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editorial

Something is happening to Christmas today and people are not happy about it. Many are alarmed at the increasing secularisation of the institution. They point to the fact that many retailers now prefer to use the deliberately anti-Christian phrase “Happy Holidays” to the more traditional, “Merry Christmas”. Others are concerned that the Christmas season has become nothing more than a catch-all phrase to refer to the celebration of such popular human values as peace, goodwill and charity.

These reactions should not surprise us. The first official state celebration of Christmas proclaimed by Constantine aroused controversy. Leo the Great, one of the early Roman bishops, hinted at the division which the celebration of Christ’s incarnation provoked within fifth century Roman society. In Sermon XXII he says: “Dearly beloved, abide firm in the Faith in which you are built, lest that same tempter whose tyranny over you Christ has destroyed win you back again with any of his wiles... misleading simpler souls with the pestilential notion of some to whom this solemn feast day seems to derive its honour, not so much from the birth of Christ, as according to them, the rising of the new sun. Such men’s hearts are wrapped in total darkness and have no growing perception of the true Light. Let no Christian souls entertain any such wicked superstition.” Leo’s words still ring with relevance as secularism continues its challenge to the incarnation.

In recent times, however, a more potent threat has arisen to the doctrine of the incarnation from within the church. Nearly three decades ago a notorious book entitled, *The Myth of God Incarnate*, was published by a group of English churchmen which challenged the notion of Jesus’ divine conception. It claimed Jesus was nothing more than a man. By denying the literal and historical reality of Jesus’ birth story and reducing the incarnation to myth, these writers have effectively denied the divine and human natures of Christ. Others such as Bishop Spong and Barbara Thiering have done the same, throwing into doubt our salvation.

As Leo reminds us, Christmas has its place: “Let the saint exult because he draws near to victory. Let the sinner be glad that he is invited to pardon and let the Gentile take courage that he is called to life.”

Peter Hastie 

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Clearing the confusion

The incarnation is pure history, and its message is self-denial.



There is a lot of confusion about Christmas these days. While it is the biggest and most popular of our holidays, people are uncertain of why this is so. Is it simply an end-of-year celebration and an opportunity for endless office parties? Does it mark the official start of the summer holidays in Australia? Or is it something more? Under the pressures of secularism and consumerism, the meaning of Christmas is in danger of being lost. Its spiritual values are giving way to crass consumerism and self-indulgence. In this interview Ian Smith examines secular attempts to mythologise Christmas with the claim that it is nothing more than a fable. He also comments on trends, even within the church, to minimise the challenge of the incarnation.

Ian is a former pastor and missionary who teaches New Testament at the Presbyterian Theological Centre in Sydney. He serves as the vice principal and academic dean. Ian has specialised in Pauline studies and completed a PhD at Sydney University on the Colossian error.



**Ian Smith
talks to
Peter Hastie**

Ian, many people today realise that our culture is losing sight of the significance of Christmas. Why is it happening?

While Christmas celebrations have been a focal point of Western culture for centuries, we cannot say the same about the doctrine of the incarnation. Nowhere in Scripture are we specifically commanded to celebrate the incarnation. Certainly first century Christians would not necessarily have had Christmas celebrations as we know them today. Indeed, the way that we celebrate Christmas in the West today is marked more by greed and self-indulgence than by any true appreciation of the incarnation. There is nothing wrong with Christmas festivities as long as they point to the truth of the incarnation. The problem with many of our Christmas customs is that they show no

obvious link to it.

We have a similar problem today with respect to marriage. People have lost any real sense of the meaning of marriage; instead, they have become preoccupied with the wedding celebrations themselves. We are starting to confuse external signs with internal realities. While we have a strong emphasis in western society on Christmas celebrations, we cannot say the same about an appreciation of the doctrine of the incarnation and the self-denial that it implies.

Christmas celebrations have always aroused differences of opinion in the church. Why?

If you had asked a first century Christian about Christmas celebrations you would have drawn a blank. It's not really until the fourth century, when the Roman emperor, Constantine, becomes a Christian, that Roman pagan rituals are adopted by the church in order to give expression to the importance of the birth of Jesus.

Christmas celebrations in ancient

Rome were organised around the winter solstice. They were meant to mark the passing of the darkness of the winter months and the coming of the light. It's not hard to see why early Christians thought that this was an appropriate time to celebrate the birth of Jesus. After all, Jesus came as the "light of the world" into the midst of darkness.

Nevertheless, through the centuries Christians have differed as to whether Christmas should be celebrated at all, and if so, precisely how. For instance, Scottish Presbyterians at the time of the Reformation excluded the Roman Catholic holy days from the church calendar and the Puritans in England took a similar approach. The Puritan fathers who travelled to America were not particularly interested in celebrating Christmas. In fact, Thanksgiving celebrations are probably more significant in America than Christmas. This, of course, can be traced to their Puritan roots. So, there has always been a bit of controversy about Christmas celebrations within the church. Again, some Christians have reacted to Christmas and Easter celebrations because nominal Christians tend to attach such importance to them. Some Christians feel that there's a certain danger in such celebrations if they afford some people a veneer of religiosity which makes them feel good for the rest of the year.

While well-intentioned Christians in the past have expressed some legitimate concerns about Christmas and Easter celebrations, their views need to be balanced by the opportunity that the church has to focus on some central truths of the gospel for a few week-ends in the year. I think this is one of the positive facts about the popularity of Christmas celebrations in our culture. We have a great opportunity at Christmas time to present the central truths of the Christian faith. So there is always a tension between those who are concerned that the festivities surrounding the event do not overwhelm the message of the incarnation and those who see it as an opportunity to preach the gospel and demonstrate their devotion to Christ.

In what way is the supernaturalism of the Christmas story attacked today?

It all depends on what you mean when you talk about supernaturalism. If you think about some of the myths that surround the traditional Christmas festivities, people seem to believe in a lot of supernatural happenings. For instance, we have a lot of people today who believe that

Christmas is about a bearded, fat man in a red suit who is omniscient, omnipresent and knows whether children have been good or bad throughout the year. Amazingly, this man can be simultaneously in any shopping centre in the world and can fit down a chimney half his size! There seems to be a fair bit of supernaturalism in this view. Many parents have no difficulty peddling this nonsense to unsuspecting children. But here's the catch: when we talk about a virgin birth and God becoming man, people tend to put these claims in the same category as the bearded, fat man. They think that the supernatural claims about Santa Claus are on a par with the claims about Jesus. However, one is myth while the other is straight history. While adults can see the difference between the two, I don't think children can. The problem is that children grow up with the true story of Christmas and the story about Santa Claus in the same category in their minds.

A lot of people today believe that Christmas is about a bearded fat man in a red suit who is omniscient and omnipresent.

How should Christian parents explain it to their children?

That's a good question. My wife, Jenni, and I decided to educate our kids on the difference between fantasy and reality. So we have encouraged them to understand the nature of fantasy and to enjoy it. We have encouraged them to read the *Narnia Chronicles*, *Alice in Wonderland* and *Harry Potter*. And whenever we have talked about Santa Claus we have taught them that he is part of that fantasy world.

On the other hand, whenever we talk about Jesus we make it clear that He is a real, historical figure. We insist that Christianity is true, unlike fantasy which exists only in our imaginations. We tell them that our church-going and daily lives are based on solid, concrete realities that took place in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. And the historical revelation of Jesus as both God and man has been self-defining as to who we are.

We took this approach while our children were very small and they've always been able to see the difference between myth and reality. We were careful about how we explained it and our kids had no

difficulty understanding it. I know many fine Christians will say, "No, you shouldn't mention Santa Claus at all", but the problem is that as soon as our kids go to school they will meet Santa there. It's wishful thinking to believe that you can hold back the tide. So I think, as with proper sex education, we must teach them the difference between the truth and all the popular myths.

Are the birth narratives about Jesus meant to be actual history, or idealised myth as some suggest?

First, I need to address the question as to whether there is such a thing as true history. Many historians would say that there is no such thing, and that every so-called historical account has an agenda. I guess that's true in one sense. But it doesn't mean that history is not based on real events. We may interpret certain events about Jesus in a particular way, but that doesn't mean that the events themselves are untrue or unhistorical. People may disagree about the interpretation of certain facts without disputing the truth of the facts themselves. I regard the birth narratives as theological interpretations of the person of Jesus that are rooted in actual, space-time events. In no sense are they myth.

But many New Testament scholars call them myth...

I know. There are a few conservative theologians who have started using this term as well. I don't agree with them. I think it is an unhelpful use of the word which is only calculated to cause confusion. They claim that it's a legitimate way to talk about a literary genre that refers to other-worldly events in a highly stylised form. The kinds of things that they refer to as "myth" are the creation story, the incarnation, and even the resurrection. Some of them will say that although these events are supposedly couched in "mythical" language this in no way endangers their historicity.

Personally, I think this is a very unhelpful claim. We need to realise that the way we use a word is dictated by its usage in the general population. If you asked the average Australian on the street what a "myth" is, he or she would say that it's a literary genre that we use to describe things that are uncertain or untrue.

This means that we must never refer to Christ's coming in the flesh as a "myth". Indeed, the apostles expressly denied that the events of Jesus' life fell into this category (1 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:16). I think we

need to follow the apostles who stressed the historicity of the gospel events. The Gospel accounts of the incarnation are grounded in history but written with a theological intent. That doesn't necessarily make them untrue; it just reminds us that the Gospel writers published the facts about Jesus with a particular purpose in mind. And this does not endanger the underlying truthfulness of those facts.

There are people who claim to be Christians, like Bishop Spong, who think that the Scriptures were never intended to be understood as history. Further, they claim that they are inaccurate. Do you have any comments about that?

On one level I want to say, "Well, who is Bishop Spong?" I mean, what authority does he really have? He loves to strut the media stage and likes to cash in on any shock value that his comments might arouse. But seriously, why should anyone take note of his claims?

One of Spong's major claims is that the Gospel accounts of Jesus' birth are written in a form of Jewish midrash and were never meant to be taken literally. "Midrash" is a form of Jewish Bible interpretation that creates parallels between one situation in the Old Testament and a later one, in this case in the Gospels, to highlight a connection between the two. The problem is that there is a lack of straightforward correspondence between many of the details of Jesus' birth and the Old Testament texts that match them. If the Gospel writers were describing Jesus' birth in this highly artificial way they could have invented more convenient details which would have matched the Old Testament texts more closely.

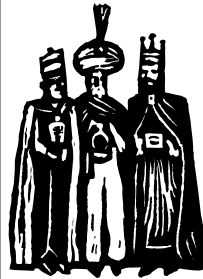
By the time that Luke and Matthew were writing the birth narratives the events were fresh in their mind. Because midrash is pious legend; it normally takes a long time to develop. I just think that Bishop Spong makes a number of rash

assumptions about the use of midrash and this flaws all his assertions and arguments against the historicity of the account of Jesus' birth in the Gospels. He is not a real scholar; he's a popularist at best.

What is the purpose of the Gospel writers in telling the Christmas story? Does it have any consequences for the rest of the apostles' message?

The way you begin a story is always important. The birth of Jesus is told in some detail in two of the Gospels. This story is basically the overture of the whole work. Of course, John starts his Gospel against the background of eternity, but Matthew and Luke begin with Jesus'

The magi are first to enter the scene; they represent Christ drawing the nations to the light.



birth. Matthew starts with a genealogy that goes back to Abraham, the father of Israel, and shows that Jesus is the One who has come to fulfill the promises to Israel. He portrays Jesus as the true Israel, the one in whom are embodied all the hopes of Israel. Matthew wants to show us that if only Israel can be reconstituted as the faithful first-born son of God, as Israel was meant to be, there is hope for the nations. That's why Matthew begins with the genealogy in the particular form in which it is cast. Jesus is the true Israel who is a light for the nations. This explains why the Magi are the first to enter the scene; they represent Christ drawing the nations to the light.

In Luke's Gospel, which is more complicated than the other narratives, we are introduced to common people. Luke introduces us to some shepherds and a few women, as well as some older people in the Temple who are awaiting the Saviour of the world. In Luke, Jesus' genealogy goes all the way back to Adam. Christ is introduced as the Saviour of the world, and this agenda is established from the beginning of Luke's Gospel. The theme recurs in Jesus' teaching about being the Saviour of the lost. In Luke 15, for example, this theme continues with

the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. Luke's aim is to show how the gospel goes into the whole world and recovers the lost. So the birth narratives set the scene for each of the major themes of the Gospels. They are introductions or overtures.

Can you explain why Matthew and Luke have different genealogies for Jesus? Are the critics right in claiming that this shows the Gospel writers made mistakes?

While people have offered a number of alternative explanations for the differences in the two genealogies, I'm not fully satisfied with them. I am sure that there's a good answer; it's just that no one has adequately explained it. Perhaps we will never know until we meet the Gospel writers in glory!

However, although I can't provide a fully satisfying answer, I can probably say some things that are helpful. The first thing we should remember is that it's not the purpose of the genealogies to trace each and every aspect of Jesus' lineage; their real purpose is to reveal Jesus' true identity. Genealogies help us to discover who we are and our connections with the past.

Now, if I think of my ancestry I can point to all different kinds of people – people who were married and unmarried, convicts and freemen, as well as rich and poor. The further back you go, the more complex it becomes. You can imagine how complex it must have been in Jesus' case. Over nearly 1800 years He must have had hundreds of ancestors. However, Matthew makes it nice and simple for us. By the way he constructs the genealogy he makes two things clear about Jesus: first, he tells us that He is the promised King of the Jews, the true son of David, and second, that His mission is to bring blessing to the nations.

Luke's birth narrative doesn't have a genealogy. If you look more carefully at Luke you will see that the genealogy isn't found until chapter three, after the birth narrative has concluded. Instead, Luke includes the genealogy just before Jesus begins His ministry. I think he does this because he wants us to see that Jesus is the second Adam who has come to redeem all of Adam's other sons and daughters from the curse. Jesus is the second Adam and the Saviour of the world.

Of course, scholars throughout the ages have considered a number of different explanations for the apparent discrepancies in the genealogies. One explanation

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is that Matthew's genealogy goes through Joseph and is therefore a legal genealogy; Luke's is supposedly traced through Mary and is more of a biological genealogy. I'm not convinced by this explanation because both of the texts come down to Joseph, not to Joseph and Mary. Other theories discuss the possibility that the genealogies could represent two lines of Joseph, for instance, one could deal with Joseph's maternal grandfather and the other his paternal line. Ultimately, and of course at many points, the genealogies merge. I mean, there is much in common in both. But I think we need to remember that each of the Gospel writers is making a theological point through the use of the genealogies and we need to realise that.

If Joseph belonged to the royal line of David but he was not the biological father of Jesus, how can Jesus have been born "King of the Jews"? Is it possible for Jesus to have a legitimate claim to the throne of David if he was conceived in this way?

