 'hidden' years of Jesus' growth to manhood it was clear that God's grace was upon him. But there was still much for his family to learn about the implications of his being God's Son, Israel's Messiah, and the world's Saviour (see vv 41-52).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- How persistent is your prayer life and devotion to God, especially when difficulties and disappointments arise?

HERVEY BAY (St David's)
Denmans Rd, Scarness, 9.30am. & 7.00pm.
Rev. John T Roth (07) 4124 7018.

IPSWICH
Cnr Limestone & Gordon Sts. 8.20am.
10.00am. 6.30pm.

Coominya: 8.00am.
Forest Hill: Church St, 9.00am.
Rev John Langbridge (07) 3294 7999.
Rev Wesley Redgen (07) 3282 9829.

ITHACA
100 Enogerra Tce, Paddington.
Service: 9.30 am. 6.30pm.
Rev. Robert Herrgott (07) 3300 6158

MACGREGOR
268 Padstow Rd. Eight Mile Plains 8.30am.
I.M. Rev. Dan Mihailovic (07) 3800 3799

MACKAY
Cnr Harvey St. & Evans Ave. Nth Mackay.
7.30am; 9.30am & 7pm.

Sarina: Sarina Beach Rd. 9.00am.
Gargett: Anglican Church, 4.00pm (1st &
3rd Sunday). Rev. Jim Brown (07) 4955 3829.

MALENY
Cedar St. 9.00am.
Rev. Noel Thomason (07) 5493 3594

MARANOA
Roma: Queen Street 9.00am.
Surat: (1st Sunday) 11.15am.
Pastor Walter Posthuma (07) 4622 1158

MAROOCHYDORE
Okinja Rd. Alexandra Headland.
9.00am. & 7.00pm.
Rev Keith Mayers (07) 5445 9209.

MARYBOROUGH
523 Alice St. 9.00am.
Pastor John Tucker (07) 4123 5920.

MONTO
Bell St. 10.00am. & 7.00pm. (2nd & 4th
Sunday). **Abercorn** 11.45am. (1st Sunday).
Kalpowar: 7.30pm. (3rd Sunday).
Pastor Elton Wiltshire (07) 4166 1441.

NAMBOUR
21 Solanda St. 8.45am
I.M. Rev. Noel C. Thomason (07) 5493 3594.

NORTH PINE
57 Old Dayboro Rd. Petrie. 10.00am. &
6.30pm. Rev Neil McKinlay (07) 3285 2104.

PEACE PRESBYTERIAN
Student Centre, Deception Bay State High
School 9.30am.
Rev. John Gilmour (07) 3261 7804

REDCLIFFE PENINSULA
WoodyPoint, Cnr. Ellen & Hawthorne Sts.
9.30am. & 6.00pm.

Scarborough: Jeays St. 8.00am.
Rev. Peter Whitney (07) 3284 2578.

ROCKHAMPTON (St Andrew's)
Cnr. Bolsover & Derby Sts. 10.00am. &
6.00pm. St John's: Parnell St. 8.30am.
Rev Charlie Kennedy (07) 4922 8241.

ROCKHAMPTON (John Knox)
Rundle St. 10.00 am. & 7.30 pm.
Rev. Jon Chandler (07) 4922 1825

ROCKHAMPTON (St Stephen's)
Burnett St. Nth Rockhampton, 8.30am.
Rev Jon Chandler (07) 4922 1825

Mt Morgan: St Enoch's, East St. 9.00am.
Rev Gilbert Jansen (07) 4938 2485.
SANDGATE
Loudon St. 9.00am. & 6.00pm.

I.M. Rev. D. Todd (Em.) (07) 3269 9359
SPRINGSURE
Charles St. 10.30am.

Emerald: High School Frazer St., 8.30am.
Rev B J Harrison Phone (07) 4984 1550.

TEWANTIN
Anglican Church, William St. 11.45am.
Rev Keith L. Mayers (07) 5445 9209.

THE GAP
1195 Waterworks Rd., 9.00am.
Rev David Niven (07) 3300 2987.

THURINGOWA -TOWNSVILLE
John Calvin, Carthew St. Kirwan. **Condon:**
I.M. Rev. Colin Barwise (07) 4728 4224.

TOOWOOMBA NORTH (St David's)
Mary St. Also at **Geham**
TOWNSVILLE (St Andrew's)
113 Wills St. City. 9.30am. & 6.30pm.
Ass. Min. Rev. Walter Jones (07) 4778 3823

VICTORIA POINT
164 Colburn Ave. 8.30am.
Rev Brian Enchelmaier (07) 3824 0958

WEST TOOWOOMBA
Cnr Greenwattle & South Sts. 8.00am,
10.00am & 6.00pm.
Rev R. Sondergeld (07) 4633 4188.

Mr Ross Turner (07) 4634 6053
WYNNUM
Cnr Bay Tce & Cedar St. 9.00 am & 6.00 pm.
Rev Dr George Logan (07) 3893 1712

south australia

ADELAIDE (St Andrew's)
92-98 Archer St. North Adelaide. 10.30 am.
S.Clerk: Mr. David Niven (08) 8381 4615.

Largs North, Brenda Terrace. 11.00 am.
Mod. Rev. R. Matthews (08) 8395 7841.

ELIZABETH
106 Goodman Rd, Elizabeth South. 9.30 am
Session Clerk: Mr Bob Arstall (08) 8825 5226.

MILLICENT
Cnr Fifth & Sixth Sts. 10.30 am.
I.M. Rev. R. Schwartz (08) 8762 1035.

MT BARKER
Hutchison St. 10.30 am.
Pastor Rupert Hanna (08) 8391 3151.
Mod. Rev. John Campbell (08) 8261 3045.

MT GAMBIER
Allison St. 10.00 am. 6.30 pm. Also **Allendale,**
Glenburnie, Nelson (Vic), OB Flat.
Rev R. Waterhouse Ph/Fx (08) 8723 9028

MURRAY BRIDGE
Masonic Hall 5.00pm. (1st, 3rd & 5th S'day)
I.M. Pastor Rupert Hanna (08) 8391 3151.

NARACORTE
Church St. 10.00am.
Rev Rudi Schwartz (08) 8762 1035

NORWOOD (St Giles)
79 The Parade. 9.15am & 7.00pm.
Rev Dr Reg Mathews (08) 8395 7841

PARA HILLS
174 Maxwell Rd. 10.45 am.
Rev Dr Reg Mathews (08) 8395 7841

PENOLA
Portland St. 10.45 am. Rev. Alan Clarkson
(08) 8737 2984 Also **Dergholm, Kalangadoo**

PORT AUGUSTA
Jervois St. 11.00 am.
Barry Rossiter PIM Padre (08) 8642 2059.

SEACLIFF
Kauri Pde. **Seacliff.** 9.30am.
I.M. Rev. John Campbell (08) 8261 3045.

WHYALLA
28 Ramsay St. 9.00 am.
S/ Clerk: Helen Mashford
(08) 8645 0818



CROSSROADS (Hobart)
Campbell St. School 6.00 pm.
Rev David Jones (03) 6223 4701

DEVONPORT (St Columba's)
Edward St. **Don:** Waverley Rd.
Rev. Steve Warwick (02) 6424 6066

HOBART
(St John's) 10.00 am & 7.00 pm
188 Macquarie St. (03) 6223 7213
Rev. Robert White (03) 6278 1370

LAUNCESTON (St Andrew's)
Civic Square. 9.30 & 11.00 am. @ 7.00 pm.
(Dec/Jan 10.00 am. & 7.00 pm.)