Well, it depends on your frame of reference. In first century society the Romans had many laws that dealt with adoption. You could be accepted into a family by adoption just as readily as by birth. For instance, if we call Jesus our older brother and God our Father, it is only because of adoption. Joseph was Jesus' father in every respect apart from being the biological reason for His birth. Jesus, in that sense, was his adopted son. Joseph raised Him as his very own. Jesus was the first-born son of Joseph and Christ was not his surname. His name was Jesus ben (son of) Joseph. When people saw Jesus they were thinking, "there's Joseph's boy". That is how He would have been known. Jesus was Joseph's legal son. There was no doubt about it.

Again, the Jews had an institution called levirate marriage which meant that if a man died without children, his brother was required to have sexual relations with his brother's widow to provide an heir for the family and to carry on the family name. Children who were conceived in this way bore their deceased father's name. No one thought of them having illegitimate family title because they were born in this way.

I think we also need to appreciate the cultural distance between ourselves and those who lived in the first century. First century readers would have thought it very strange to have read the genealogy of Jesus as King of the Jews under the line of Mary. It just didn't work that way. So,

Jesus was the son of Joseph as well as being the Son of God.

Why does the rest of the New Testament have little or nothing to say about the birth of Jesus? Mark's gospel, supposedly the earliest New Testament document, is silent about it. Why?

Well, scholars have looked at the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke and one of the things they are actually agreed on is that Matthew and Luke seem to be writing separate accounts from each other. They are both true, but their sources, whether they are oral or written, seem to be different from one another.

Did Mark have access to their sources? The traditional view is that after the Neronian persecutions between AD 65-66, when Peter is supposed to have been crucified upside-down, Mark escaped and went to Egypt and wrote up Peter's memoirs on Jesus' life. His memoirs don't contain the birth narratives about Jesus. The fact that they're not there doesn't mean that they are not true. In fact, all of the Gospel writers have been selective for various reasons. Obviously Mark had an editorial reason for leaving it out. Unfortunately we don't know what it was.

Now, why doesn't John mention the birth of Jesus? Well, you could ask the same question about many other aspects of Jesus' life that are mentioned in the Synoptic Gospels. John doesn't mention much that is in those Gospels at all. True, he mentions the feeding of the five thousand, the crucifixion and the resurrection, but there is not a lot of overlap between John and the other Gospels. I think that's

probably because when John came to write his Gospel most of the things about Jesus were already well-known and so he decided to write a very different account with an explicitly evangelistic purpose.

As for Paul, I think he talks about the incarnation quite frequently. Philippians 2 is an excellent statement about how Christ emptied Himself in humiliation as He undertook His saving work. Again, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 8:9 that Christ cast aside His glory in the incarnation and made us rich through His act of impoverishment. In fact, the incarnation is an underlying theme in many of Paul's exhortations. What we need to understand is that in Paul's case he was not writing a gospel. He was not writing to tell a story; he was writing letters, and that is a completely different genre. So he was drawing out the implications of what was generally known about the incarnation. Frankly, one of the greatest mistakes you can make in criticising literature is to argue from negatives. You can't make an assumption from what is not there. You can only make an assumption from what is there, and it is there in Matthew and it's there in Luke.

Should we trust Luke's account of the Christmas story if many historians claim that it is inconsistent with secular history, particularly the account of the census during Quirinius' governorship of Syria?

The problem that arises with respect to Quirinius is that he was governor of Syria around AD 6 and Herod, who commanded that all the little boys of Bethlehem under two years of age should be slaughtered, died in 4 BC. This has led many scholars to think that Jesus was actually born in 6 BC. If this is so, there certainly seems to be a problem with the date that Luke has given us. It seems as though it is about 12 to 14 years too early.

The first thing I should mention is that our current dating system, devised by

Jesus was the first-born son of Joseph, and Christ was not his surname.

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Dionysius, is undoubtedly wrong. Our dates of AD and BC are out. If Jesus was born in 6 BC and Quirinius didn't become governor of Syria until AD 6 and we know that there is a census after that, can that be right? Well, there are a number of possibilities.

First of all, the Greek word that is used here to describe the census can be translated a couple of different ways. It could be that the word means there was an "earlier" census that took place around the time of Quirinius' governorship.

Second, we also know from records that we have around the same time from Egypt that it took about 10 years to organise a census. Now if you think of trying to organise a census in a society with no computers and no quick means of communication in a country that had only been conquered by the Romans in 63 BC, it would have been a long and difficult task. Trying to get people to relocate to their paternal hometown would have been a big effort. Therefore, it could be that "first" means pre-registration. If Luke is perhaps referring to this pre-registration it could have resulted in the census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria in AD 6.

So, we have a number of possible ways to explain this apparent discrepancy.

However, ultimately it comes down to the fact of what I am prepared to believe as historical. Should I believe first-century primary evidence by eye-witnesses or should I believe the 19th century skeptics? Now, what is the good historian going to

Should I believe first-century primary evidence by eye-witnesses or the 19th century skeptics?

do? It is not the only historical problem that we face in the text. Nevertheless, what I find really exciting is that although we have problems with Quirinius which have been known for over a thousand years, no one has ever tried to change the text. The text has always been kept pure, which is quite remarkable.

Are the birth stories of Jesus mythological, like the narratives of the births of other famous men in the Graeco-Roman world?

The claim that the birth stories about Jesus are patterned on the mythologies of famous men in the Graeco-Roman world is nothing more than a theory put forward

by some 19th century skeptics who wanted to find a Greek background behind everything in the New Testament. Matthew is certainly not written for a Greek audience; it's the most Jewish of the gospels. Further, it is characteristic of Judaism in all its various forms that it has always been monotheistic. The Jews believed that God was above us and wholly other. In other words, they had no tradition or any expectation of a sexual union between God and a woman. In addition, Greek mythology was on the decline by the first century. Philosophy was then on the rise. As far as the Jews were concerned, God visited the world through the prophets, through the law, and through the hope of a coming Messiah. They never thought of God coming to earth through a divine-human sexual act. So I don't think the Greek mythologies had any influence at all on the stories of Jesus' birth.

Some critics claim that the story about the visit of the Magi is unbelievable. Is it?

I don't see why it should be unbelievable. I mean, the magi were court astrologers who came from the area of Persia. The magi probably held a priestly and advisory role in the Mesopotamian

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royal court. It seems that their main function was to try to discern the future by reading the stars. When you see a great star in the sky I would have thought that that would have attracted the attention of any serious-minded astrologer. I think the arrival of the magi is highly probable seeing that there were strange happenings in the sky.

Well, let's talk about the star. How do we account for it? Is it credible that it led the magi to Jesus? Do we need some scientific explanation for it?

Again, the existence of the star that led the magi to Bethlehem reveals one's attitude to supernaturalism and the possibility of miracles. Frankly, I am surprised at the number of scholars, even conservative ones, who try to find naturalistic explanations for the star. It's as though it's impossible for them to believe that God could direct this star to Jesus' birthplace. This explains why they search around to find times for the alignment of planets and come up with the date of 7 BC. Others claim it was a meteor or something.

However, if we believe that God is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, then it seems to me to be perfectly logical to believe that God can use natural things for His greater purposes. People ask, "How did the world go dark at the time of Jesus' crucifixion? Was it a thundercloud, a dust storm, or something out of the ordinary?" The simple answer is: "I don't know." Nevertheless God ordained it to happen in precisely that way. He intervened in His world regardless of how we explain it. I mean, if God can create the world out of nothing, why is it so hard to believe that God can create a special light in the sky in addition to the other lights that He has put there?

It has been claimed that Paul's understanding of Jesus is not based on a supernatural birth. Critics suggest that Christ did not have to be born of a virgin to be declared the Son of God. How do you respond to this?

I am concerned by this view. It's becoming more popular. I have heard it made in more recent times by evangelical Christians in Sydney. Some have made the extraordinary claim that the virgin birth is not an essential doctrine of the Christian faith.

I disagree with this position. I believe that the doctrine of the virgin birth is an essential doctrine. The Scriptures tell us that Jesus is fully human because He was

born of a woman, as Paul reminds us, and that He is fully God because He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Throughout the ages the church has always taught the virgin birth. If Jesus had only a human father, in what sense is He divine?

There are other theological issues at work here too. Jesus' birth, which comes from above, indicates that the new creation is underway. The virgin birth also guarantees Jesus' purity and freedom from sin. He is the new Adam. So I believe that the virgin birth is an essential part of the logic of what God is doing in Christ in ushering in the new creation.



Christmas is not a season for personal indulgence but humble service, but it's good to have family reunions.

Christians throughout the ages have differed as to how they should celebrate the Christmas events. Are there any general principles we should have in mind as we think about this?

Yes, there are. It's a bit of a hobby horse of mine. It goes back to what I said right at the beginning. I think Christians should reject the idea that Christmas is a season for personal indulgence and instead we should remember that the incarnation calls us to humble service and to give ourselves for the redemption of others and our world. I think it's good to have family reunions and to show our concern for one another by giving appropriate gifts.

How do we do this? There are many ways. I can set aside an offering for a special collection at Christmas for disadvantaged people. Or I can help needy people in my own church. Perhaps there are lonely people with no family. Christmas is a time to invite them to share in the celebrations of the wider family of the church. I know one Christian family that used to keep a record of everything that they spent on Christmas lunch and then gave the same amount to a Christian mission. There is no shortage of ideas on how the incarnation can be expressed.

I can certainly remember in my youth that you would hear that sort of message

quite a lot, but I don't know if we hear it as much today. I think we have become a very self-indulgent generation, and we need to remember the challenge of the incarnation.

Is there any reason why God revealed the birth of Christ to such unlikely people as the magi, the shepherds and a few elderly people in Jerusalem? How do we explain this?

We can only put it down to the wisdom of God; He knew what He was doing. At times God organises His plans in ways which seem strange to us. For instance, why does John the Baptist go and preach in the desert of all places? God obviously knew what He was doing. He has the right people in the right place. The same is true of Philip, the evangelist, when he witnessed to the Ethiopian eunuch. Again, God had the right person in the right place at the right time. I am not sure why God chose the specific people that He did to witness Christ's birth, but I know He had a purpose in it.

If we look at what happened after the event this becomes obvious. 350 years later the whole Roman Empire accepts the Christian faith and two millennia after the birth of Jesus it has become probably the best known story in the world. However, it all started with these unknown characters. In your Sunday school class you might think that the Sunday school kids are pretty uninspiring, but you never know what they might turn out to be.

Paul says that Jesus birth took place "in the fullness of time". What does he mean by this?

Well, again, God knew what He was doing. It was an ideal time for Jesus to be born. They say that hindsight gives us 20/20 vision. When we look back on the period we can see that Jesus came at a time that was very stable in a political sense. The Pax Romana, which was the Roman peace, meant that government throughout the world was very stable and travel was relatively safe.

It was a time when, for the first time in the history of the world, Greek was spoken all over the ancient world so that Paul could travel from Jerusalem to Ephesus to Athens and speak the same language to every audience. It was also a time when there was a deep longing and expectation that God would send Israel a Messiah. So, for political, cultural and spiritual reasons, it was an opportune time for the coming of Christ. The fact is that God, in His wisdom, knew what He was doing. ap

Christmas to Chalcedon

Fully man, fully God! What can this mean?

In the depths of history lies a Church Council held in Chalcedon in AD 451 to sort out what the church said about Jesus. Most Christians have never heard of the Council of Chalcedon, but it has given the church the most important affirmation that Jesus is God and man. Without Chalcedon, Christmas makes no sense.

At the heart of the Christian faith lies a wonderful and fascinating mystery. Theologians have a habit of hiding all sorts of mischief behind “mysteries” but I can find no better word. By “mystery” I mean a Christian doctrine which we only know by God’s revelation and which we cannot penetrate with human understanding. Most Christians could list several of these, but in my estimation it is the incarnation, the act of God taking on humanity, that is the most mysterious and fascinating.

The doctrine of the Trinity is certainly mysterious, yet who would expect to be able to understand and explain God? When we come to Jesus Christ we are thinking about a man who lived a life like ours, from birth to death. How puzzling to find that we can no more grasp him intellectually than we can grasp God. Of course, all of us have dimensions which no one else can plumb (1 Cor. 2:11a), but we figure that if we could somehow know what makes our friends who they are it would not be all that different from ourselves. When we start to think about Jesus, we find a reality which is like us in many ways, and yet so different. The older theologians used to call it “ineffable” (unable to be put into words). I hope that I can show you that it is also wonderful and fascinating.

As we think about this, let’s start with the Old Testament and how God saves. The whole Bible after Genesis 3:15 is the history of God’s redemption of His creation. It focuses on Abraham and the nation of Israel, but it always aims at ending the curse and returning God’s blessing to the creation. God does this by saving and keeping His people. He does this over and over again as Israel repeats Adam’s disobedience.

As God saves and keeps His people, He sometimes uses his servants. Moses is



**John
McClean**

the great example of this. He saved Israel, ruled and led them, declared God’s word to them, set up the tabernacle and taught them. God is also more directly involved through his life. This doesn’t happen often, but when it does it’s spectacular. Think of the events at the Red Sea.

That God saves us directly and through

Jesus does not come out directly and say that he is “God”. There are at least two theological reasons for this reserve.

His servants is important. God works through His servants because He is committed to His creation and its integrity. The promise to Abraham, which ties together the whole Bible, is a promise about fathering and raising children,

which is part of God’s original creation pattern. God saves His people and the creation by working through them and it.

However, God is not locked out of the created order; He can act more directly. Moreover, the creation is unable to save itself. So God can and does and must act directly as well.

At the end of the Old Testament, as Israel wandered further and further from their Lord, the prophets promised a servant who would save, a new Moses who would lead a new Exodus (Is. 40:3-5), a new king (Is. 9:1-7), a priestly messiah (Zech. 4:11-14), a new prophet (Mal. 4:5-6) and a new teacher (Is. 11:2). The prophets also said that the new age would come when God Himself entered into history very directly and saved His people. In Isaiah 63 the Lord is portrayed as a blood-spattered warrior coming from the battle field where He has won the victory, just as He did at the Red Sea in the Exodus.

The prophetic promises are fulfilled in

Jesus. In Him, God Himself saved the creation through His servant Jesus, the Saviour who is both human and divine. The idea that Jesus is both God and man is not a piece of esoteric theology; it’s woven into the New Testament presentation of Jesus and is the only way to make sense of Him.

Jesus is presented as a man who has a family, who grows and learns, who struggles and rejoices and who dies. After His resurrection and ascension the New Testament writers still call Jesus a man when they talk about our salvation and about judgement (Acts 13:38; 17:31; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 2:6-9, 24).

The New Testament also says that Jesus is God. This is not quite so straightforward to us as Jesus being human. Jesus does not come out directly and say that he is “God”. There are at least two theological reasons for this reserve. One is that Jesus came in what theologians have called “a state of humiliation”. He concealed His glory and power. In Jesus’ ascended and glorified state He reveals God’s glory in His humanity. However in His first coming He took the way of humiliation and suffering and was recognised by faith and not by sight. The second reason for Jesus not claiming to be God is that He differentiated himself from the Father. He was concerned to stress his reliance upon and obedience to the Father. There were other reasons for this as well, such as the need to avoid conflict with the Jewish authorities until the proper time.

Although Jesus’ divinity is hidden during His humiliation, the gospels have plenty of hints of it and the letters of the New Testament spell it out more clearly. There is room here only to outline this testimony. The gospels show Jesus doing things that God does such as forgiving sins, calming storms and raising the dead. John’s gospel also records Jesus’ claims to be “I am” (John 8:58) and to be from above and from God (Jn 3:11-13) and to be one with the Father (Jn 14:9-11). Jesus is given divine titles such as “Lord” (Rom. 10:9) and “bridegroom” (Mk 2:19) and “the first and last” (Rev. 2:8, 22:13). He is also described as “Creator” (Jn 1:1,3, Heb. 1:3) and “Sustainer” (1 Cor. 8:6,

Col. 1:17). He is worshipped as only God can be (Rom. 9:5, 2 Tim. 4:18, Rom. 9:33f; Rev. 5: 8-14). There are also several passages in the New Testament which refer to Jesus as God (Rom. 9:5, Heb. 1:8, Jn 1:1-2, 18, 20:28, Titus 2:13, 2 Pet. 1:1, Acts 20:28). Each of these involves questions of translation, but together they give clear testimony to the recognition that Jesus shares in what it means to be God.

In the biblical view of the world there is a great distinction between God and His creation, but Jesus stands across that distinction in a remarkable way. He is as human as we can imagine, yet He also belongs on God's side of the divide. That is why we sing in *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*, "Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail the incarnate Deity".

Why does this matter? We might say that it's simply because the Bible teaches that Jesus is God and man and so we have to believe it. That is true, but there are some things that the Bible teaches which are central and most important and this is one of them. If we do not recognise that Jesus is divine and human then our view of salvation is skewed, our faith in Him diminished and our expectations of living as Christians are confused.

As we saw when we thought about the Old Testament, God is directly involved in salvation and He works through the created order by His servants. The incarnation brings this pattern to an intense focus. In Jesus Christ God Himself is present in a man. So Jesus is the mediator in a way no other man ever was. In this way God saves, as it were, from the inside of creation. We could not save ourselves, but God saves us in a way that redeems and heals us and all creation.

The New Testament highlights this saving from inside when it presents Jesus as the new Adam (Rom. 5:14-19; 1 Cor. 15:45-49). When Adam acted on behalf of all his descendants, he acted tragically in disobedience and we still reap and repeat the consequences. Jesus brings a new beginning for humanity and creation. He could only do that as a human.

Because Jesus is fully human and fully divine His death could be "for us". In Hebrews 2, a marvellous chapter on the humanity of Christ, the writer concludes that it was because He shared in our flesh and blood that He could free us from death and the devil and make atonement for our sins (Heb. 2:14-17). Yet Jesus' death could not have such importance because it is the death of the incarnate Son.

The goal of God's redemption for us is

that we share in His glory as humans. He does not strip away our humanity but fulfills and completes it. God does this as we are united to and conformed to Christ. There are a whole series of New Testament passages that speak this way. Ephesians 4:15 says that together the church grows into Christ. How can we do this and not become God? The answer is that the Christ to whom we are joined and into whom we grow is the God-man, and so He can be the proper model for us. Indeed Jesus is already what we will be, He anticipates our glorification (Phil. 3:21; 1 John 3:2). This all depends on the incarnation.



The goal of God's redemption for us is that we share in His glory as humans. He does not strip away our humanity but fulfills and completes it.

Hebrews tells us that the incarnation also means that Jesus is now a sympathetic high-priest. Jesus' work continues as He prays for us and pours out His Spirit on us, who in turn transforms us into the image of Christ. Jesus' ongoing work also depends on Him being the God-man.

The Council of Chalcedon was held because Christians need to be clear about what we say about Jesus. It showed that we have to insist that Jesus is fully human and fully divine and that in Him God and humanity find perfect unity. Before the Council there had been several wrong views about Jesus.

Some people, such as Arius and the Arians who followed him denied that Jesus is fully God. (This is the view of Jehovah's Witnesses today.)

The opposite error is to deny that he is really human. A sophisticated version of this was taught by Apollinarius who said that Jesus had a human body but that His mind was that of the Word of God. This treats Jesus as if He is mentally and spiritually superhuman. I suspect that lots of Christians today think of Jesus like that. What is the problem with it? When the Son became human He took on our wounded humanity to pay the price for our rebellion and to heal us. If He has only taken on part of our humanity, then

we are only partly saved and we will have to lose our bodies in order to be able to be united with God.

Another set of errors are those that relate Jesus' divinity and humanity in a wrong way. Nestorius taught that in Jesus the two were sufficiently separable that Mary could not be called the bearer (or mother) of God but only the bearer of Christ. This seems to so disconnect Jesus' divinity and humanity that salvation does not engage humans. It is left up to us to reach out and connect with God. The opposite error is to think that divinity and humanity are united in Jesus so that Jesus becomes God and not man. This view was called monophysitism because it teaches that there is only one nature (*physis*) in Jesus. This view leads to a mysticism in which we merge into God, rather than being forgiven people who live in fellowship with God. In the Reformation era John Calvin opposed Andreas Osiander for taking a similar view and teaching that Christians are directly united to God's essence in salvation.

The ongoing debates and confusion about how to think properly about Jesus finally led to the Council of Chalcedon. Here the various views seemed to balance each other and the council declared that Christ is to be "acknowledged in two natures, without being mixed, transmuted, divided, or separated". The formula stated that Jesus Christ is one person but in Him, uniquely, there are united two "natures", that is He is divine and

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human. The result of the council was that a group of Eastern churches (in Egypt, Syria, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Armenia and India) were separated from the rest of the Christian church. That breach has only begun to be formally healed this decade.

Obscure as it is, we need to thank God for the wisdom of the Council of Chalcedon. Its insights secure our view of salvation: that God saves us to be human, not from being human. It shows us that we live in God's grace, not trying to work our way into His kingdom, nor losing ourselves in Him. It says about as much as we can about the Christmas mystery.

The recent election of Barack Obama to the Presidency of the United States has triggered an outpouring of hopeful enthusiasm, some of which is almost messianic in its raptures. The response from conservative Christians seems to have been as much to this millennial fervour as to Obama himself. People have been saying "pray that he can keep his head with all this nonsense going on". There was a similar dynamic with the election of the Rudd Government a year ago, though because we are usually more reserved about our politics it hasn't been as exaggerated as in the US.

The election is a significant historical

event. Obama's racial background, his age, his political leanings, his background in community development, the use of the internet and the financial support of millions of individuals all seem to make the 2008 election notable. The progress of his presidency will be fascinating. While

The incarnation shows us the depth of our problem. Our world is not simply disorganised or uneducated. There is a wound which centres in the human heart.



we think about this, there is an important incarnational perspective on it.

The incarnation shows us the depth of our problem. Our world is not simply disorganised or uneducated. There is a wound which centres in the human heart, and runs through the whole created order and can only be restored by God's heal-

ing. The evangelical sceptics of the Obama-hype have a point – a new president, no matter what his calibre, can not change that. Every declaration that we have entered into a brand new era of hope inevitably founders on the rocks of human sin.

However the incarnation is also God's great affirmation of the world He has made, including people and our societies and even our political institutions. Our world can only be healed by God, but it will be healed. When the evangelical critics paint any hope in politics or any enthusiasm for a political program which aims at change as wrong headed, they are in danger of losing sight of the incarnation. God says we matter and our life in His world matters.

There are elements of Obama's platform with which most evangelicals would disagree. We shouldn't be surprised that people hope for good government and one that wants to change things that seem wrong in society. The incarnation says that is worth working for, it also says that we won't find the change we really need in any politician.

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FROM THE MODERATOR – GENERAL IN REGARD TO CHURCH PLANTING IN PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA



'The vigorous, continual planting of new congregations is the single most crucial strategy for 1) the numerical growth of the Body of Christ in any city, and 2) the continual corporate renewal and revival of the existing churches in a city. Nothing else – not crusades, outreach programmes, para-church ministries, growing mega-churches, congregational consulting, nor church renewal processes – will have the consistent impact of dynamic, extensive church planting.' (T. Keller)

Perth is currently growing at an unprecedented rate. People are moving to the Capital of Western Australia from all over Australia and the world. The West Australian General Assembly has developed a METRO-WIDE STRATEGY which seeks to respond to this growth and has as a key component, the planting and establishment of at least five new congregations. The West Australian General Assembly has declared that under the METRO-WIDE STRATEGY, the next area for church extension work will be in the Rockingham district, half an hour drive south of Fremantle on the coast. The Presbyterian Church in Western Australia is marshalling its own resources to launch a new effort in church planting but it also needs the help of the wider Presbyterian Church in this great task. (More details on the METRO-WIDE STRATEGY can be obtained from the Clerk of WA Assembly, Mr. Glenn Muskett on 08-9339 9400 ceo@braemarhomes.com.au)

I would invite you to pray especially for a suitable church planter to be raised up and for a suitable, committed and supportive core group to come together.

The 2007 General Assembly of Australia authorised the Moderator-General to coordinate an annual appeal during 2008, 2009 and 2010 to raise funds from across the Presbyterian Church of Australia to provide for the opening, staffing and development of a new church planting congregation in metropolitan Perth. The new church (the Lord willing) in the Rockingham district will be the recipient of the funds raised. Gifts can be sent to 'GAA WA Church Planting Appeal' c/- PO Box 2196, Strawberry Hills, NSW, 2012 with cheques made out to 'Presbyterian Church Funds'. A covering letter should state that the gift is for the 'WA Church Planting Appeal'. The GAA WA Church Planting Appeal will be placed before the Lord's people in our Church in a number of different forms.

Thank you for taking time to read this Communication. I would ask that we work together to ensure a very generous response to this call for gospel partnership with the Presbyterian Church in Western Australia.

ROBERT BENN, Moderator-General

Late but lovely

An ancient orator shows why we must celebrate the church's final festival.

How did Christmas begin? Did you ever wonder? Of course the very *first* Christmas is recorded for us in Matthew and Luke's Gospels, but what about the *celebration* of Christmas by the church?

You may have heard the rants of sceptics who claim that 25 December celebrations are nothing more than a pagan solstice festival. But is that really true? The "problem" of Christmas was disputed among Protestants in the 16th century and it still is. Should we celebrate Christmas on 25 December, or at all?

You may not realise that one of the first Christmas sermons (*the* first Christmas sermon in the eastern city of Antioch) has come down to us through history and it's a fascinating and inspiring read.

John Chrysostom (his "surname" is really a nickname from a later century – it means "Goldenmouth") was one of the greatest preachers of all time. He was assistant bishop in Antioch, the city where believers had first been called Christians more than 300 years earlier (Acts 11:26). In AD 386 John was given the important task of preaching at the very first Christmas celebration in this leading city of the Eastern church.

Before this, the three great festivals celebrated by the church had been Epiphany (celebrating Jesus' baptism), Easter (His death and resurrection) and Pentecost (the coming of His Spirit.) Now, for the first time, this Greek-speaking church in Antioch would celebrate Christmas. In another sermon a few days earlier, John announced to his flock that they would for the first time be enjoying "the most solemn and awesome of all festivals, which one would not be wrong to designate 'the metropolis' of festivals, the birth of Christ in the flesh". Antioch at the time was an ancient metropolis – so their appetites were whetted and a few days later "the flock" turned up in droves to hear of the birth of the Great Shepherd.

Most of Chrysostom's sermon is a passionate defence of a Christmas celebration. In order to give you a taste, here is how Antioch's first ever Christmas sermon begins: "The things which the ancient patriarchs saw, the prophets foretold, and the righteous longed to see,



Peter Moore

these things have come about and their goal has been grasped today. God appeared on earth in the flesh and dwelt with humankind!

"So let us rejoice and let us do so gladly, dear ones. For if John, although he was in his mother's womb, leapt when Mary came to Elizabeth, shouldn't we do so much more, since it is not Mary, but our Saviour whom we have seen born today? Shouldn't we leap, unable to contain our



John considers a festival vital. How can we not have a "party" since such an earth-shattering moment has arrived?

joy and wonder, stunned at just how brilliant this thing is which has been accomplished, simply unable to properly take it all in?"

In a subtle reference to the pagan solstice celebrations that *were* taking place at about this time, John says that if it seems exciting to celebrate the sun, making its annual course over the earth, how much more the "sun of righteousness" pouring out his brilliant light from human flesh and giving light to human hearts?

As the sermon goes on, it is mostly a passionate appeal to the sceptical within the congregation about the need to celebrate this incredible turning-point in the history of the world. John considers a festival vital. How can we not have a "party" since such an earth-shattering moment has arrived?

Chrysostom has a number of arguments for this, mostly focusing on the

date chosen: 25 December. First, he points out that the rapid acceptance of this date as the date for Christ's birth is evidence of God's hand being upon it. He makes mention of Gamaliel's logic in Acts 5:38-9.

Second, John points out that the Eastern Church had adopted this festival from the Roman provinces to the west, who had been observing it for many years. He notes that in Rome there was ready access to the imperial records as to when the census of Quirinius took place, and so he insists this Roman precedent must be extremely important.

Third, Chrysostom spends much of his sermon trying to prove from Scripture the late December date for Christmas day. Personally, I find this all rather unconvincing, but the argument is put passionately and it goes something like this.

You will remember that the angels appear to Jesus' "Uncle Zechariah" to tell him Elizabeth would have a son (read Luke 1:13), and then six months later an angel makes an even more surprising announcement to Mary (Luke 1:35-36). Chrysostom figures that Zechariah would have only been able to enter the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement and this is in late September. (As a matter of interest it was 8 October this year and next year it will be on 27 September 2009.) Assuming a similar kind of time frame in the year of Christ's birth, it means Jesus must have been conceived near the end of March – which is of course nine months before Christmas!

The difficulty with the argument of course is that it all depends on Zechariah being the one who entered the holy of holies for the Day of Atonement ritual. However it is not clear from the New Testament that he did so. After all, most people don't believe that Zechariah was the high priest at all (and see Luke 1:9.)

But this brings us to the most prominent argument that Chrysostom uses across his surviving Christmas sermons: the importance of the birth of Christ as a turning point in history. Christians don't usually appreciate the immensity of the moment when God the Son becomes a human being, and we ought to take any

chance we can to reflect on it and celebrate it. Questions about the actual date of Christ's birth are a minor point. This was also true in Chrysostom's day, for many heretics were objecting to the message of the incarnation on the supposed grounds that the arrival of God on earth was not logically possible. Which just proves that even though everything has changed after 1600 years, nothing has!