Church Office: (03) 6331 5412
Rev. Peter Thorneycroft 0438 315 412
Yth. Pastor: Brett Rutherford (03) 6331 2584

MONTROSE
Cnr. Islington Rd. & Walker St. 10.00 am.
Mod. Rev. Robert White (03) 6278 1370.

RIVERSIDE
Eden St. 10.45am.
Glengarry: 9.15am. Frankford H'way.

Winkleigh: 2.00pm, 2nd Sunday.
Ps. Norman Shellard (03) 6327 2967

ROKEBY
Presby. Community Church, Tollard Dr.
Mod. Rev Dr. D. Mitchell (03) 6223 4860.

SCOTTSDALE
George St. **Bridport:** Westwood St.
Mod.Ps. Bryan Crawford (03) 6352 4024

STANLEY (St James)
Fletcher St. **Rocky Cape, Mawbanna**
Mod. Mr I Bessell (03) 6443 4299

ULVERSTONE (St Andrew's)
65 Main Rd. 10.00am.
Rev Daniel Combridge (03) 6425 9525.

WEST TAMAR
Auld Kirk, Sidmouth and Mole Creek
Mod: Rev. John Britton (03) 6339 4480



ARARAT
Cnr. Campbell St. (Pyrenees H'way) and
Queen St. 10 am. Mr Norman Sharp
O.(03) 5334 3747 H. (03) 5352 4054

ASHBURTON
Junction of High St. and High Street Rd.
near Warrigal Rd. 10.15am.
Rev Peter Orchard (03) 9889 6034.

ASPENDALE
Cnr Station St. & Lyle Grv. 9.00am. &

6.00pm. Rev A. Campbell (03) 9580 0530.
AUBURN
 Cnr Rathmines & Station Sts
 Hawthorn East 10.00 am. (03) 9882 5256
BAIRNSDALE
 7th Day Adventist Church, 149 Nicholson
 St. 10.00 am. 1st of Month 5.00pm.
 S/school 9.00 am.
 Past. Laurie Leighton (03) 5153 1669
BALACLAVA
 Hotham St. & Denman Ave. 10.00am.
 Rev Mike Wharton (03) 9527 3270.
BENDIGO (St John's)
 Forest St. 10.30am.
 Rev Andrew Clarke (03) 5443 6189.
BLACKBURN
 53 Gardenia St. 11.00am.
 Rev P Locke (03) 9725 6417
BURWOOD
 (Chinese Presbyterian Church) 11.00am.
 Cnr. Greenwood & Tennyson Sts.
 Rev Dr John Elnatan (03) 9801 7645.
CAMBERWELL- Trinity
 cnr Riversdale & Waterloo Sts. 10.00am.
 Rev. Philip Mercer (03) 9882 8102
CAMPERDOWN-TERANG-GARVOC
 9.30 am Aug — Jan. 11am Feb — July
Terang: 1 Warrnambool Rd.
Camperdown: Campbell & Brooke Sts.
Garvoc: 2:30pm. 2nd & 4th Sunday.
 Pastor Bernie Thomas (03) 5592 1041
CANTERBURY
 146 Canterbury Rd. 10.30am. & 7 pm.
 Rev. Grant Lawry (03) 9836 4601.
CANTERBURY JAPANESE
 146 Canterbury Rd. 10.30 am
 Rev. Hugh Price (03) 9894 2384
CAULFIELD-ELWOOD
Caulfield: Neerim/Bambra Rds. 11.15am.
Elwood: Scott/Tennyson Sts. 9.15am &
 4.00pm. Rev Stephen Tay (03) 9505 3013.
CHELTENHAM Pioneers' Presbyterian
 8 Park Rd. Cnr. Charman Rd. 9.30am.
 Rev. David Palmer (03) 9583 2785
CLIFTON HILL
 Cnr Michael & McKean Sts
 North Fitzroy. 10.30 am
 Rev Peter Phillips (03) 9481 4642.
CROYDON HILLS
 Good Shepherd Lutheran Primary School
 57 Plymouth Rd. Croydon. 10.00am.
 (03) 9725 5370
DANDENONG
 51 Potter St. 10.00am.
 Ses. Clerk. (03) 9793 1423
DONVALE
 Cnr. Springvale & McGowan's Rds. 8.30am,
 10.30 am & 6.30pm. Rev Gerald Vanderwert
 (03) 9842 9493. (03) 9841 7020 (O)
DROMANA — MORNINGTON
Dromana: St Andrew's, Gibson St. 9.00am.
Mornington (The Chapel) Cnr Strachans
 Rd. & Nepean Hwy. 11.00am.
 Rev Andrew Venn (03) 5975 9514
DROUIN
 Church St. 9am. 10.30am. 7.30pm.
 Sept-April; 7.00pm. May-Aug.
 Rev. Ken Brown (03) 5625 1126.
ELTHAM
 23 Batman Rd. 10.00 am
 Rev. Don Elliott (03) 9439 9720

FRANKSTON
 30 Radiata St. 10.30am. & 6.00pm.
 Rev David Kumnick (03) 9786 2976.
GEELONG WEST (Scots)
 Cnr. Pakington & Waratah Sts. 10.00am.
 I.M. Dr. Allan Harman (03) 5256 2134.
GLEN WAVERLEY-KNOXFIELD
 Highvale Primary School,
 Ashton St. Glen Waverley 9.30am.
 Rev. Trevor Cox (03) 9764 9141.
HAMILTON
 St Andrew's, Gray & McIntyre Sts. 10.00am.
 & 5.00pm. (last Sunday of month)
 Rev Keith Bell (03) 5572 1009
HAWTHORN
 580 Glenferrie Rd. 11.00 am. & 7.00 pm.
 (03) 9819 5347.
KANGAROO GROUND
 265 Eltham-Yarra Glen Rd. 9.30am.
 S. Clerk: Dr R. Baldock. (03) 9437 1265
KOREAN
 16 Walnut Rd. North Balwyn.
 English language service. 11.00 am
LEONGATHA
 Cnr. Bent & Turner Sts. 10.00am.
 Session Clerk: (03) 5662 4734
MALVERN
 161-163 Wattletree Rd. 10.30am. & 5.00 pm.
 Rev John S Woodward (03) 9509 7373.
MELBOURNE
 The Scots' Church, Cnr. Russell & Collins
 Sts. 11am & 7pm. Wed. 1.00pm.
 Rev. Douglas Robertson (03) 9650 9903.
MELTON
 Mowbray College, Centenary Ave.
 Rev Peter Owen (03) 9747 8195.
MOE — YARRAM
Moe: 34 Fowler St. 10.00am.
Yarram: Cnr. Dougherty & Montgomery
 Sts. 2.00pm.
 Rev Jared Hood (03) 5127 1296.
NOORAT-DARLINGTON
Noorat: Cnr Mc Kinnons Bridge &
 Glenormiston Rds. 10.30 am.
Darlington: Hall St. 8.45 am. (1st & 3rd
 Sundays) Rev. Barry Oakes (03) 5592 5220
NUMURKAH
 58 Saxton St. 11.15am.
Tallygaroopna: Victoria St. 9.30am.
Cobram: Cnr High and Pine Sts. (Anglican
 Church) 2.30pm.
 Rev. John Rickard (03) 5862 1621.
RESERVOIR
 81 Edwardes St. 10.00 am. & 7.00 pm.
 Rev Chris Siriweera (03) 9460 9523
RINGWOOD-HEATHMONT
 Cnr. Waterloo St. & Canterbury Rd.
 Heathmont 10.00am. Enq: (03) 9728 3374
ROCHESTER
 Cnr. Victoria St. & Echuca Rd. 11.00am. &
 7.30pm. **Timmering** 9.30 am
ST KILDA
 Cnr Alma Rd. & Barkly St. 11.00am &
 7.00pm. Rev Bob Thomas (03) 9537 1642 (O)
SALE
 89-93 Dundas Street. 10.30 am.
 (03) 5122 3406
SHEPPARTON
 Cnr. Hayes & Leithen Sts. 9.00am. &
 7.00pm. Also **Stanhope, Kyabram.**
 Rev Kyung Ee (03) 5831 6494.
SOMERVILLE
 Cnr Jones Rd. & Park Lane.
 Rev. Ian Brown (03) 5977 5469.