As we finish this small serving of an ancient shepherd's Christmas food for the flock, let me pass on some of the stirring words of the great preacher from a later Christmas sermon. There was no Christmas tree, nor lights nor tinsel, but a couple of times I think we can hear him referring to the very first "Christmas dinner": the Lord's Supper! As you read his words, read them out loud, because that is how he meant them to be heard.

I gaze at a new and wonderful mystery. My ears ring with the Shepherd's song, piping not a soft melody, but chanting a rich heavenly hymn. The Angels sing. The Archangels blend their voices in harmony. The Cherubim hymn their joyful praise. The Seraphim exalt His glory.

All join to praise this holy celebration, gazing on the Godhead here on earth, and humankind in heaven! The one who is above, now for our redemption dwells here below; and the person who was lowly is by divine mercy raised up.

"Don't ask how: for where God wills something, the creation yields. For He willed, He had the power, He descended, He redeemed; all things move in obedience to God's will.

"And see now: Kings have come, that they may adore the heavenly King of Glory; soldiers, that they may serve the Leader of the armies of Heaven; women, that they may adore Him who was born of a woman so that He might change the pains of childbirth into joy; virgins, to the Son of the virgin, beholding with joy, that He who created milk in the first place, now receives from a virgin mother this food for babies; infants, that they may adore Him who became a little child, so that out of the mouth of infants and babies He might make praise perfect; children, to the one who raised up child martyrs through the rage of Herod; men, to Him who became a man, that He might heal the miseries of His servants; shepherds, to the Good Shepherd who has laid down his life for His sheep; priests, to Him who has become a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek; servants, to Him who took upon Himself the form of a servant that He might bless our servitude with the reward of freedom; fisherman, to Him who from among fishermen chose fishers of men; publicans, to Him who from among them named a chosen evangelist; sinful women, to Him who exposed His feet to the tears of the repentant; and that I may embrace them all together, all sinners have come, that they may gaze at the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

"Since therefore all rejoice, I, too, desire to rejoice. I, too, wish to share in the choral dance, and to celebrate the festival. But I take my part, not plucking the harp, nor with the music of the pipes, nor holding a torch, but holding in my arms, [the bread and wine which are symbols of] the cradle [that is, the human body] of Christ. For this is all my hope, this my

life, this my salvation, this my pipe, my harp. And bearing it I come, and having from its power received the gift of speech, I too, with the angels sing: Glory to God in the Highest; and with the shepherds, and on earth peace to men of good will.

"O inexpressible grace! The only begotten, who existed before eternity, who cannot be touched or be perceived, who is without body, has now put on my body, that is visible and is subject to decay! For what reason? That coming among us He may teach us, and teaching, lead us by the hand to the things that human beings can't see. For we all think that the eyes are more trustworthy than the ears. We doubt whatever we don't see. And so He has graciously shown Himself in bodily presence, that He may remove all our doubts. The Ancient of Days has become an infant. He who sits upon the sublime and heavenly throne, now lies in a manger. And He who cannot be touched, now lies in human arms. He who has broken the bonds of sinners, is now bound up in a baby's wrap! But He has decreed that humiliation shall become honour; infamy clothed with glory; and total humiliation, the measure of his goodness. For this reason He took upon Himself my body, that I might become capable of His word; taking my flesh, He gives me His Spirit; and so He gave and I receive, and He prepares for me the treasure of life. He takes my flesh, to make me holy; He gives me His Spirit, that He might save me.

"Come then, let us observe the feast. Come and we shall commemorate the festival. For this day, the ancient slavery is ended, the devil confounded, the demons take to flight, the power of death is broken, paradise is unlocked, the curse is taken away, sin is removed from us, error driven out, truth has been recovered, gracious words spread everywhere, a heavenly way of life has taken root on the earth, angels speak with human beings without fear, and human beings speak with angels! Why is this so? Because God is now on earth, and humanity in heaven. On every side things that are utterly different have now been put together. God has come to earth! On this day, the Word of God, being truly God, appeared in the form of a man, that He might put lies right. To Him then, who out of confusion has made a clear path: to Christ, to the Father and to the Holy Spirit, we offer all praise, now and forever, Amen."

Peter Moore lectures in church history/systematic theology and pastoral theology at the Presbyterian Theological Centre, Sydney.

God is now on earth, and humanity in heaven. On every side things that are utterly different have now been put together.

ST DAVID'S

Finding Rest in a Restless World

Full-Time Youth Pastor

St David's Presbyterian Church in North Toowoomba, QLD, is a growing congregation with a passion to engage a new generation with the gospel.

We are seeking a Youth Pastor to train and lead the congregation in youth and children's ministry in a discipleship model.

He will need to be of Reformed convictions, be a capable preacher, be a team player, and be able to serve in a conservative but developing context.

This is a positive opportunity for a ministry worker or new graduate with suitable experience to relocate, even from interstate, to an encouraging church environment in beautiful Bible-belt Toowoomba.

Ordained ministers are also welcome to apply.

A two-person interview panel may be visiting Sydney in the near future. For appointments or further information, please contact the minister:

Rev. Andrew M Clarke
34 Alford Street, Mount Lofty QLD 4350
Telephone: (07) 4632 8027
Mobile: 0412 993 902
Email: minister@rest.org.au



One of us

*20 daily Bible studies in
Matthew 11-12 and
Proverbs 22-23*

The basic message of Christmas is: God became a man. Jesus became one of us, fully human, sharing in our struggles, facing our temptations, feeling our pain and disappointment, suffering the same experiences of being misunderstood, opposed and rejected. But Jesus was also different from us. He was God incarnate. He existed in heaven with the Father from all eternity before He broke through into, and became part of, the time-space Universe that was created by Him and for Him (cf Col. 1:15-17).

His earthly ministry is part of human history. He showed us what God is like – His love and compassion, His power and authority, His wisdom and ways, His tenderness and mercy. By doing this He divided the human race into two distinct groups. On the one hand are those who accept His word, submit to Him as Lord, and seek to live out His teaching. On the other hand are those who refuse to acknowledge Him at all. To the first group He is a Saviour, bearing all the punishment for their sins as their substitute on the cross; to the second He stands as their Judge.

As we go through these two chapters in Matthew's Gospel we will see the practical outworking of this in Jesus' teaching, in His miracles, and His interaction with those who persisted in their spiritual blindness. We will see the tension between love and justice, mercy and judgement, pleading gentleness and sovereign power. And we will have a chance to reflect again on what Christmas means to us, and how we respond to His Spirit.

Bruce Christian ▶

DAY 1

Trusting Jesus... anyway!

THE PASSAGE

MATTHEW 11:1-6

THE POINT Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as “being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see”. Jesus challenged John the Baptist (and us!) to discover the reality of this truth for himself.

THE PARTICULARS

- Jesus’ teaching ministry included both the mentoring of His small team of The Twelve and the public proclamation (“preach”) and instruction (“teach”) of the Good News of God’s Kingdom (1).
- John the Baptist was understandably confused: God had commissioned him to announce Jesus as the promised Messiah,

but his predicament was hardly consistent with that (2-3)!

- Interestingly, Matthew refers to Jesus as “Christ” (Messiah) in the context of His Messiahship being questioned, anticipating the response that was about to be given to the prisoner (2).
- Also interestingly, the Messianic indicators quoted by Jesus from Isaiah 35:4-6 and 61:1 omit: “to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners”; He is challenging John to believe on the strength of the evidence of the other Messianic miracles, even if the very significant question regarding his own imprisonment remains unanswered (4-5)!
- Jesus commends the person who remains committed to Him in spite of the strange and inexplicable providences of life (6).

DAY 2

A time for action!

THE PASSAGE

MATTHEW 11:7-15

THE POINT Jesus’ words here are momentous! The whole of human history has come to its single climax, its unique turning point. John the Baptist is the very last, and in that sense the “greatest”, of God’s many messengers commissioned to proclaim the promise of His Messiah-King. But now that King has come to conquer Satan’s rule of sin, evil and death by His own death and resurrection, and so to usher in the Kingdom of God. A whole new regime is being set in place such that even its least significant participant will overshadow the champion of the old regime. “The old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17) and John, along with all the other OT “saints”, will, like us, have an inheritance in the

Kingdom of Heaven because of Christ’s finished work.

THE PARTICULARS

- God wants messengers who are committed to His truth and not swayed by, or seeking the approval of, the world (7-9; cf John 15:18-19, 1 Corinthians 1:26-2:5, 2 Corinthians 4:5-7).
- God gave John a unique task in His Plan – fulfilling His very last written promises of Malachi 3:1 and 4:5-6 (10-15); the message and coming of the Kingdom are intensely serious matters (12).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- How does our understanding/presentation of the Good News about God’s Kingdom compare with what Jesus is saying here?

DAY 3

Not child’s play

THE PASSAGE

MATTHEW 11:16-19

THE POINT Jesus uses a (then) familiar children’s pastime to point out how utterly unresponsive the Jews were to the dramatic intervention of their God into their history. Whatever form the actual “game” took, its amusement related to responses or lack of them, perhaps a bit like our “Simon says”. The divine messenger John had been commissioned with a sombre message of God’s judgement, and he bore it in his ascetic lifestyle as well as his hard-hitting words. The Divine Messenger Jesus was commissioned with a message of joy and hope which He lived out by “partying” with the scum of society. Both approaches were authentic expressions of the Messianic Kingdom’s impact on a heartless, hateful, helpless,

hopeless world. Who wouldn’t empathise with breast-beating mourners at a funeral? Or dance to joyful flute-playing at a wedding? Only those so out of touch with reality, so caught up in their own ritualistic tradition, as to be spiritually numb.

THE PARTICULARS

- We are to be faithful to the “whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27) in all its facets, and leave the ultimate outcome to God (19b).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- In terms of thorough, lifestyle-changing conversions, our society seems unmoved by either a “challenging” or a “user-friendly” approach to evangelism. Why is this? What can we do about it?

DAY 4

Turn or burn

THE PASSAGE

MATTHEW 11:20-24

THE POINT The “Jesus” and “John” approaches were not mutually exclusive, but complementary; we now see the “friend of tax-collectors and sinners” pronouncing God’s dire Judgement on specific places that had refused His openly demonstrated overtures of mercy. Communities/cities/regions/nations who have been given the privilege of seeing first-hand the evidence of the power of the Gospel at work, who have had ready access to the historical facts that clearly identify Jesus as Messiah and Son of God, will be called to greater account for refusing to respond to it.

“side-show” to prove who He was; they were intended to show God’s mercy, love and compassion to people in need. The only proper response, therefore, was gratitude expressed in true repentance.

- The towns and cities where Jesus had performed miracles stood condemned, not because of their behaviour in itself, but because they refused to repent and believe in Him (20; cf John 3:16-18).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Where does Australia stand in the light of Jesus’ words here? If His Return should be today, what might we expect to happen to us (cf Genesis 19:24-25, Amos 1:9-10)? What particular case would He be justified in bringing against us as a nation?



Come worship with us!

If you are passing through or moving nearby, feel free to ring the Minister, Clerk or Elder.
Find us on the Web at: <http://www.presbyterian.org.au/states.htm>

northern territory

DARWIN

Casuarina Shopping Centre 9.30am.
Rev. Rob Duncanson (08) 8945 7878.

australian capital territory

CANBERRA, BELCONNEN

Cnr Gatty St. & Ross Smith Cres, Scullin.
Sunday Service 10:00 am
Elder: Mrs J. Cram (02) 6278 7379

CANBERRA, FORREST (St Andrew's)

1 State Circle (opp Parliament House).
Service Times: 9.30am. & 7.00pm.

Church Office: (02) 6295 3457

CANBERRA, TUGGERANONG

Isabella Plains Primary School, cnr Ellerstone Ave & Noorooma St, Isabella Plains.
Worship Service & Sunday School 10.00am.
Evening service 6.15pm (light meal @5:45pm).
Mike Pittman (02) 6292 6772.

new south wales

ANNANDALE-LEICHHARDT

Hunter Baillie, Johnston & Collins Sts.
10.00am (6.30pm 1st Sunday only)
Rev. Peter Dunstan (02) 9810 7869

ARMIDALE (St. Paul's)

Faulkner St, 9.30am. & 7.00pm.
Rev. David M. Seaman (02) 6772 3093

ASHFIELD

Liverpool Rd. & Knox St. 10.15am & 6.00pm
Rev Peter Hastie (02) 9798 6572.

BEACON HILL (St Andrew's)

244 Warringah Rd. 9.00am. & 7.00pm.
Rev. Trevor Cheetham (02) 9451 5076.

BEECROFT

Mary St., 8.45am. 10.30am. & 5.30pm.
Rev. Paul Cooper (02) 9876 2478.

BEGA — EDEN

Bega — 25 Upper St. 9.30am.
Contact: Mrs M. Cochrane (02) 6492 2949

BONDI

Cnr. Castlefield & Miller Sts.
10.00am & 7.00pm.
Rev John Graham: (02) 9130 6607.

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

Cr Bendooley & Wingecarribee St. 9.30am.

Kids' Church: 9.30 am. 1st & 3rd Sunday
Sess. Clrk: Mr Peter Boggs, (02) 4861 3079.

BURWOOD (St. James)

46-48 Belmore St. 9.15am
Rev. David Maher (02) 9744 6542

BURWOOD CHINESE

46-48 Belmore St. 9.15am & 11.15am
(Cantonese) 10.30am & 5.00pm (English).
Church Office: (02) 9715 3889.
Rev. Dennis Law 0414 812 776.
Rev. Eugene Hor 0414 992 106.
Mr Joe Lin 0405 203 064. Miss Amy Leong
0415 777 829 (Pastoral worker)

CAMPBELLTOWN

34 Lithgow St. 8.30 am. 10.00 am. 6.30 pm.
Rev. Jim Elliot (02) 4625 1037.

CARINGBAH

393 Port Hacking Rd. South. 9.30am & 6.30pm.
Rev. Darren Middleton (02) 9540 4469.

CASTLE HILL

247 Old Northern Rd. 9.30am & 6.00pm.
Rev. Moses Hahn (02) 9634 2911.

CHATSWOOD

St Andrew's, Anderson St. 9.00am, 10.30am
& 6.30pm. Rev. Jeff Read (02) 9419 5932 (W),
(02) 9419 7349 (H). Ass. Rev. Warren Esdale.

CHERRYBROOK

John Purchase Public School Hall,
Purchase Road. Service: 9.30 am.

Rev. Stephen Fong (02) 9875 4894

CHINESE CHURCH

Cnr Crown & Albion Sts. Surry Hills.
English 9am & 5pm / Cantonese 10.30am /
Mandarin 9am / Bilingual Service 12noon /
Sunday School 9am & 10:30am / Youth 9am.
Church Office (02) 9331 4459. Rev. David
Tsai (02) 9747 4845 or 0408 5516 606.

COFFS HARBOUR (St Andrew's)

187 Harbour Dr. 8.00am, 9.45am & 6.30pm
at Harbourside Evangelical Church.

Rev. Jamie K. Newans (02) 6652 3183

CORNERSTONE

@ Concord: Meets Concord Public School
9.30 am. Cnr Burwood Rd. & Stanley St.

Concord. Rev. Mark Powell (02) 9702 5281

@ North: Meets Eastwood Heights Public
School 9.30am. Lincoln Street, Eastwood.

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

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. 9.30am. Beresfield: Beresford Ave.
7.45am. Raymond Terrace: Irrawang St.
9.45am. Rev. J. Buchanan (02) 4933 7443.

EPPING

Bridge & Rawson Sts. 9.00am, 10.30am &
6.30pm. Rev. Matthew Oates (02) 9876 1188.

FORSTER/TUNCURRY

Bruce St. Forster, 9.30am, 6.00pm.
Rev. Jason Summers (02) 6557 5047

GLEN INNES

Heron St. 11.00am & 7.00pm.
All ages study groups 9.30am.

Pastor Lance Jackson (02) 6732 5707

GOULBURN (St Andrews)

Clifford St. 9.00am. 7.00pm (2nd & 4th
Sundays). Also Taralga, Crookwell and
Tuena. Rev. Chris Balzer (02) 4822 2344

GOSFORD

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

9.45am. 6.30 pm. Rev. M. Cropper

Office: Ph (02) 4323 2490.

GRANVILLE/MERRYLANDS

Granville: 14 Hutchinson St. 9.30am. Rev. P.
Tamsett 9760 0900. Merrylands & Monitor's
Rd. P. Magee 9760 2362. Canley Heights: 3

Derria St. 9609 7384. East Parramatta:

Inquiries B. Frost 0433 908 130.

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. & McMahon St. 9.30am &

6.30pm. Rev Kevin Murray (02) 9153 8176.

KOGARAH

Meets Carlton School of Arts — 9.30am.

2 Short Street.

Mr Steve Chong (02) 8012 6837 (H).

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

MANLY (St Andrew's)

Raglan St. & Augusta Lane. 9.00am.

Rev. Derek Bullen (02) 9976 2801

MAROUBRA

8 Robey St, 10.00am. 7.15pm.

Chinese Service, 4pm.

Rev Johnnie Li (02) 9349 1312

MITTAGONG

Cr Alice & Edwards Sts. 9.00am. Sess Clrk

Mr David Hocking, (02) 4869 3118.

MOREE (St Andrew's)

Cnr Albert & Auburn Sts, 10.00am.

Tel. (02) 6752 1083

MORUYA

31 Evans St. 9.00am.

Home Missionary John Wells (02) 4474 2186.

MOSMAN (Scots Kirk)

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

Rev. Adrian de Graaf (02) 9969 6101.

MOSS VALE

7 Browley St 9.30am & 6.00pm
Rev. Steve North (02) 4869 4795.

NAROOMA

1 Farncombe Ave. 11.00am.
Home Missionary John Wells (02) 4474 2186.

NEWCASTLE (St Andrews)

Cnr Laman & Auckland Sts 9.30am & 6.00pm.
Office: (02) 4929 2857

NEWCASTLE EAST (St. Philip's)

48 Watt St., 10.00am. **Surfside:** 7.00pm.

Stockton: 10.30am Wednesday.

Rev. John Macintyre (02) 4929 2379.

Asst: Rev. Jon Nuttall (02) 4928 3410.

NORTH SYDNEY-GREENWICH

(St Peter's) 234 Blues Point Rd. 10.00am.

& 6.45pm. Wednesday 1.15pm.

Greenwich: (Taylor Memorial)

86A Greenwich Rd. 10.00am.

Rev. Dr Paul Logan (02) 9955 1662.

Rev. Matthew Oates (02) 9405 2235.

ORANGE (St James)

Cnr Anson St. & Matthews Ave. 10.00am.

Rev. Robert McKean (02) 6362 6304

PARKES/FORBES/PEAK HILL

Parkes: S. School 10.00am; Service 11.00am.

Forbes: 9.00am. Peak Hill: 10.00am.

1st Sunday. Rev. Craig Bland (02) 6862 2730

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.

REVESBY

Cnr Tower St & Eastern Avenue,

Service: 9.00am & 6.30pm.

Rev. Dr Peter Barnes (02) 9774 5740.

ROSE BAY (St Andrew's)

Cnr Dover Rd. & Carlisle St.

10.00am & 6.00pm.

Rev Bruce Christian (02) 9388 1206(O).

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.

A. Min. Mark Armstrong (02) 4751 1188 (O).

Rev. Keith Walker (02) 4751 1188 (O).

SUTHERLAND

Cnr Flora & Glencoe Sts. 9.30am & 5.30pm

Rev Andrew Clausen (02) 9521 2361

SYDNEY (Scots Church)

44 Margaret St. Sydney. Sun: 10.30 am.

Wed: 1.15pm. Rev. Adrian Van Ash

(02) 9299 7490 (O) (02) 9817 0587 (H).

TAMWORTH (St Stephen's)

Cnr Matthews & Crown St. 9.00am &

6.30pm. **Moonbi** 9.00am.

Rev Stuart Andrews (02) 6765 8754.

Tamworth Community Presb Church,

St Stephens, Cnr Matthews & Crown St.

10.30am Rev. David Hassan (02) 6765 2865.

TAREE

Albert St. 9.00am.

Rev. Paul Harris (02) 6552 1082(O).

TERRIGAL (Scots Kirk)

2 Willoughby Rd. 9.00am & 6.00pm.

Rev. Glenn Samuel (02) 4385 2240

TUROSS HEAD

277 Hector McWilliam Dr. 9.00am.

Home Missionary John Wells (02) 4474 2186.

WAHROONGA

Wahroonga Presbyterian Church,

Cnr. Illoura Ave. & Stuart St. 9.30am.

Rev. Murray Fraser (02) 9489 3690

WAGGA WAGGA SOUTH

60-62 Coleman St. Turvey Park

9.00am & 10.30am.

Rev. Sandy McMillan (02) 6925 1228.

WEE WAA

Mitchell St. Rev. Mark Powell (02) 6795 4259

WENTWORTH FALLS (St Andrew's)

Falls Rd. 9.00 am.

Rev. Keith King (02) 4784 1255

WENTWORTHVILLE (St Andrew's)

7 McKern St. 9.00am & 5.00pm.

Rev. Luke Tattersall (02) 9863 8366.

WEST WYALONG

Pioneer Memorial, Court St. 10.30am.

Barmedman: 1st & 3rd Sunday. 9.00am.

Mirrool: 3rd Sunday. **Tallimba:** Contact

Minister. **Weethalle:** Last Sunday 7.00pm.

Mr. Graham French (02) 6972 2143.

WOLLONGONG (St Andrew's)

Cnr Kembla & Burelli Sts. 9.45am & 6.00pm.

Rev. Granville Pillar (02) 4226 1725(O).

WOONONA

7 Gray St. Rev Peter Currie (02) 4284 4057.

WOY WOI

118-120 Blackwall Rd. 9.00 & 10.30 am.

Rev. Keith Rathbone (02) 4342 2856.



ARARAT

330 Barkly St (Cnr Albert St). 10.00am.

Rev. Ian Hutton (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. Session Clerk (03) 9580 6161.

AUBURN

Cnr Rathmines & Station Sts Hawthorn East

10.00 am. Rev. Trevor Cox (03) 9882 5256

BAIRNSDALE

159 Nicholson St. 10.00am.

1st of Month 5.00pm. S/school 9.00 am.

Rev. Gary Stephens (03) 5153 1669

BALACLAVA

106 Hotham St. & Denman Ave. 9.30am.

Rev. Tony Johnson (03) 9527 3270.

BENDIGO (St John's)

Forest St. 10.30am.

Rev. Philip Burns (03) 5443 6189.

BLACKBURN

53 Gardenia St. 11.00am.

Rev P Locke (03) 9725 6417

BRIMBANK

Sydenham Community Centre

Cnr, The Community Hub & Overton Lea

Blvd, 9.30am each Sunday.

Rev. Peter Owen (03) 9307 6583.

BUNDOORA

Bundoora Hall, Noorong Ave.

10.00am & 6.00pm.

Admin: Mrs M. Goodson (03) 9457 4962.

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

Mr Simon Crittle (03) 9833 6007.

CAULFIELD-ELWOOD

Caulfield: Neerim/Bambra Rds. 11.15am.

Elwood: Scott/Tennyson Sts. 9.15am.

I.M. Rev. Dr Botrosdief (03) 9505 3013.

CHELTENHAM Pioneers' Presbyterian

8 Park Rd. Cnr. Charman Rd. 9.30am.

Rev. Daid Brown (03) 9583 2785.

CLIFTON HILL

Cnr Michael & McKean Sts North Fitzroy.

10.45 am. Rev. Peter Phillips (03) 9346 8044.

COLAC (Scots)

90-94 Armstrong Street. 10.00am.

Rev. Marvin Hagans H: (03) 5250 4360

O: (03) 5231 2398

CRANBOURNE/LYNDHURST

Cranbourne: Cnr Russel & Sladen Sts 10.00am

weekly. **Lyndhurst:** 214 Westernport Hwy

(entry frm Pyramid Pl) 2.00pm 2nd & 4th

Sunday of Mth. Mr Alex van der End

(03) 5995 6061. cranbourne.pcvic.org.au

DANDENONG

51 Potter St. 10.00am.

Rev. John Rickard (03) 9792 4252.

DONVALE

Cnr Springvale Rd & McGowan St Donvale.

8.30am, 10.30am & 6.30pm.

Rev Gerald Vanderwert (03) 9842 9493. (03)

9841 7020 (O)

DROMANA-MORNINGTON

St Andrew's, Gibson St. 9.00am.

Mornington (The Chapel) Cnr Strachans

Rd. & Nepean Hwy. 11.00am.

Rev. Dr Michael Wishart (03) 5975 9514.

DROUIN

Church St. 9am. 10.30am. 7.00pm.

Rev. Mark Smith (03) 5625 4112.

ELTHAM

23 Batman Rd. 10.00 am

Rev. Don Elliott (03) 9439 9720

ESSENDON

Cnr Wilson & McPherson Sts. 9.15am &

7.00pm. Rev. Peter Phillips (03) 9346 8044.

FLEMINGTON

Norwood St. 9.30am.

S. Clerk Miss R. Anstee (03) 9650 9903.

FRANKSTON

30 Radiata St. 10.30am & 6.00pm.

Rev. Bill Medley (03) 9786 2976.

GEELONG (St. Georges)

Cnr. Latrobe Tce & Ryrie St.

10.00am & 7.00pm.

Rev. Graeme L. Weber (03) 5229 5493.

GEELONG NORTH

60 Victoria St. 10.00am.
Session Clerk: Bert Stasse (03) 5241 4097.

GEELONG WEST (Scots)

Cnr. Pakington & Waratah Sts. 10.00am.
Rev. David Assender (03) 5249 5508.
Clerk: Mr J. R. Diffen (03) 5264 8080.

GISBORNE (St Andrew's)

Fisher Street 10.30am & Evening service last Sunday of month 5.30pm (7.00pm Summer daylight savings)

HAMILTON

St Andrew's, Gray & McIntyre Sts. 10.00am. & 5.00pm. (last Sunday of month)
Phone: (03) 5572 1009

HAWTHORN

580 Glenferrie Rd. 11.00 am. & 7.00 pm.
Rev. Graham Nicholson (03) 9819 5347.

HEATHMONT

Cnr. Waterloo St. & Canterbury Rd.
Heathmont 10.00am.
Rev. Andrew Venn (03) 9870 5182.

HORSHAM

16 Kalkee Road 10.00am & 7.00pm.
Rev. Willem Vandenberg (03) 5382 3735.

KANGAROO GROUND

265 Eltham-Yarra Glen Rd. 9.30am.
Rev. Rod Scott (03) 9763 4248.

KOREAN MELBOURNE

16 Walnut Rd. North Balwyn. 11.00am & 2.00pm. Mr Wonil Kim 0412 748 681.

LEONGATHA

Cnr. Bent & Turner Sts. 10.00am.
Session Clerk: (03) 5662 2107

MALVERN

161 Wattletree Rd. 10.30am. & 5.00 pm.
Rev. Philip Daffy (03) 9509 7373.

MELBOURNE

The Scots' Church, Cnr. Russell & Collins Sts. 11am & 5.30pm. Wed. 1.00pm. 5.15pm (Indonesian Service)
Rev. Douglas Robertson (03) 9650 9903.

MELTON

Mowbray College, Centenary Ave. 10.00am. (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

Cnr Mc Kinnons Bridge & Glenormiston Rds. 10.30am. Rev. Miles Fagan (03) 5592 5220

NUMURKAH

58 Saxton St. 11.15am.

Tallygaroopna: Victoria St. 9.30am.

Cobram: Cnr High and Pine Sts. (Anglican Church) 2.30pm.

RESERVOIR

81 Edwardes St. 10.00 am. & 7.00 pm.
Rev. Ross Tucker (03) 9460 9523

ROCHESTER

Cnr Victoria St. & Echuca Rd. 10.30am & 7.30pm (1st Sunday of the month).
H. Missionary – Pastor Steven Arbuckle.
S. Clerk – Mr Jeff Broad (03) 5484 6284.

ST KILDA

Cnr Alma Rd. & Barkly St. 11.00am & 7.00pm. Rev. Bob Thomas 0417 592 646.

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.

SORRENTO-RYE

Sorrento: St Andrew's, Kerferd Avenue 11.00am. **Rye:** Cnr Collingwood & Lyons Sts. 9.15am. 6.00pm.

Rev. John Brennan (03) 5985 6492

SOUTH YARRA

621 Punt Rd. 10.30 am. & 5.30 pm.
S.Clerk: Mr J. Adlawan (03) 9808 7391.

SUNSHINE

McKay Memorial, Anderson Rd. 10.00am. & 6.00pm. Rev. John Cho (03) 9311 1661.

SURREY HILLS (St Stephen's)

Canterbury & Warrigal Rds. 10.15am & 6.00pm. Family Services 6.00pm (2nd & 4th Sunday). Rev. Chris Siriweera (03) 9833 3306.

SURREY HILLS (St Stephen's)

Deaf Presbyterian Church

Canterbury & Warrigal Rds. 2.00pm.
Rev. Tony Salisbury (03) 9551 3634
(Mod. Rev. Chris Siriweera (03) 9833 3306)

UPPER YARRA – WARBURTON

3471 Warburton H'way. 10.00am. & 6.00pm.
Rev. Tony Archer (03) 5966 2309.

WANGARATTA – REGIONAL PARISH

Wangaratta, 158 Rowan St. 11.00am & 5.00pm (9.00am 1st Sunday)

Yarrawonga, 47 Orr St. 8.45am (11.00am 1st Sunday). **Myrtleford,** 78 Standish St. 7.00pm (5.00pm June, July, August).