SOUTH YARRA
 621 Punt Rd. 10.00 am. & 6.30 pm.
 Rev. Stuart Bonnington (03) 9867 4637
SORRENTO-RYE
Rye: St David's, Col'wood & Lyons Sts. 9.30am.
Sorrento: St Andrew's, Kerferd Rd. 11.00am.
SUNSHINE
 McKay Memorial, Anderson Rd. 10.00am. &
 7.00pm. Rev Cor Vanderhorn (03) 9311 1661
SURREY HILLS (St Stephen's)
 Canterbury & Warrigal Rds.
 10.15am & 7.00pm.
 I.M. Rev. John Woodward (03) 9509 7373
UPPER YARRA – WARBURTON
 3471 Warburton H'way. 10.00am. & 6.00pm.
 Mr. Tony Archer (03) 5966 2309.
**WANGARATTA — REGIONAL
 PARISH**
Wangaratta, 158 Rowan St. Yarrawonga,
 47 Orr St. Myrtleford, 78 Standish St
 Rev. Neil Harvey (03) 5721 6444
WARRNAMBOOL (St John's)
Warrnambool: Cnr Spence & Manifold Sts.
 10.00am & 7.00 pm. Sunday Night Life 5.30
South Warrnambool: McDonald St. 9.30
Woodford: Mill St. 11.00 am
 Warrnambool Office: (03) 5562 2029
 Rev Chris ten Broeke (03) 5561 5373
 Rev. Philip Burns (03) 5561 7899.
WEST FOOTSCRAY
 141 Essex St. (Scots) 10.00 am.
 Session Clerk: Ms J Swift (03) 9687 5701
WILLIAMSTOWN (St Andrew's)
 87 Cecil St. 10.00am.
 Rev. Bruce Riding (03) 9397 5338
WOORI YALLOCK
 Healesville Rd. 9.15am & 5 pm, (7pm DLS)
 Rev David Brown (03) 5964 6014.

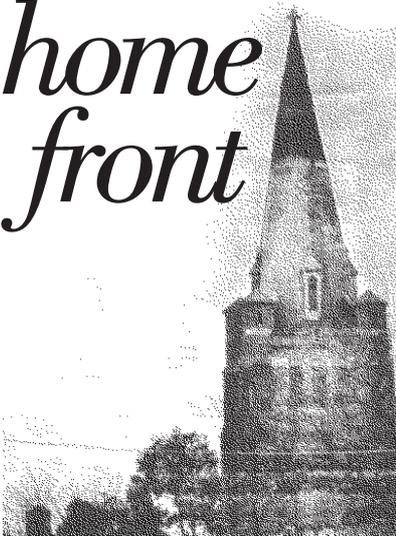
western australia

BICTON
 Harris St. & View Tce. 9.00am & 7.00pm.
 S. Clerk Mr R Kent (08) 9339 1089
FREMANTLE (Scots)
 Cnr South Tce & Parry St. 10.00 am
 Chinese Worship & Sunday School. 3.00 pm.
 Rev James Nocher (08) 9319 2208.
WHITFORDS (St Mark's)
 Anglican School, St Marks Dr Hilarys.
 9.00am. Rev Alan Perrie (08) 9447 1074

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 Congregations 100 or more \$65.00 plus GST

home front



Call to help refugees

The NSW Church and Nation Committee on 8 October decided to write to the Immigration Minister, **Mr Philip Ruddock**, expressing its concern at the inhumanity of incarcerating refugees for long periods in prison-like conditions in extremely inhospitable environments, according to the convener, **Rev. Peter Greiner**.

The committee, which said the views were its own and not necessarily assembly's, acknowledged the government's obligation to investigate people seeking refugee status. But it was concerned for children, in particular, in the detention centres, and that some families were being artificially kept apart by immigration policies.

The committee expressed its concern at the policy of preventing refugees from setting foot on Australian soil by using neighbouring states in order to diminish Australian responsibility, and called for refugee applicants to be allowed to move, work and study within the community under a refugee visa.

The committee believes detention should be used only where individuals seriously and provably violate the conditions of their visas. It told Mr Ruddock that Australia should take the initiative in urging the privileged nations of the world to resolve the world refugee crisis in a humanitarian way.

Iraq resolution

The Church and Nation Committee also decided to write to the Prime Minister, Mr John Howard, expressing its view that it is the prerogative of the United Nations Security Council to enforce resolutions relating to arms inspections in Iraq. While Australia should support UN action, the committee opposed unilateral, aggressive, preemptive action by any individual nation against another.

The committee also decided to write to the Foreign Minister, **Mr Alexander Downer**, expressing its concern at Israel's actions against the Palestinians and urging the Australian government to make a more obvious contribution to finding a diplomatic and economic solution to the legacy of misery, hatred and violence in the region.

Islam issue

Due to an overwhelming response to AP's November issue, Islam and the Church, the **Australian Presbyterian World Mission (NSW)** has ordered another 3000 copies for distribution around the churches. For copies, please contact your local missions coordinator, or contact the Convener, **Rev. Dr. Ewen Brown**, 269 Forest Road, Bexley, NSW, on (02) 9567 9744, fax: (02) 9792 1374, email: brown2_em@telstra.com

A new beginning

Scots Chinese Presbyterian Church Fremantle (WA) was hit hard in January 2000 when most of the congregation left with a former pastor. Those who persevered have recovered most of the money removed at the split, and their number has grown, enabling the congregation to call **Rev. Ngiam Heng Goh** as pastor. Rev. Goh received theological training in Singapore and the US, lectured at a Bible college in Singapore, and served on the pastoral team at a Bible Presbyterian Church. The induction was held on 20 October, with **Rev. J. Nocher** leading the service and **Rev. K. Morris** preaching.

Peter Lush

1928 – 2002

Dr Peter E Lush, an elder at Armidale for nearly 40 years and the first elder to become NSW moderator, died in Clunes, NSW on 19 October.

Peter was born in Natimuk, Vic, and studied at the University of Melbourne, gaining a PhD. He was a lecturer in Mathematics at the Secondary Teachers College, Melbourne and the University of New England, Armidale. He also served with UNESCO in Egypt, advising on teaching tertiary mathematics.

Inducted an elder of St Paul's Presbyterian Church, Armidale, in 1965, he served as a Sunday School teacher and a member of the General Assemblies of New South Wales and Australia.

He was appointed one of the New South Wales Presbyterian Negotiators for the division of the assets of the Presbyterian Church in NSW, and was clerk of the Presbytery of New England.

In 1995 he was elected moderator of the NSW assembly – the first elder to hold the post. He also served as trustee of the church in NSW and a director of the Superannuation Corporation, resigning in 2001. He is survived by five children and 10 grandchildren.