Rev. Neil Harvey (03) 5721 6444

WARRNAMBOOL (St John's)

Warrnambool: Spence Street. 10.30am & 7.00pm. (O) (03) 5562 2029.

South Warrnambool: McDonald St. 9.30am.

Woodford: Mill St. 11.00 am.

Rev. Ben Johnson (03) 5561 3230.

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

1363 Healesville-Koo Wee Rup Rd. 9.30am.
I.M. Rev. Tony Archer (03) 5966 2309.

WYNDHAM

116-120 Blackforest Rd. 10.00am.
Pastor Shane Cassidy (03) 9974 2024



ACACIA RIDGE

Cnr. Mortimer & Beaudesert Rds. 9.00am. & 6.00pm., (07) 3277 0010, (07) 3711 3022 (H).

ASCOT

68 Charlton St. (Near Airport).

Nundah: 14 Rode Rd

Rev Guido Kettmiss (07) 3216 4151.

ATHERTON (Tablelands)

Cnr. Alice & Jack Sts. 10.00am & 6.00pm.
Rev. Cameron Wills (07) 4091 7203.

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

Cnr Water & Alice Sts. 9.00am & 7.00pm.
Rev. Wallace Brown (07) 4151 4766.

CABOOLTURE

24 Cottrill Road. 9.00am & 6.00pm.
Rev. Don Kennedy (07) 5498 6253

CAIRNS

85 Sheridan St. 9.30am. & 6.30pm.
Korean 11.00am. Cook Island 12 noon.

Rev. Harry Oh (07) 4051 2238

CALLIDE VALLEY

Biloela: Cnr. Kariboe & Melton Sts. 10.00am. **Jambin:** Three Ways 8.30am.
Rev. Gaius Goh (07) 4992 1441.

CHARLEVILLE/BLACKALL

78 Galatea St. 9.00am.

CLAYFIELD (Scots Memorial)

29 Bellevue Terrace, 9.30am & 6.30pm.
Rev. Andrew Richardson 0423 160 412

COORPAROO

Emlyn St. 10.00am.
H. M. Phil Case (07) 3397 8793.

CREEK ROAD

Presbyterian Ministry Centre. 1541 Creek Rd (cnr Fursden Rd). **Carina** 9.00am & 6.30pm.

Centre: (07) 3398 4333. Ass. Rev. Jens Norved (07) 3396 1185. Japanese Service 11.30am.

Jack & Keiko Marshall (07) 5501 9220.

DECEPTION BAY-BURPENGARY

Peace Presbyterian Church. 9.30am.
155-157 Maine Terrace, Deception Bay.

Rev. John Gilmour (07) 3203 2526.

GLADSTONE (St Andrew's)

Goondoon & Bramston Sts. 10.00am.

Benaraby: O'Connor Rd. 8.00am. **Calliope:** Dawson H'way (Stirrat St.) 2nd Sunday 9.30am; 4th Sunday 8.00am. Rev. D. Secomb (07) 4972 1058 (O); 4972 1057 (H).

GOLD COAST (I)

Arundel: 132 Allied Drive 9.00am & 10.45am. (07) 5571 5676. www.arundel.org.au

Robina: Cnr University & Cottesloe Drives 10.00am & 6.30pm.

Rev. Kevin Ridley (07) 5571 1416

GOLD COAST (II)

Mudgeeraba: Cnr Mudgeeraba Rd & Regency Pde. 9.00am & 6.30 pm.

Rev. Ray Evans (07) 5573 1458.

GOLD COAST (III)

Christ Church: Currumbin Primary School, Phillip Street, Currumbin – 9.30am.
Rev. Alan Radloff (07) 5530 5758.

HELENSVALE (Northlinks)

1 Shepparton Road – 9.30am.

Rev. John Evans (07) 5580 1367.

HERVEY BAY

5 Denman's Camp Road, Scarness. 9.30am & 7.00pm. Rev. John Roth (07) 4124 7018.

ITHACA

100 Enogerra Tce, Paddington.

Service: 9.30 am. 6.30pm.

Rev. Robert Herrgott (07) 3300 6158.

IPSWICH

Cnr Limestone & Gordon Sts. 9.30am, 10.00am & 6.30pm.

Forest Hill: Church St, 9.00am.

Office: (07) 3281 7201, Fax: (07) 3202 2571.

MACGREGOR

268 Padstow Rd. Eight Mile Plains 9.00am.

Pastor Ross Wilson (07) 3272 6265
MACKAY
 Cnr Harvey St. & Evans Ave. Nth Mackay.
 8.30am & 7pm. **Sarina:** Sarina Beach Rd.
 9.30am each Sunday; Ph. (07) 4957 2835.
MARANOVA
Roma: Queen Street 9.00am.
 Rev. Walter Jones (07) 4622 1158
MAROOCHYDORE
 45 Okinja Road Alexandra Headland 9.00am
 & 7.00pm. Rev. Peter Barber & Church
 Office (07) 5443 7073.
 Rev. Keith Mayers (07) 5445 9209.
MARYBOROUGH
 523 Alice Street. 9.00am (& 5.00pm first
 Sunday). Rev. David Newman (07) 4123
 1212
MONTO
 Bell St. 10.00am. **Abercorn** 11.45am. (1st
 Sunday). **Kalpowar:** 5.30pm.
 Pastor Elton Wiltshire (07) 4166 1441.
NORTH PINE
 57 Old Dayboro Rd. Petrie. 9.00am &
 6.30pm. Rev P. Cornford (07) 3285 2104.
REDCLIFFE PENINSULA
 WoodyPoint, Cnr. Ellen & Hawthorne Sts.
 9.30am. & 6.00pm. **Scarborough:** Jeays St.
 8.00am. Rev. Peter Whitney (07) 3284 2578.
ROBINA
 Cnr Cottesloe & University Drs.
 Rev. Kevin Ridley (07) 5571 1416.
ROCKHAMPTON (St Andrew's)
 51 Denham St. (cnr Alma Lne) 9.00am. &
 6.00pm. Rev C. Kennedy (07) 4922 8241.
ROCKHAMPTON (John Knox)
 Rundle St. 10.00 am. & 7.30 pm.
 Rev. Jon Chandler (07) 4922 1825 (O)
 (07) 4922 1540 (A/H).
ROCKHAMPTON (St Stephen's)
 Burnett St. Nth Rockhampton, 8.30am.
 Rev. Jon Chandler (07) 4922 1825 (O)
 (07) 4922 1540 (A/H).
Mt Morgan: St Enoch's, East St. 4.00pm.
 Rev. Jon Chandler (07) 4922 1825 (O)
 (07) 4922 1540 (A/H).
SANDGATE
 Loudon St. 9.00am & 6.00pm.
 Rev. D.K. Ashman (07) 3269 1231
SHAILER PARK/CORNUBIA
 99 Bromley St. **Cornubia.** 10.00am &
 6.00pm. Rev. Don Geddes (07) 5522 8982.
SPRINGSURE
 Charles St. 9.00am.
Emerald: Cnr Ruby & Egerton Sts.,
 11.00am.
 Rev. B. J. Harrison (07) 4984 1550.
THE GAP
 1195 Waterworks Rd, 9.00am.
 Rev. Chris Perona (07) 3300 2987
TOOWOOMBA NORTH (St David's)
 Mary St. Also at **Geham.**
TOOWOOMBA SOUTH (St John's)
 Cnr Cranley & Geddes Sts. 9.30am, 6pm.
 Rev Graeme McKay (07) 4635 4560
Murphy's Creek, Thor St 9:30am.
Westbrook, Westbrook Hall, Main St. 9am.
TOWNSVILLE (Willows)
 26 Carthew St. Kirwan 9.30am & 6.30pm
 Rev. David McDougall (07) 4723 1232
TOWNSVILLE (St Andrew's)
 113 Wills St. City. 9.00am & 6.30pm.
 Ass. Rev. Kwang-Ho Song (07) 4778 3823

WEST TOOWOOMBA
 Cnr Greenwattle & South Sts. 7.45am,
 9.30am & 5.45pm. Rev. R. Sondergeld
 (07) 4633 4000 (H), (07) 4633 4188 (O).
WINDSOR
 Maygar St. 8.30am. **Wilston:** Macgregor St.
 10.15am. **Newmarket:** Wilmington St.
 6.00pm. Rev. Stuart Atkinson (07) 3356 4124

western australia

BASSENDEN
 14-16 Broadway. 9.30am.
 Rev. Ross Fraser (08) 9248 3252.
BICTON
 Harris St. & View Tce. 9.30am & 7.00pm.
 Rev. Andrew Robinson (08) 9339 3542
FREMANTLE (Scots)
 90 South Tce. Worship & Sunday School
 10.00am. Rev. Stuart Bonnington
 (08) 9398 1304 Off. (08) 9336 6542
MANDURAH
 Cnr Sutton and Gibson St 10:00am
 Rev. Paul Bloomfield (08) 9319 0706.
WEST LEEDERVILLE (Henderson Memorial)
 Cnr Kimberly & Ruislip Sts. 10.30am.
 English & Japanese Service 1.00pm.
 Rev. Steve Young (08) 9448 8755.

south australia

ADELAIDE (St Andrew's)
 92-98 Archer St. North Adelaide. 10.30 am.
 Rev. Chris ten Broeke.
 Session Clerk Mr D. Niven (08) 8381 4615.
ELIZABETH
 106 Goodman Rd, Elizabeth South. 9.30am.
 Rev. KKevin Stow (08) 8284 1719. Session
 Clerk: Mr Bob Arstall (08) 8825 5226.
LARGS NORTH
 Brenda Terrace. 11.00am.
 Rev. Raymond Brewer (08) 8263 9692.
MILLICENT
 Cnr Fifth & Sixth Sts. 10.30 am.
 Rev. Alan Clarkson (08) 9739 6490.
 Also **Rendelsham**
MT BARKER
 Hutchison St. 10.30 am.
 Pastor Rupert Hanna (08) 8391 3151.
 Mod. Rev. S. Slucki (08) 8296 1581.
MT GAMBIER
 Allison St. 10.00 am. 5.30 pm. Also **Allendale,**
Nelson (Vic). Rev Gary Ware (08) 8723 9028.
NARACOORTE
 Church St. 10.00am.
 Rev. Andrew Gall (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. 9.30am. Rev. Alan Clarkson (08)
 9739 6490. Also **Dergholm, Kalangadoo**

PORT AUGUSTA
 Jervois St. 10.00 am.
 Barry Rossiter (08) 8642 2059.
SEACLIFF
 Kauri Pde. **Seacliff.** 9.30am.
 Rev. S. Slucki (08) 8296 1581.
WHYALLA
 28 Ramsay St. 10.00 am.
 S/Clerk H. Mashford (08) 8645 0818.
 I.Mod. Rev. Dr Reg Mathews (08) 8395 7841.

tasmania

CORNERSTONE (Hobart) 9.30am.
 "The Philip Smith Centre", 2 Edward St,
 The Glebe. Rev. David Jones (03) 6223 4701.
CROSSROADS 5.30pm.
 "The Philip Smith Centre", 2 Edward St, The
 Glebe. H.M. Michael Lynch 0414 669 554.
DEVONPORT (St Columba's)
 13 Edward St. 10.00am. **Don:** Waverley Rd.
 2.00pm (1st & 3rd Sundays).
 Rev. Steve Warwick (03) 6424 6066
HOBART (St John's)
 10.00am & 6.30pm. 188 Macquarie St.
 (03) 6223 7213.
 Rev. Robert White (03) 6229 7657
 Rev. Rod Waterhouse 0438 555 983.
LAUNCESTON (St Andrew's)
 Civic Square. 10.00 am & 5.00 pm.
 Church Office: (03) 6331 5412
 Rev. Peter Thorneycroft 0438 315 412
MONTROSE
 Cnr. Islington Rd. & Walker St. 10.00 am.
 Mod. Rev. Rod Waterhouse 0438 555 983.
RIVERSIDE
 Eden St. 10.45am. **Glengarry:** 9.15am.
 Frankford H'way. **Winkleigh:** 9.15am, 2nd
 Sunday. Rev. Norman Shellard (03) 6327 2967
ROKEBY
 Presby. Community Church, Tollard 9.30am
 & 6.00pm. Clerk David Turner (03) 6247 7971.
SCOTTSDALE
 George St. 11.00am. **Bridport:** Westwood St.
 9.00am. Pastor Greg Munro (03) 6352 2527.
STANLEY (St James)
 Fletcher St. 10.30am.
 I.M. Rev. Steve Warwick (03) 6424 6066.
ULVERSTONE (St Andrew's)
 65 Main Rd. 10.00am.
 Rev. Charlie Kennedy 0400 228 241.
WEST TAMAR (Auld Kirk)
 Sidmouth 10.00am and Mole Creek 2.00pm.
 Clerk: Steve Buckland (03) 6396 3213.

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 Congregations 100 or more \$65.00 plus GST*

DAY 5

The heart of the Gospel

THE PASSAGE

MATTHEW 11:25-30

THE POINT Here we have it all together: God is absolutely sovereign over all our affairs and so we can't come to Him unless He chooses us first; there is an open invitation for everyone and anyone who is burdened with the load of his/her sin to come and find rest; and, if we find the 'logic' of those two truths irreconcilable, there is the reminder that it is not about relying on our human cleverness and learning but about child-like trust in accepting both of them as true because Jesus said them both, and almost in the same breath! If only we could stop polarising ourselves and each other and start rejoicing in the knowledge that the door is always wide open, and being humble enough to admit that when we do opt to enter freely it

is only because God had chosen us unconditionally by His grace and irresistibly drawn us in!

THE PARTICULARS

- The theme of walking humbly and dependently before a mighty, sovereign God who is also a gracious, loving Father pervades the whole of Scripture (25-26; cf Isaiah 57:15, 66:2; Micah 6:8).
- Jesus the Master calls us to work "yoked" to Him; He thus guides us, and bears the burden for us when we are weary (28-30).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- How does this passage impact the way we present the Gospel to our friends and neighbours? ... and how we pray for them?

DAY 6

Jesus and His Day

THE PASSAGE

MATTHEW 12:1-8

THE POINT The Pharisees had become so bound by the technicalities of their rules that they failed to see the more important principles on which the rules were based. But a more serious problem was their failure to recognise who it was who was among them: the one who made the rules in the first place!

Even King David, in his extremity, appeared to get away with deception that led to the death of many innocent people (see 1 Samuel 21, 22), and he was only the shadow of the true Messiah King. Even the priests break the Sabbath rule in the performance of their temple duties, and all this is only the shadow of the true "Temple" who was there with them (cf John 2:19; Hebrews 8:1-6)! No, they had no right to dictate to the

"Lord of the Sabbath" concerning His day.

THE PARTICULARS

- The Pharisees' "hair-splitting" rules defining what constituted Sabbath "work" prohibited by the 4th Commandment missed its whole point (cf Mark 2:27, which Matthew omits to mention). God is more interested in mercy than in mandates, in relationships than in rules, as Jesus confirmed by quoting Hosea 6:6.
- Jesus totally invalidates the Pharisees' Sabbath legalism (7).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- How can we do justice to what God intends to convey in the 4th Commandment without making the mistake the Pharisees made?

DAY 7

Legalism and spiritual blindness

THE PASSAGE

MATTHEW 12:9-14

THE POINT We don't know how many healing miracles Jesus performed in the course of His earthly ministry (cf John 20:30; 21:25), and it could be that many occurred on the Sabbath.

However, this is the one that Matthew and Mark single out as the example of the Jewish leaders' opposition to such Sabbath "work". Did the Pharisees actually "set it up" so as to have a case against Jesus (cf 10)? Luke also mentions this one, and adds 2 other examples (13:11-13 and 14:1-4). John doesn't report any of these, but mentions a different two (5:1-9; 9:1-16). How sad it is that the spiritual leaders are so blind to what God is doing in Christ!

THE PARTICULARS

- Jesus Himself set us the example of meeting regularly with

the Lord's people for worship each Sabbath day (9; cf Luke 4:16).

- The gravity of spiritual blindness is seen in the Pharisees' glaring inconsistency between allowing their rigid Sabbath rules to be broken in the case of acts of mercy for animals, but not humans (11-12)! Their only aim was getting rid of Jesus – by any means.
- Jesus again declares His absolute authority to define what is right/wrong (12b); His word stands – and His miracles prove it.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Are there legalistic tendencies you need to address in your life?

DAY 8

The Quiet Achiever

THE PASSAGE

MATTHEW 12:15-21

THE POINT The Jews were expecting a Messiah who would make a strong and spectacular impact on the world for their benefit – a King who would lead them in an impressive and permanent military victory over all their enemies. Well aware of this, Jesus knew there would be two different reactions to His healing/teaching ministry as He revealed God's gracious character to them: some would try to force Him to be King, others would try to kill Him. So it was best to keep His true identity hidden for the moment!

THE PARTICULARS

- Like the other disciples, after the resurrection of Jesus and His commissioning them to "make disciples of all nations"

under His supreme, universal authority (28:18-20), Matthew knew that Jesus was in fact the promised "conquering-king" Messiah; but he also discovered other Scriptures that foretold another side of the story: this conquering King would also be a "servant"; He would establish world-wide justice, not by "bullying" people into submission, but by quietly, gently and humbly going about His redeeming work in the power of the Holy Spirit. An example of such Scriptures is Isaiah 42:1-4, one of the prophet's Servant Songs, the point of which was completely missed by the Jews.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Are you patiently trusting God to build His Church His way?

DAY 9

The Kingdom of God has come

THE PASSAGE

MATTHEW 12:22-29

THE POINT It is hard to imagine the Pharisees' thinking they might be able to convince anyone, especially themselves, of the credibility of their case as to the source of Jesus' power. But then it is hard to imagine their ability to fail to recognise Jesus' true identity on the strength of the overwhelming evidence of His works (cf John 14:11)! Spiritual blindness is a very debilitating chronic illness which can only be cured by the gracious intervention of God's Holy Spirit (cf John 9:39-41). Let all of us remind ourselves as we read of their response: "There, but for the grace of God, go I".

THE PARTICULARS

- The title "Son of David" is a specifically Messianic title (23).

- Jesus' power to give both sight and speech to this desperate man was truly amazing; it is no wonder the common people found it harder to believe that He was not the Promised One than that He was. What more would the Messiah do? (22-23; cf John 7:31).

- The Pharisees knew that Jesus' supernatural power exceeded anything they had ever witnessed; so the only option from their perspective was to attribute it to the Prince of demons (24)!
- Jesus' 3-pronged response is incontrovertible: (a) no one fights himself (25-26); (b) they can't have it both ways, so their own argument backfires against them (27); and (c) the healing proves that Jesus has already taken over Satan's "house" (28-29).

DAY 10

Spiritual stocktake

THE PASSAGE

MATTHEW 12:30-37

THE POINT We are either listening to, and responding to, the promptings of God's Spirit through His Word, or we are not; our daily words and lifestyle will indicate clearly which of these is the case.

THE PARTICULARS

- Contrary to what most people think, there is no "neutral" stance regarding Jesus; unless we are fully committed to who He is, and what it implies for daily life, we are really opposing Him (30).
- Part of the Holy Spirit's ministry is to apply Jesus' redemptive work on the cross to the heart of the believer. Anyone with a mind-set that can deny the clear evidence of the Spirit's power at work in Jesus' earthly ministry, even to the point of

ascribing this power to Satan, is therefore totally unable ever to receive the benefit of Christ's death, the forgiveness of sin (31-32).

- The "bad fruit" signified by such behaviour doesn't just happen; it is the natural and inevitable product of a sinful heart (33-35).
- Our words are the indicators of the state of our hearts before God. We will be called to account for the sort of heart we have, and this will be determined by our everyday speech (36-37)!

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Would someone who has actually committed the "unforgivable" sin be concerned about it? What Scriptures would you use to help someone who is worried about this matter? 1 John 1:8-10?

DAY 11

Signs-and-wonders thinking

THE PASSAGE

MATTHEW 12:38-42

THE POINT One of the ways Satan tempted Jesus when He began His public ministry was to challenge Him to perform a spectacular feat, a "miraculous sign", so that people would see and believe, and so follow Him (4:5-7). Jesus resisted this temptation knowing that the pathway the Father had chosen for Him involved rejection, suffering, defeat, and death on a cross. But Satan tried again. To meet the Pharisees' demand would have been easy, but useless; they already had more than enough such evidence to leave them without excuse, and Jesus had not come to tickle their physical senses or amuse their lustful eyes (cf Genesis 3:6; 1 John 2:16).

THE PARTICULARS

- Commandments 1 and 2 (Exodus 20:3-6) warn us against lusting after things other than the one, true God; this is why Jesus uses "adulterous" to describe His spectacle-obsessed generation (39).
- Jonah's "resurrection" was what brought repentant Nineveh to its knees before God. Soon Jesus' questioners would face much more convicting evidence – and not repent (39-41; cf Acts 17:31).
- More than the power of Jesus' "spectacular" miracles was His divine wisdom (cf 13:54) – far exceeding that of Solomon (42).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- In what ways are we all guilty of "signs and wonders" thinking?

DAY 12

Repentance-and-faith

THE PASSAGE

MATTHEW 12:43-45

THE POINT It is important to see "repentance-and-faith" as a single entity. Genuine repentance involves "cleaning out" all our old ways that have cluttered up our lives and kept a holy God outside the door – like making a whole set of honest New Year resolutions. Saving faith involves taking hold of the new life God offers us in Christ, and in Christ alone (cf Acts 4:12; John 14:6; Galatians 2:21). If I am genuinely repentant because I have come to loathe the sin, the self-centredness, that has dominated my life, it is an important, commendable first step; but if I fail to follow this up with faith in Christ as my Saviour I am courting disaster.

THE PARTICULARS

- True repentance is like a spiritual "exorcism", a throwing off of "everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles", but it needs to be followed by "[fixing] our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith" (cf Hebrews 12:1).
- Jews who persist in rejecting Christ as their Messiah make their situation much worse. Wearing sackcloth, without embracing Jesus as the Saviour He was sent into our world to be, creates a spiritual vacuum that the prince of this world will quickly fill.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- How does Jesus view the future of the Jewish nation in the light of their failure to recognise His incarnation and atoning death?

DAY 13

Priorities

THE PASSAGE

MATTHEW 12:46-50

THE POINT For most of us, for most of the time, there is not a lot of tension between fulfilling our family responsibilities and faithfully following Jesus. Nearly everything we do satisfies the demands of both at the same time. But Jesus is challenging us here to have firmly in place a default pecking order that automatically gives first place to the work of God's Kingdom whenever a conflict does arise. Good family relationships are part of God's design for us and are therefore a great source of blessing, a real gift from Him. But the most important "family" is the fellowship we share with our "brothers and sisters" in Christ as we serve Him through His Church.

Luke (14:26) records another time when Jesus expressed this principle even more strongly, and it is what is behind Paul's reasoning in 1 Corinthians 7:1, 7-8, 29-38).

THE PARTICULARS

- The fact that Jesus had siblings shows that, contrary to Roman Catholic teaching, Mary did not remain a virgin (46).
- Jesus obviously loved His family very much (cf Luke 2:51; John 19:26-27), but His first priority was always obedience to His heavenly Father (cf Luke 2:49). He calls us all to follow Him.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What is the default setting of your "family" relationships?

DAY 14

Negotiating life's minefield

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 22:1-9

THE POINT The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (4; cf 1:7; 9:10).

THE PARTICULARS

- If we reject the truth that the God of the Bible (and therefore the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ) is the Creator and sustainer of all things – as our own society has done, certainly in practice if not always in theory! – our whole way of living is thrown off balance. Money and material possessions then become our main security, and so the acquisition and retention of such things is paramount; greed even usurps the desire for a good reputation (1-2). We can see the extent of the problem in Paul's warnings to Timothy about choosing Church leaders

(1 Timothy 3:2-7).

- Satan is a master at setting minefields; unless we're on constant alert we will be maimed by his devices (3, 5; cf 1 Peter 5:8-9).
- The best time for parents to begin alerting their children to this is when they start to breathe – first just by prayer, and then by adding instruction suited to their stage of development (6).
- It is a fact of life that money is power (7). But God warns about the consequences of the abuse of this power (8), and encourages us concerning the blessings that flow from its proper use (9).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What strategies do you have for keeping your focus on God?

DAY 15

Sowing and reaping

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 22:10-16

THE POINT The further our society moves away from the teaching of God's Word – last Century passively, but now actively – the more mess we make of everything we do, and the worse the consequences will be; we will inevitably reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7).

THE PARTICULARS

- At the heart of strife among God's people is the influence of those who mock God by marginalising Him (10; cf Psalm 1:1-2).
- On the other hand, a sincere, gracious peacemaker is the "friend" of good government and the smooth running of society (11).
- God acts sovereignly in His world on behalf of truth (12);

the present global financial crisis bears witness to this (cf 16)!

- We must be careful not to rationalise by letting caution become an excuse for inactivity or laziness (13; cf Mt. 25:24-27).
- Wandering out of the Lord's way and incurring His rebuke will leave us wide open to other, especially sexual, temptations (14).
- Contrary to the "wisdom" of modern psychology: (a) original sin is a reality and our children aren't born innocent (15a); (b) God has decreed that corporal punishment, correctly and lovingly administered, is a helpful and effective tool for discipline (15b).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Do we compromise God's Word under the pressure of society?

DAY 16

Pay attention and listen!

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 22:17-28

THE POINT We are not good listeners today. Our increased knowledge of the world and ourselves, and our easy access to information about anything and everything, instils within us a dangerous sense of self-sufficiency. So Solomon's pleading here has even more relevance to us than it had for his own son.

And unless our own society, and perhaps even the Church generally, soon learns to be quiet and listen attentively to the wisdom of God in His Word, there will be quite serious consequences for us all.

THE PARTICULARS

- Solomon longs earnestly that his son (all the Hebrew verbs and pronouns indicate that he is only addressing one person)

will take seriously what he is saying to him. He wants him to absorb the wisdom he is imparting to the point where it becomes so much a part of him that it flows readily out from him to others. He is talking about great things that are true and reliable, and that will deepen his trust in the Lord as he heeds them (17-21).

- We are to be committed to the pursuit of mercy (22) and justice (23); we are to avoid relationships that will corrupt us (24-25); we are to deal honestly and not commit ourselves beyond our means (26-27); and we are to respect the property of others (28).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- How serious is your reading and meditating on God's Word?

DAY 17

Cut-throat temperance

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 22:29-23:8

THE POINT Western society is sagging under the weight of a lifestyle that shows little ability or even inclination to show restraint in the face of easy access to food, alcohol, sex, electronic gadgets, etc, etc, – in fact anything that promises to satisfy our basic desires. The Christmas holiday season will add to all this, and although we are already seeing the disastrous results of such behaviour (obesity, binge drinking, violence, unsatisfying relationships, the financial crisis), the quite worrying statistics don't seem to be doing anything to address this or to curb our excesses. Sadly, Solomon himself had to learn much from bitter experience.

THE PARTICULARS

- Hard work is rewarded (29), but it brings its own temptations that require drastic, “cut-throat” measures to deal with (1-3)! (Why is chocolate so enjoyable when its outcomes are so bad?)
- In 2008 the wisdom of verses 4-5 is as easy as ABC (or any of the other businesses that have had to be bailed out recently).
- Hospitality is encouraged in Scripture – but it must be genuine. If we only help others grudgingly, we haven't helped them at all (6-8); the same applies to giving to God (cf 2 Corinthians 9:6-7)!

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What area of your life needs some knife work? How is it going?

DAY 18

Taking God's Word seriously

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 23:9-16

THE POINT God's Word is truth (John 17:17); it must be our final authority.

THE PARTICULARS

- We try hard to share the Good News of Jesus with a society that desperately needs Him, but just isn't interested. We want to share God's wisdom (Jesus) with those the Bible refers to as scornful fools. Our patient God, in His mercy, would have us keep trying; but He is also righteous and just, and so gives us permission not to cast pearls before pigs (9; cf Matthew 7:6).
- God's justice also requires that we respect the rightful property inheritance of others, especially the more vulnerable (10-11). He encourages voluntary, generous sharing (cf Acts 2:44-

45; 4:32-37; 5:4), but He has never advocated enforced socialism!

- Our sinful hearts/minds have much to learn from the Bible as God's revealed truth – we should waste no opportunity (12).

Growing in godly wisdom, and applying it in godly living, will bring great joy to those who have led us to the Lord (15-16).

- God's Word does not just allow parents to administer corporal punishment, it commands them to; fairly, properly, and lovingly applied it will always be to the child's eternal advantage. God firmly opposes spoiling children by sparing the rod (13-14).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Are you letting God's Word or the world direct your thinking?

DAY 19

Truth, wisdom, discipline...

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 23:17-25

THE POINT Truth, wisdom, discipline and understanding would not be considered very valuable commodities on the stockmarket today – but God's sound advice to us is, “buy... and do not sell” (23)!