Penola fellowship

The St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, **Millicent**, congregation swelled to 150 on Sunday 29 September for the annual presbytery service for the **Presbytery of Penola**. The Moderator-General, **Rt Rev. Jack Knapp**, preached from 2 Corinthians 5.

A shared luncheon was enjoyed by all who could stay after the service. Presbytery clerk **Brian Johnson** reports that the presbytery plans to hold these lunches regularly to bring people together in faith and fellowship.

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SINCE 1961

In with Flynn

Port Augusta Presbyterian Church, SA, is maintaining its historic links with Presbyterian ministry to inland Australia, under the guidance of moderator **Rev. John Campbell** and with the ministry of home missionary **Barry Rossiter**.

This link goes back to its first minister, the **Rev. Robert Mitchell** and his astonishing labours in both the congregation and the famous Smith of Dunesk Mission based out of the now tiny historic town of Beltana in the Flinders Ranges.

Barry Rossiter spends half his time in Port Augusta and the balance as a part-time patrol worker with the **Presbyterian Inland Mission John Flynn Patrol**.

Canberra forges ahead

A recent meeting of a **Commission of Canberra Presbytery** approved more than half a million dollars worth of development in two projects in the ACT.

The most recent parish in the ACT – **Gungahlin-North Belconnen** – has been working to build a worship centre, but has suffered months of frustrating delays in the planning process. The plans of the \$374,000 building allow for a multi-purpose auditorium with seating for up to 120, meeting rooms, minister's office and associated facilities. This will be the first church building to be erected in the new town of Gungahlin and will be visible for some distance.

The day after the presbytery's approval

the ACT Government announced plans for six new suburbs to be established over the next 20 years, roughly doubling the population of Gungahlin to around 80,000.

The congregation expects to be in its new premises by about April 2003.

At the same meeting the commission approved work costing \$200,000 for upgrading laundry facilities at St Andrew's Retirement Village in Hughes ACT. When built nearly a decade ago the village housed 62 low-care residents; it now caters to more than 100, ranging from low to highest care.

Reservoir overflows

On Sunday, September 15, a well-attended, well-rehearsed and above all well-blessed Sunday school anniversary service was held at **St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Reservoir, Vic**, with their theme "Who is my Neighbour".

Rev Chris Siriweera preached from Luke 10: 25-37. The church hosted the 33rd **annual missionary convention** during the week ending 20 October. The theme was "Speak a Word for Jesus". Highlights included addresses on the work of Christian witness to Israel by **Paul Morris** and **Jeff Miller**, general manager of Melbourne's new Christian FM radio station, **89.9 Light FM**, which was officially launched on 1 December. **Dr Peter Adam**, principal of Ridley College, preached on Jonah.

Melbourne vacancies

The following congregations in the **Presbytery of Melbourne East** are vacant: **Auburn** (interim moderator **Rev. Charles Green** 03 9808 2799); **Hawthorn** (**Rev. John Buchanan** 03 9810 4466) and **Korean** (**Rev. Grant Lawry** 03 9836 4077).

Indian Confessions

John and Lynette Ellis, APWM missionaries serving at the **Presbyterian Theological Seminary** in Dehra Dun have just received a second shipment of the Westminster Confession of Faith for the 21st Century. The books are being used to help train some of India's future Christian leaders. The Principal, **Dr Mohan Chako**, is delighted at the good use made of earlier copies as text books. **The Christian Education Committee of the GAA** has resolved to make copies of the WCF-21C available for cross-cultural missionary use at a special price. For more details contact **Rev. Bill Lutton**, national director of the APWM 02-9792 1373 apwm@optusnet.com.au or the GAA Christian Education Resource Centre 03-9867 4637 or southyarra@pcvic.org.au.

Covenant blessing at South Yarra

'Clear and practical teaching rooted in the biblical text – this is exactly what the Church needs today," said a participant as the **South Yarra Centre for Contemporary Christian Discipleship** in inner Melbourne hosted its second Christian Growth Day on Saturday 5 October.

The focus was Deuteronomy and the speaker was Dr. Allan Harman, well known Christian author and Old Testament theologian, fresh from a trip to the Middle East. A CD containing the three talks given by Dr Harman is available for \$10 plus postage from the South Yarra Presbyterian Church, 621 Punt Rd, South Yarra 3141.

Next year the centre hopes to hold three Christian Growth Days, two of which are already confirmed: Saturday 22 March 2003, on 2 Thessalonians with the **Rev. Andrew Young**, Principal of Grace Theological College, Auckland, and Saturday 4 October on Isaiah, again with Dr Harman, whose long awaited commentary on Isaiah is due for publication by Christian Focus Press next year.

TRINITY THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

in Perth, Western Australia is seeking a new

PRINCIPAL

for appointment during 2003.

Since being established at the end of 1997, Trinity has grown rapidly. With a multi-denominational full-time faculty of 5 and student body of 60, Trinity offers undergraduate and graduate degrees by affiliation with the Australian College of Theology. The College will move to its own purpose-built premises during 2003. In addition to increasing interest from prospective students throughout Western Australia, Trinity faces exciting prospects as a result of connections with Christian groups in South East Asia. The new Principal's primary tasks will be to enable the College to consolidate after a period of rapid change, and to lead it to grasp vital opportunities to serve Jesus Christ and his Gospel in our region.

Trinity is a trans-denominational College, committed to the evangelical, reformed faith, and focused on equipping men and women for effective Christian service.

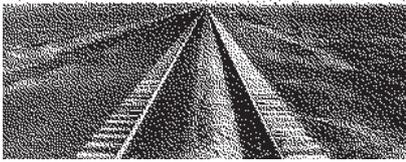
In addition to appropriate academic qualifications (preferably at doctoral level) and experience, applicants should be experienced in Christian ministry and capable of effective Christian leadership.

For an information pack providing details about the College and the appointment, please contact the College office 61-8-9332-6911 or info@trinity.org.au.

Expressions of interest to be lodged by 31 December 2002.

Website: www.trinity.org.au

across australia



Students win Geneva trip

Two students at Melbourne's **Presbyterian Ladies College** have won Asia Pacific Scholarships to attend the Youth and Human Values conference in Geneva next October. Year 11 student **Catherine O'Dea** and former student **Celia Kemp** had to write about human values that they thought were important to the future, demonstrate an interest in contemporary issues and be an active member of a youth organisation.

Witness to Israel

Christian Witness to Israel prayer groups have been organised in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. It is hoped that they will be able to meet monthly at different venues to maximise prayer interest in the ministry to Jewish friends. Further details can be obtained from **Rev. Paul Morris**, phone 02 9597 2004 or email paulmorris@ozemail.com.au

Vilification undecided

A conciliation meeting at the Victorian Equal Opportunity Commission between the **Islamic Council of Victoria** and Pastors **Daniel Scot** and **Daniel Nalliah** of **Catch the Fire Ministries** ended with the council softening its demands, reports **Ros Philips** of the Festival of Light.

The ICV first demanded that the two Daniels apologise, and promise never to repeat the teaching about Islam given at a seminar in March. The two Daniels respectfully replied that the seminar aimed to inform Christians about key principles of Islam and to help them know how to interact with people from a Muslim background. Daniel Scot and Danny Nalliah regretted that some felt hurt by what had been said.

The ICV did not accept this statement, which did not contain any admission of

wrongdoing. However after some discussion, the ICV may have realised that Daniel Scot had a much more detailed understanding of Islam's holy books – the Quran and the Hadith – than others present.

The ICV then softened its demands – but still appeared to want some form of apology.

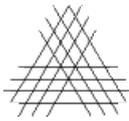
Daniel Scot and Danny Nalliah stood firm with their initial statement, so at the close of the meeting there was no resolution of the vilification complaint.

The ICV has 120 days – until the end of February – to lodge a formal complaint with the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal. It is possible that the ICV may decide not to put the Quran "on trial", and to let the case lapse.

Busy summer ahead

Scripture Union NSW is expecting its volunteers to have a busy summer of evangelism ahead of them, with 56 missions scheduled involving more than 2900 volunteers. It is estimated that these missions reach more than 60,000 people a year.

Between 27 December and 6 January, 44 Scripture Union Family Missions are held, with 2500 volunteer ministry workers involved with more than 50,000 people. This traditional form of holiday short-term mission is known affectionately as **Beach Mission**. Please pray for weather that doesn't make it any harder for the mission teams as they make God's Good News known to children, young people and their families.



PRESBYTERIAN THEOLOGICAL CENTRE Sydney

The PTC is the theological and missionary training college of the Presbyterian Church in NSW, which offers theological and pastoral training for ministry candidates of several denominations and independent students. The Centre also offers training for youth workers, church planters, women's workers and cross-cultural missionaries. Full-time, part-time and external courses are available. **Evening lectures in 2003 will be in New Testament.**

Courses include:

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Bachelor of Christian Studies
Diploma of Theological Studies
Graduate Diploma in Bible & Ministry
Diploma of Theology/Ministry
Master of Divinity
Master of Arts in Theology

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Email: adminptc@ptcsyd.wow.aust.com
Web site: www.presbyterian.org.au/ptcsyd

Tregear Presbyterian Community Church

Youth Pastor – Part time

Tregear Presbyterian Community Church has been actively involved in the Mt Druitt area of Western Sydney for the past 30 years. Applications are invited from suitable candidates interested in working with our existing youth leadership team. You would need to demonstrate:

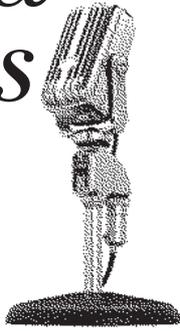
- ability to work with others involved in a volunteer capacity in our church youth group programmes
- a passion to reach young people outside of the church family for Christ
 - ability to nurture, pastor and disciple young people
- ability to relate well and comfortably with parents of young people
 - ability to plan and implement innovative programmes

This position would suit a person who is committed to presenting the Gospel in a dynamic way to young people within and outside the established Church. Ideally you will have been involved in young peoples' ministries in a local Church.

Applications from current Bible College/Theological students (or recent graduates) are encouraged. We are looking for a commitment of at least 2 days per week to include Sundays. For further information contact Russell Baker on 0416 034 314 (evenings) or John Grant on (02) 4734 2315 (business hours). Written applications outlining how you meet the above criteria should be sent to Rev Tim Wilson, PO Box E87 Emerton by 18 December 2002. (Statutory employment checks will apply)

Visit our website at www.tregearchurch.org.au to obtain a profile of the Tregear Presbyterian Community Church

world news



Mohawk translation

A team of five Mohawk translators have completed translating three books of the Bible into their mother tongue. Working in the communities of **Kahnasatake** (a Mohawk community of about 1500 people north-east of Montreal, Canada and the flashpoint of the 1990 Oka uprising) and **Kahnawake**, Quebec (south of Montreal, near Chateauguay), the project began in 1999. With funding, technical

and consulting support from the **Canadian Bible Society**, the team translated the biblical books of II Corinthians, Jonah and Ruth.

Today, the Mohawk language is spoken by an estimated 10 per cent of the 30,000 North Americans that make up the total Mohawk population.

Canada NewsWire

Unorthodox legislation

It's now harder than ever to practise your faith in Belarus if you're not Orthodox. The upper house of the Belarusian parliament has overwhelmingly passed a bill that places hefty restrictions on non-Orthodox religious activity.

Despite the pleas of international religious liberty advocates, **President Alexandr Lukashenko** signed the bill into law.

According to *Keston News Service*, the new law requires groups to "register" each of their religious activities. Government censors will now review all religious literature. Fewer groups will be permitted to register with the govern-

ment (and leaders of unregistered groups will face fines). Only religions with at least 10 registered communities (including one registered before 1982) can publish or teach, and all but occasional religious meetings in private homes are banned.

Christianity Today

Testing truth in China

To counter the teaching that science proves conclusively that God does not exist, international Christian broadcaster **Trans World Radio** has begun airing a series of strategic broadcasts to China in Mandarin, titled *Truth in the Test Tube*. The program takes a four-pronged approach.

First, apologetics – a close look under the hood of life reveals that nature is a fine-tuned engine. The implication: A wise engineer designed and created it. Second, affirmation – the program interviews Christians who are professionals in research, engineering, astronautics, medicine and other sciences. Third, analogy – broadcasts use legitimate illustrations drawn from science and technology. And finally, application – once listeners are satisfied that what is being said is indeed true, they realise the need to accept God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

TransWorld Radio

Extreme terrorism

'An extreme kind of terrorism never witnessed before – an execution carried out by professionals,' was how a former officer of Pakistan's air force described a recent attack on the offices of a Christian institution in Karachi. Seven young Christian workers were killed in the 25 September attack on the **Idara-e-Amn-o-Insaf** (Committee for Justice and Peace). The officer was speaking at a 5 November meeting of church leaders with a delegation from the **World Council of Churches** (WCC) on a pastoral visit to Pakistan.

WCC News

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Role reversal

The greatest became least: that's the wonder, writes James Montgomery Boice.

The important thing is that Jesus was born, and the interesting fact is that so many remember his birth.

Why is this? It is true that many remember the birth of Christ because they are Christians and therefore love and cherish him. But millions of others are not Christians and yet also celebrate Christmas. Why has the birth of this one man so seized upon the minds and imaginations of men and women?

Answers to that question are found in the paradoxes of the Christmas story.

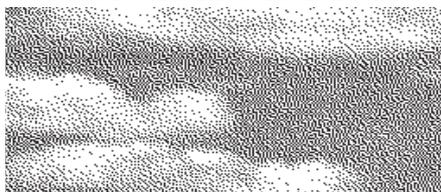
There is one paradox that stands out above the rest, and perhaps more than any other commends the account to many people. It is that the one born in such lowly surroundings – in a stable, of poor parents, laid in an animal's manger – was nevertheless the God of glory, whose splendour before the incarnation surpassed that even of those heavenly beings who announced his birth to the shepherds. Here is a baby. But he is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is God in a stable. He is the supreme potentate of the universe among his own lowly cattle. That is the paradox of the incarnation: Immanuel!

That paradox did not escape the biblical writers. In fact, as we study the Christmas narratives, we soon find that not only was it known to them, but it was actually emphasised. We see this clearly in Luke's gospel in the best known verses of the story (vv. 1-7). It is pointed up in three ways.

First, there is a reference to Augustus Caesar, who was in that day the supreme and powerful leader of the world. Prior to the reign of Augustus the empire had been in great turmoil. There had been the advance of Julius Caesar over the Rubicon, which led to the death of the Republic and in time to Caesar's own death by assassination. That was followed by the civil wars in which Antony and Octavius defeated Brutus and Cassius. Then there was war between Antony and the quickly ascending Augustus.

In all, there were 20 years of turmoil, and it was only at the end of that period

IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD



that Augustus, now the sole ruler of the empire, established peace.

Moreover, it was not only in civil war that Augustus proved victorious. He also conducted wars on the various borders of the empire against invaders and on the seas against pirates. He established the Pax Romana. To a degree he even restored the Republic, for under his reign the senate, magistrates, and assembly resumed their ancient functions. Rome prospered, and wealth and glory flowed freely into Caesar's capital.

That is the individual Luke mentions as he begins his account of Christ's birth. So to us, and certainly to all who lived in Luke's time, the contrast between the power, fame, and glory of Augustus and the weakness, obscurity, and humility of the babe of Bethlehem is obvious.

Second, there is a downward progression in the status of the five characters mentioned in these verses. We notice that it is not just Caesar who is mentioned. Quirinius, the governor of Syria, is also mentioned, and so are Joseph and Mary. At the peak of the social structure is Caesar. Quirinius is farther down, yet still a man of prestige and power. Joseph is lower, for he is just a working man from Nazareth in Galilee. After that comes Mary, a woman and therefore even farther down the scale according to the values of that day. At the very end and at the lowest possible point on the social scale is Jesus. He is just an infant, the poorest of the poor, as far from Caesar as anyone could possibly be. Yet he was infinitely above Caesar both in the majesty of his person and in dignity.

Third, we note the details of Christ's birth. These are humble, as I have already indicated. On the night the angels appeared near Bethlehem, Caesar would have been sleeping in Rome on a golden bed beneath sheets of fine linen. He would have been attended by servants, protected by the Praetorian guard and the many Roman legions. By contrast, the babe was wrapped in swaddling clothes and placed in a manger. His attendants were beasts.

That is the great paradox of the Christmas story. It is that which makes it irresistibly attractive. It is the reversal of roles at God's cost for our benefit.

This is an extract from The Christ of Christmas by James Montgomery Boice (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983). ap

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Movie Watch

My Big Fat Greek Wedding

Reviewed by Phil Campbell

On one level at least, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* was a disappointment. Family friendly G-rated movies are a rare treat, so we planned a family outing ... twice. And twice, four kids in tow, tickets sold out before we reached the box-office window. This is a movie that has taken the world by storm.

With all the anticipation, maybe it's inevitable that the movie didn't quite live up to expectations. For starters, if you've seen the shorts and you're expecting full-on comedy ... it's not. Instead, it's a poignant story of a clash of cultures – the only laugh-out-loud moments are featured in the previews.

The movie opens on a cold wet morning in Chicago. Toula Portokalos (Nia Vardalos), 30 years old, frumpy and single, is on the early shift at Dancing Zorba's, the family café. "You better get married soon ... you starting to look old," grumbles her proud-to-be-Greek dad. "He's been saying that to me since I was a teenager," says Toula in the voice-over narrative. "Greek girls are meant to do three things – marry a Greek man, have Greek children ... and feed the men." Living in a house modelled after the Parthenon, Toula

is wishing she was braver, and prettier ... that life was different.

The plotline covers much of the same ground as *Bend it Like Beckham* – a cultural battlefield as a new generation is caught between the values of loving but protective parents and a whole new culture. In this case, Toula takes control, gets a fashion makeover and heads for college.

Worst of all, Toula falls in love. John Corbett (best known as Chris in television's *Northern Exposure*) plays amiable



Real life is often much tougher than this, with fewer happy endings.

and engaging Ian Miller – nice guy, but definitely not Greek. So how does the Portokalos family cope with Ian? How do Ian's starchy white Anglo-Saxon parents cope with Toula?

The answer, of course, is predictable. Toula's family occasions are always full of noisy cousins. Ian's family occasions are dysfunctionally silent. Tensions ebb and flow, with some enjoyable moments, as the plotline moves towards the inevitable happy ending.

Significantly, Ian is prepared to cross

almost any cultural barriers for the sake of his one true love. Baptised into the Greek Orthodox church, struggling with a new language and culture, at every point he is improbably gracious. In spite of Toula's struggles with her angry dad, Ian's perseverance wins out. It probably won't spoil the suspense – there wasn't any – to report that the "big fat Greek wedding" is glorious, all is forgiven, and even Ian's starchy parents finally join in the family fun.

Ultimately, I was left with a feeling that real life is often much tougher than this, with fewer happy endings. Crossing cultures is hard work, and the all-forgiving Ian was just a little too good to be true.

It's interesting, though, to be reminded of an earlier "Ian", who was prepared to cross cultural boundaries for the sake of a different kind of love. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul says, "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings." Any cultural barrier was pushed aside by a concern for the gospel that dismissed all personal preferences as unimportant, for the sake of reaching the world with the gospel. It's a costly commitment.

In short, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* wasn't hilarious. It probably wasn't even particularly deep. Even so, it was family-friendly, gentle, and quite good fun. Recommended.

Phil Campbell is Culture Watch editor. ap

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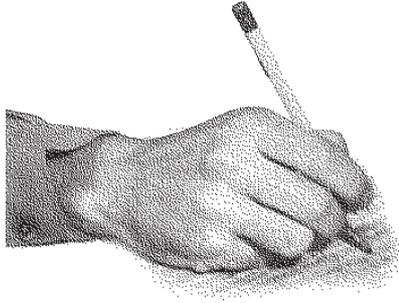
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letters



Identity crisis

When asked what are the most important qualities in the life of a Christian leader John Stott answered that a leader must be able to command a following and that in order to do this a leader needs a vision of what could be (*AP*, September). In other words leadership is dependent upon the vision.

There is some truth in this, which applies to all leadership, but if a man is concerned as to whether he himself has a following he is probably not a Christian leader and is most likely following his following. There are seven rules of Christian leadership, one for each day of the week. They are;

- 1) Identify with God.
- 2) Identify with God.
- 3) Identify with God.
- 4) Identify with God.
- 5) Identify with God.
- 6) Identify with God.
- 7) Identify with God.

As soon as you break this rule you are not a Christian leader. Did Paul think that because men sometimes followed him that made him a Christian leader? Or was it his words "Imitate me as I imitate Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1) that made him a leader? It is fair to say that if a man cannot say this he is not a Christian leader, but rather a blind man leading the blind. The one great difference between worldly leaders and Christian leaders is that leadership is by faith.

*Neil Cadman.
Norman Park, Qld*

Soul and backbone

I am writing to thank Peter Barnes for his informative and fearless article "Soul Food?" concerning Philip Yancey and his latest book *Soul Survivor* (*AP*, October).

The article was refreshing and resounded with the clarity of reformed theological insight. It is a great credit to *AP* that your writers (in this case Peter Barnes) have the backbone to critique leading Christian writers who may have deviated somewhat in terms of Christian doctrine. Christian writers worldwide should be encouraged to write as members of God's Church, not sideline observers.

*Tom Morrison
North Bondi, NSW*

Crossing cultures

I very much appreciated Carmelina Read's article "A Modern Ambition" (*AP*, September). It echoed so much of what I am trying to teach Gourma women by word and example.

But as a single, expatriate, the example probably falls short of what they need. And thank you for a readable and thought-provoking magazine. Yes, I have had some negative thoughts about it from time to time, but I'm still reading it, still challenged, and look forward to its arrival.

*Elsbeth Slater,
Burkina Faso*

Mysterious symbolism

For years I have been treading the blue-carpeted, "fleur de lis" patterned pathways of the hallowed halls of Presbyterianism and during all those years nobody has been able to tell me exactly why the carpet has to be blue and why the "fleur de lis". Could any of your readers please help me and perhaps many others solve this mystery? Many thanks and God bless you all in the production of an excellent magazine.

*William J Anderson,
Vermont South, Vic*

Confessing misgivings

I write out of some concern about comments by Professor Ian Smith (*AP*, October). While there is much in his article that I respond to heartily, in speaking about the legalist in Colossae, he writes "some of the Christians there also believed that it was necessary to keep the Sabbath, as well as be circumcised and to practise certain forms of asceticism". He goes on to assert that such misguided people are to be found among the older members of our denomination.

Does Ian include as legalists those men who wrote the Westminster Confession of Faith and included chapter 21, which speaks about Sabbath-keeping? Has Ian moved away from the Confession on this matter, a Confession which he himself has vowed to uphold and defend? I am also somewhat perplexed by the statement implying that there is no association between doing good works and being a Christian. Perhaps I am one of the misguided oldies, but I thought that Paul says we are saved by grace unto good works (Eph. 2:8-10).

*Rev. Paul Seiler
Annerley, Qld*

A faithful reading?

A while ago I came across the statement in Romans 1:17 "from faith to faith", and started to wonder what that meant. I think I have discovered the truth.

Paul is writing to a group of people with a famous faith – "your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world." (v8 – If only that could be written about our churches).

Shortly after that, in verse 15, Paul says he wants to come and preach the gospel to them. Preach the gospel to some with such great faith? Then I discovered he wanted their faith to be mutual, or the same as his, so in what way was their faith different? It appears they had a very strong faith in God the Father but didn't have a faith in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. They had not rejected (Rom. 1:28) the instilled revelation of the reality of God (Romans 1:19) but were, "by patient continuance in well doing" (2:7), trying to get acceptance by good works and that was why Paul wanted to preach them the gospel (1:13). Have others come to the same understanding?

*Phillip Storrs,
Eumundi, Qld*

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prayer

DECEMBER

- 21 Ulverstone parish Tasmania; about 100 communicants and adherents, 20 younger folk and 4 elders; Daniel and Amanda Combridge.
- 22 Lower Clarence parish, northern NSW, including Maclean, Yamba and Lawrence; about 205 communicants and adherents, 55 younger folk and 12 elders; Mark and Lyndal Mitchell; Mark and Lois Cooper-White.
- 23 Kerri Somerset APWM / SIM missionary from West Toowoomba serving in Nigeria.
- 24 Cornerstone Chinese congregation, Concord, Sydney; Choong and Lynette Tang.
- 25 May the message – that he is called Jesus because he was born to save his people from their sins – be powerfully proclaimed at this season.
- 26 Casino parish, far northern NSW, including Bonalbo; about 130 communicants and adherents, 90 younger folk and 6 elders; George and Susan Ayoub.
- 27 Presbytery of Sydney South; 15 parishes and 1 home mission station totalling 19 congregations with 1205 communicants and adherents; 2 missions directors, 4 ministerial candidates, 7 retired ministers, 3 under jurisdiction; Russell Stark clerk.
- 28 Blessing on many young lives through Family Missions around our coast.
- 29 Rural families and communities under severe financial pressure from the long drought.
- 30 Christian camps, conferences and conventions during the holiday period.
- 31 Gateway parish – Ascot and Nundah near Brisbane's Gaterway Bridge; about 120 communicants and adherents, 115 younger folk and 13 elders; Guido and Virginia Kettmiss, Lesleigh and Sharan Hall.

JANUARY

- 1 "Jean Flynn" home mission congregation, Elizabeth, northern Adelaide; about 50 communicants and adherents, 6 younger folk and 3 elders; vacant.
- 2 Robert and Beverley Taylor of Mt Gambier, SA, as he begins his work as national administrator of the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship.
- 3 Pray that the Lord will raise up many candidates – young and older people – for preaching and diaconal ministry, and in world mission, including teaching English overseas.
- 4 Pittwater parish (Newport) northern Sydney; about 80 communicants and adherents, 45 younger folk and 6 elders; Philip and Helen Rawlings.
- 5 Robert and Hazel Looney, serving in the Wycliffe Bible Translators regional office in Perth after similar service in NZ.
- 6 Grenfell parish western NSW including Caragabal and Quandialla; about 85 communicants and adherents, 35 younger folk and 9 elders; Paul and Elizabeth Harris.
- 7 Presbytery of Maroondah, Vic; 8 parishes and 1 home mission station totalling 600 communicants and adherents; 1 lecturer, 1 home mission director, 6 retired ministers, 3 under jurisdiction; Doug Fraser clerk.
- 8 Western Blacktown (Doonside) parish, Sydney; about 80 communicants and adherents, 30 younger folk and 2 elders; David and Caron Balzer.
- 9 Graham and Irene Sharp from Kogarah, Sydney serving in Alice Springs with Missionary Aviation Fellowship servicing aircraft.
- 10 The battle against bushfires and all

who have suffered loss.

- 11 Balga parish, Perth; Darrell and Margaret Thatcher.
- 12 Scots Church Sydney, our oldest (J.D. Lang 1823); about 90 communicants and adherents, 2 younger folk and 9 elders; Adrian and Anne van Ash.
- 13 Godly and prayerful planning ahead for your congregation's ministry in 2003
- 14 Guyra home mission station northern NSW including Ben Lomond; about 50 communicants and adherents, 4 younger folk and 6 elders; vacant.
- 15 Cliff and Sue Letcher serving with Australian Indigenous Ministries since 1994; as president he has pastoral responsibilities for staff. The office is now located at Wimmallee, NSW Blue Mountains.
- 16 Derek and Barbara Bullen as they begin ministry in Manly parish, Sydney; about 200 communicants and adherents, 25 younger folk and 35 elders.
- 17 Dr Ian and Dorcas Denness from Cookinburra, Vic., and Albury, NSW, serving among drug addicts in South Asia under Red Sea Team International.
- 18 Benalla Regional parish, Vic., including Mansfield, Balmaatum and Thoona; about 205 communicants and adherents, 70 younger folk and 11 elders; Dallas and Beverley Clarnette.
- 19 Auburn parish, Melbourne; about 30 communicants and adherents, 20 younger folk and 5 elders.
- 20 Presbytery of Canberra, NSW/ACT; 6 parishes and 4 home mission stations totalling 19 congregations with 1555 communicants and adherents; 7 retired ministers; Peter Davidson clerk.

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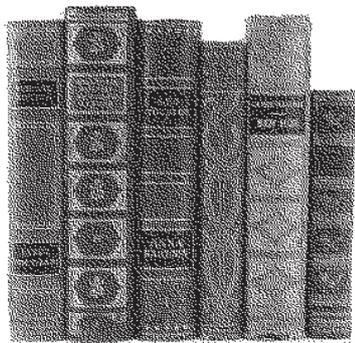
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books



Take and Read Spiritual Reading – An Annotated List

Eugene Peterson
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996.
Reviewed by David Thurston

C. S. Lewis, in an introduction for a new translation of an old book, urged Christian readers of his own day (1944) to resist the temptation of reading only contemporary Christian literature, even if it was his! He wanted Christians to read old books like Athanasius' *On the Incarnation*, so they could see beyond their own contemporary Christian culture.

Looking at most books reviewed in Christian magazines or from the bulk of Christian book catalogues, one would have to say that Lewis' timely advice has gone unheeded. We are, today, largely ignorant of everything but our own narrow slice of contemporary Christian sub-culture. Reading, itself, has become a matter of getting the right, useful information rather than learning to see the world differently.

For people who say the Scriptures are their only authority, we have become increasingly dependent on a small number of human authorities who will tell us what to read. We are like baby birds craning their necks upward, longing for our "parent" to regurgitate pre-digested food into our stomachs. "Old books" speak to us from a different culture and situation, they are neither easy nor familiar, and require some work.

As Christians, we are the heirs of a rich heritage that stretches back 2000 years. There is so much that we need a guide, not a censor. We need someone who has

tasted and mapped the terrain, not to tell us what to do but to invite us by telling us what is there.

Eugene Peterson becomes just such a guide.

Peterson invites us to try books that may not be easy to get, that are old and sometimes a little difficult to read and books that invite us to see the world differently. Some that will invite us to silence and others to sing. There are books by Catholics and Lutherans and Anglicans, even Presbyterians, but in it all there is a heart for God, his world and his people.

Peterson does not expect us to like or agree with everything that he recommends, but he wants us to reject it because we've read it and not because someone else said it was no good.

Reading this book on books and, more importantly, reading the books themselves will work against the tendency of "plantation-isation" I see happening in Australian evangelicalism. A plantation has only one variety – all the trees look the same, they are regimented and the rationale is function and use. This is over and against the idea of the biodiversity of a garden – where difference is not only tolerated or endured, it is enjoyed. Yes there are weeds, but in a pine plantation everything that is not a pine is a weed.

Peterson's book invites us to other visions and other views not our own; he calls us to health and away from sameness.

Rev David Thurston is the minister of Central Sydney Presbyterian Church and the chaplain at St Andrews College at Sydney University.

Flynn's Outback Angels

Ivan Rudolph
Central Queensland University Press /
ABC Books, 2001.

Reviewed by Stuart Bonnington

This book in two volumes – *Casting the Mantle* and *Fulfilling the Dream* – complement Ivan Rudolph's successful biography of John Flynn, published in 1996. Now he takes up the stories of the women who inspired John Flynn, lived in the Outback and worked for the Australian Inland Mission and the Royal Flying Doctor Service. They are crammed full of very readable and highly interesting "real life" stories. The illustrations are good and bring an added dimension to the stories. My only criticism of them (and Rudolph's earlier biography) is, where are

the references to the events, stories and quotes that fill the pages of these two great books? I have no reason to doubt the way the story is being told, of course, but it would be good to be able to go further if one wanted to. However most readers probably won't be bothered by the lack of formal substantiation of the story lines, they will be gripped by an excellent all-round account of a thrilling aspect of the religious and general history of our nation.

Stuart Bonnington is minister of South Yarra Presbyterian Church, Vic.

From Sinner to Saint

Evert G. Bout
Dandenong: Reformed Churches Publishing
House, 2002.

Reviewed by Peter Barnes

Evert Bout has written a clear and readable presentation of the Reformed faith, which teaches that God cares for the sinner when the sinner did not care for God. The fourth chapter, on Total Inability, is particularly well-handled. There are problems – to say that the Holy Spirit enhances the creation but is not the creator requires more of a defence than is here given; "agape" can be used in a bad sense, as in 2 Timothy 4:10; the assertion that Augustine's famous (or infamous) "Love God and do what you like" was said early and later bitterly regretted is wrong on both points; and the claim that elders ought not to preach seems misplaced and in need of more backing.

For all that, this work will be useful as a user-friendly introduction to the Reformed faith.

Peter Barnes is books editor of AP.

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Miracle of faith

People 2000 years ago were as sceptical as today.

Those who like to think themselves scientific often make the claim that the Bible was written before the days of Isaac Newton and Charles Darwin, and so people were more prone to ascribe supernatural explanations to events which in reality can be explained by means of science.

For example, such people might delight in pointing to Christopher Columbus' knowledge of a coming eclipse in 1504. Columbus was trying to entice the natives of Jamaica to supply his men with provisions. When they refused, he threatened to remove the moon, knowing that an eclipse was imminent. Sure enough, the moon was eclipsed, and the natives became compliant.

It is a dangerous story, precisely because it tends to make us feel superior. Biblical critics – with or without much knowledge of biblical times – tend to assume that the same sort of approach can explain the readiness of ancient people to believe the miracles in the Bible.

The truth is that the miracles in the Bible were performed in the face of scepticism and not in an atmosphere of gullibility. When, at 89, Sarah was told that she would bear a son, she laughed (Gen. 18:12). In the New Testament, when Zacharias was told that his wife Elizabeth would bear a son in their old age, Zacharias responded: "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years" (Lk 1:18). Despite the fact that he and his wife are described as righteous, obedient and blameless (Lk 1:6), Zacharias was struck dumb for his scepticism (1:20). Only when the child, John the Baptist, is named does Zacharias receive back his powers of speech (1:64).

When Mary is told that, while remaining a virgin, she will bear a son, she asks: "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" (Lk 1:34). When Joseph, her betrothed, found out that Mary was expecting a child, he moved to put her away secretly (Mt. 1:19). His first explanation was not the supernatural one but the natural one – not that the Holy Spirit had caused Mary to become the mother of



Peter Barnes

the Messiah but that Mary had been unfaithful to the one to whom she was betrothed.

That is ever the way in Scripture – even believers opt for the natural explanation first. There is no weak-minded and gullible expectation of an avalanche of miracles.

Human nature has not changed drastically. There are those who have been prone to rationalism and those who have been prone to gullibility.

When Elisha tells the Shunammite woman that she will bear a son, she rebukes the prophet for mocking her: "No, my lord, man of God, do not lie to your maidservant!" (2 Kings 4:16).

When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego

were about to be cast into the fiery furnace, they knew that a miraculous deliverance was a possibility but had no sure expectation that it would be so (Dan. 3:17-18).

Jonah, tossed overboard, expected not the miraculous refuge of a great fish's belly but death (Jonah 1-2).

In the feeding of the 5000, it is clear that neither Philip nor Andrew expected the miracle. On the contrary, all they could see was the enormous amount of money needed to buy food and the paucity of their resources (Jn 6:5-9). When Jesus walked across the Sea of Galilee, the people did not immediately grasp what He had done, but assumed that there was a natural explanation (Jn 6:25).

Even when the disciples obeyed Christ, and expected something extraordinary, they seem to have felt the tug both ways. On one occasion, Jesus told Simon

to launch out into the deep and let down his nets for a catch, Simon almost seems ready to debate the point, but believes and obeys (Lk 5:5).

This attitude becomes especially obvious at the resurrection of Christ. The disciples saw Jesus, and worshipped him, but some doubted (Mt. 28:17). The two disciples on the road to Emmaus are downcast, Mary sees Jesus and thinks it is the gardener, Thomas will not believe unless he can see and touch Jesus, the disciples see him on the beach and do not recognise him (Lk 24; Jn 20-21).

The truth is that the disciples were very reluctant to believe in Christ's miracles. The idea that gullibility collapsed when the apple landed on Isaac Newton's head is heavy on assertion, but light on evidence. In 1999 Pastor Arnot was still reporting, in the aftermath of the "Toronto Blessing", that people were fulfilling Psalm 81:10 ("Open wide your mouth and I will fill it") by having their teeth miraculously filled with gold fillings!

Human nature has not changed drastically. There are those who have been prone to rationalism and those who have been prone to gullibility.

That was true in the ancient world and it is true in the modern world. The assertion that all miracles are impossible is unscientific; the assertion that all people in the ancient world were gullible is unhistorical.

What remains true is that Christ's miracles were so obvious and clear that they could not be denied (e.g. Mk 3:22-27; Jn 11:47-48; Acts 4:16). Hence Jesus' words: "If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin; but now they have seen and also hated both me and my Father" (Jn 15:24).

The overwhelming picture in the Bible is that believers were sceptical of miracles until convinced by the clear weight of evidence applied to their minds by the Holy Spirit.

Peter Barnes is minister of Revesby Presbyterian Church, NSW.

ap