THE PARTICULARS

- Psalms 37 and 73 address the emotional problem we all seem to have when we see people who couldn't care less about God, or the welfare/needs of others, prospering in their selfish pursuits while we struggle with life's issues. It is hard not to be envious of them. The Scriptures encourage us to keep trusting the Lord who is in total control and who only desires our good (Romans 8:28), submitting willingly and gladly to His provi-

dence whatever form it may take; and to focus on the bigger picture that sees everything with the eternal perspective of heaven (17-18).

- The advertising industry today thrives on the built-in lusts of our flesh; we need to be doubly careful to avoid as much as we can its constant pressure. It is not rocket science to deduce the adverse effect it is having on the health of our society (19-21).
- Another reason for the collapse of our society is the demise of family values. Satan has been successfully attacking the family for decades – we urgently need a rearguard action (22, 24-25).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- How are you handling Satan's pressure in these three areas?

DAY 20

Give me your heart

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 23:26-35

THE POINT It is a sad reality that the time of the year when we especially remember God's “incredible gift” of His Son has become the excuse for godless partying where inappropriate sexual flirtation and the excessive consumption of alcohol are destroying homes and families in increasing measure. The statistics confirm what we all observe (and sometimes experience!). The secret of ensuring that we don't contribute to this statistic is to make a firm decision to give our hearts to the God who gave us His Son.

THE PARTICULARS

- How many people have come to ruin because they have failed to keep in check the desires – or, rather, lusts – of their heart!

The strong physical attraction we feel towards others is a natural, God-given gift; but if we give it an inch outside the limits He has set down for its enjoyment, it will take a mile. This is why the Bible constantly reminds us of the dangers, and the need to have our heart and eyes firmly devoted to and fixed on Him (26-28).

- Alcohol, like all the other things that can too easily lead to our downfall, starts off as something that we can readily justify as “good”, “beneficial”, “pleasurable”, “harmless”, etc. But the bitter experience of many is just what God warns us about (29-35).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- As God's child, have you given your Father your whole heart?



Across Australia

Spreading the news

Presbyterian Youth (NSW) general manager Murray Norman and training director Nathan Secker will be in Scotland this month at the invitation of evangelicals in the Church in Scotland. The pair has been invited to showcase the highly successful PY camping and training formula in a number of Scottish cities including Glasgow and Edinburgh.

“Basically we will talk to them about developing training and evangelism as well as discipleship, among young people,” Mr Norman said. “Currently the Church in Scotland doesn’t have anything like this. We are really excited to be able to share our story.”

Pastures new

The Rev. Phil Simmonds is resigning from his position as associate director of Australian Presbyterian World Mission to take effect at the end of February 2009. For some time now Phil and Glenda have felt the Lord’s call to return to pastoral ministry. They have discussed this with national director Bill Lutton and national convener David Pilgrim. Both Simmonds have given unstinting service for six years, with Phil first as administrator and then as associate director, and Glenda’s largely voluntary work in the office.

Quirk-y camp

Well known speaker Chris Quirk will head the panel at the Presbyterian Women’s Association’s 2009 camp in Canberra next March. Mrs Quirk, who has worshipped at Blacktown East Presbyterian Church (NSW) with husband Mick and three now adult children for the past 25 years, will be a major draw-card for the camp, which is open to members and non-members alike.

A statewide network of Christian women supporting church ministries, the PWA aims to provide a camping experience that is welcoming, encouraging, fun and educational – with the Bible at the centre. For more information, contact Camp Registrar Sylvia Johnson (02) 9528 7429.

Plea for India

Over recent years, there have been many brutal attacks on Christians. Queensland Presbyterian minister Rev. Richard Wilson has just been appointed pastoral co-ordinator full time with Indian Reformed Fellowship Australia, writes: “Could I ask you to pray... India is yet again at a crossroads that is probably as significant as the turbulent years of the blood-letting of Independence in 1947.”

December 2007 left a swathe of destruction and many thousands of Christians displaced. Hindu folk have been urged via mobile phone messages to burn the homes and churches of Christians. Numerous Christians have been burnt, beaten, raped and slashed with swords. The violence has spread and 50,000 Christians are estimated to have fled their homes ahead of violent religious cleansing, and are now displaced across Orissa, with many hiding in dense jungle. Hundreds of churches have been vandalised, looted and torched as have thousands of Christian homes.

Queensland role

The Rev. Lesleigh Hall resigned from parish ministry with the Gateway Presbyterian Church (Qld) in August, to take up the new position of PCQ administration manager. Lesleigh has been involved in the broader life of the church as deputy clerk for the last five years; a role that means that he is also a member of the Committees on Outreach and Nurture, Home Missions and the Finance and Administration Board. He also is a long-term member of the Commission of Assembly (14 years) and the Code and Legal Reference Committee (17 years).

The PCQ administration manager will provide additional administration and ministry support to Peter Barson, director of Home Ministry and Christian Education; general manager Keith Booker and Clerk of Assembly Ron Clark.

Dream time in West

Imagine a whole assembly meeting held without a negative vote or an amendment to a motion. A pure dream many will say. But it actually happened at the recent PCWA General Assembly. Mr W. A. (Bill) MacRae, an elder of The Scots’ Church, Fremantle, was elected as moderator of the 2008 Assembly.

Guests at the assembly included Victorian moderator Douglas Robertson and the Rev. Bill Lutton, national director of Mission Partners.

Jones nominated as M-G

The WA assembly nominated the Rev. David Norman Jones, minister of Cornerstone Presbyterian Church, Hobart, as Moderator-General of 2010 General Assembly of Australia. In other resolutions, it accepted with thanks the invitation of the Reformed Churches of South Africa to send a representative to its 150th Synod in Potchefstroom in January and to attend the International Reformed Conference that follows and appointed the moderator as its representative; encouraged the further development of the Presbyterian School of Theology; encouraged the further progress of interim planning for the Christian school proposal; and thanked the Lord for the admission of the Peel Christian Fellowship into the PCWA as the Peel Presbyterian Church (Rev. P. Bloomfield).

The assembly requested the Whitfords Session to develop a plan for the establishment of a new English-speaking congregation in conjunction with the Mission and Evangelism Committee. It congratulated the Presbyterian Church of Victoria as it celebrates its 150th anniversary in April 2009 and thanked the Victorian General Assembly for the way it has so generously assisted and helped in the development of the Presbyterian Church in Western Australia from the times of the pioneering ministry of the Rev. David Shearer (1879-1891) of Perth (later St Andrew’s) Presbyterian Church, through the organisation of the original Presbytery of Western Australia in 1892 right up until the present day.

Honouring Calvin

The WA Assembly decided to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the birth (10 July 1509) of the Reformer John Calvin by supporting a series of illustrated lectures on Calvin entitled “God’s Timid Frenchman” by Professor Phil Burcham at Scots Church at Bassendean in 2009 and encourage the members of the PCWA to read through Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* in one year using the free reading guide prepared by the Rev. J.R. Harris of the Presbyterian Church of America.



Around the World

Indian toll reaches 500

A representative of the local government in Orissa estimates that more than 500 people died as a consequence of the anti-Christian pogrom launched by Hindu fundamentalists. He said he personally authorised the cremation of at least 200 bodies.

The representative, on condition of anonymity, spoke to a team sent by the Communist Party of India (CPI-ML) on a fact finding visit to Kandhamal district. Officially, according to the state government, the death toll now stands at 31.

The CPI-ML team visited destroyed villages and refugee camps in October, almost two months after the start of the massacre. Their report was published in the November issue of the *Liberation* magazine. In addition to the real number of dead the report describes the gap between the government's reassuring statements about the refugee camps and the real situation.

Fundamentalist groups, who want the central government to pull back the police units it sent in, are organising themselves into armed groups, and threatening anyone who refuses to convert to Hinduism.

Asia News

Shelter for Christians

The government of the Indian state of Kerala has offered to shelter 56 refugees from Orissa, most of whom had fled the state following threats and beatings by Hindu mobs. Chief Minister V.S. Achuthanandan met a group of riot victims who told of the violence in Kandhamal district, long a trouble spot for violence against Christians.

The Chief Minister said the state government would accommodate them in various centres under the social welfare department. Achuthanandan said that the refugees were mentally and physically weak and that treatment, food and clothes would be taken care of by the state government.

The riot victims told the chief minister that they had been continuously targeted over the last year and were hiding in the woods to escape attacks by the religious fanatics.

At least 50,000 fled to forests and took shelter in relief camps following

violence by Hindu mobs in Orissa since August.

Christian Today

Kristallnacht 'Christian failure'

Churches in Germany have remembered the 70th anniversary of the systematic attack by the Nazis in 1938 on Jewish Germans, saying that many Christians failed then in their duty to speak out.

"In the November pogroms of 1938 defenceless people were humiliated, harassed and killed, houses of worship were desecrated and destroyed," Germany's Protestant and Roman Catholic leaders said in a joint statement to mark the 9 November anniversary.

"The terrible images of burning synagogues have been burned into our memory," said Bishop Wolfgang Huber, who heads the Evangelical Church in Germany, and Archbishop Robert Zollitsch, the chairman of the Catholic German Bishops' Conference.

"The November pogroms were also the prelude to the Holocaust, to a period of unimaginable destruction and annihilation."

In Berlin, Cardinal Georg Sterzinsky regretted the attitude of the Catholic Church to the persecution of Jews. The majority of Catholics remained silent, the archbishop stated. The leadership of the Protestant church in central Germany said in a pastoral letter read out in parishes that it acknowledged that Christians had been co-responsible for the anti-Semitic policies of National Socialism. Through their attitude to the policy of annihilation in the Nazi era, Christians had laid "heavy guilt" upon themselves.

ENI

Half women ministers: prediction

Half of all full-time clergy in the Church of England will be women within 10 years, according to a member of the church's general synod. The prognosis came from U.S.-born Christina Rees, a writer, broadcaster and public speaker and chairwoman of Watch (Women and the Church), started in 1996 as a forum for promoting women's ministry in the Church of England.

She said: "Half the clergy will be women by 2018 of that I'm certain, but right now we're in the ridiculous position of still deciding on what terms we're going to have women bishops. The organisation Forward in Faith [which opposes the ordination of women as bishops] is very

active and denies that the general synod has the right to approve the consecration of women as bishops. If we don't move soon it will be a scandal."

Rees was speaking following the publication of official church statistics for 2007 which show that women now represent nearly half of all Church of England ordinands.

But the shortfall is increasing as new ministers are not arriving in sufficient numbers to replace retiring ministers. England has 12,732 parishes, comprising 16 057 churches that are served by 7616 full time clergy.

Ecumenical News International

Defender of Faith

In a bid to reflect Britain's multicultural modern society, Prince Charles is proposing to adopt the title of "Defender of Faith" when he becomes king instead of the traditional "Defender of the Faith".

The Age reports the move requires only a small grammatical change, dropping a "the" from the monarch's present title of Defender of the Faith. But it is high on symbolism because it would mean that the king, as supreme governor of the Church of England, would not be known as Defender of the Faith for the first time since the 16th century.

The monarch has been known by the title Defender of the Faith since the title was bestowed on Henry VIII by the Pope in 1521 for his early support for Catholicism.

The Age

'Homophobic' GP banned

The head of the British Islamic Medical Association (IMA) has been suspended from medical practice after sending an "offensive and homophobic" letter. Dr Muhammad Siddiq has been suspended for 12 months over the letter he sent to the GPs' magazine *Pulse* last July.

He wrote gay people needed the "stick of law to put them on the right path", the General Medical Council was told.

When confronted by Walsall Primary Care Trust, he apologised at first but later wrongly blamed his son, the GMC heard. The GMC Fitness to Practice panel, was told Dr Siddiq also wrote in the letter that gay people were "the root cause of many sexually-transmitted diseases".

Andrew Popat, chairing the GMC hearing, called the GP's actions inappropriate and not in the best interests of his patients.

Eritrean Christians jailed

The Washington-DC based human rights group **International Christian Concern** says Eritrean officials imprisoned about 20 Christians belonging to the underground **Faith Missions Church** on 12 October in **Deki-Zeru**, a town 30km away from Asmara, the capital.

Just before Christmas last year 35 members of the church were jailed but released in February. The church has been carrying out evangelistic and development activities in Eritrea for over five decades, but was forced to go underground in 2002.

Officials of Eritrea have been persecuting members of both the registered and the unregistered churches. So far, more than 2000 Christians have been imprisoned in metal shipping containers, military barracks and prison cells.

Assist

Algerian Christians acquitted

A court in north-western Algeria has acquitted three Christians charged with blaspheming Islam and threatening a member of their congregation who reconverted to Islam. The acquittal was announced in a court at **Ain El-Turck**.

The defendants believe the judge's decision to acquit was due to the spurious evidence used against them. The acquittal also comes as part of a larger trend of the Algerian government bowing to negative international media attention and government condemnations of such cases, they said.

Defendant **Youssef Ourahmane** said that as a result, a recent government crackdown against evangelical Christians has eased off in recent months. "I think the pressure on them has been strong, such as condemnations from the U.S. and foreign ministries from France, Italy, Switzerland, Austria and Spain. This pressure from outside has embarrassed the Algerian government very much."

Compass Direct

Fight for kidnapped sister

Lawyers for two underage Pakistani Christian sisters who were kidnapped plan to renew a custody fight for the older girl, a 13-year-old allegedly coerced into marrying her captor, based on new statements from her 10-year-old sister that they were raped and forced to convert to Islam.

The plans come after the court last

month allowed 13-year-old **Saba Masih** to decide whether to return to her parents or remain with her husband. **Amjad Ali** married Saba Masih shortly after the girls were kidnapped on 26 June. In the 9 September ruling, the court ordered the return of her 10-year-old sister, **Aneela Masih**, to her parents. Since her release Aneela Masih has told her uncle, **Khalid Raheel**, previously unknown details of the sisters' capture, according to the **Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement**.

Aneela Masih told Raheel that while at a fruit stand she and her sister were taken away by taxi and raped. After being tied up and locked in a room, she told him, the two were forced to make professions of Islamic faith. She described how the pistol-toting captors threatened the girls with death and told them their parents would also be killed if the sisters did not do everything asked of them.

Compass Direct

Vatican clocks on

For the first time since **Pope John XXIII**, Vatican workers from office staff to cardinals have been issued swipe cards for clocking on and off at work. The **Vatican City State** has issued new cards to all employees from the lowest office

staff to the grandest heads of departments, including priests or bishops.

The swipe cards have reportedly been received without complaint by the lay staff but some older clerics have been heard grumbling that Pope John XXII abolished timekeeping in the early 1960s.

The clerics complain that clocking in and out is a headache when they have to leave the office on twice-weekly pastoral duty. The timekeeping scheme is part of a new meritocracy drive at the Vatican, which is set to introduce performance related pay next year.

Ansa

Swinging vicar banned

A motorbike-riding female vicar who went on swingers' holidays and turned up drunk to services has been banned from the clergy for 12 years. Mum **Teresa Davies**, 37, even boasted of her sordid exploits to two colleagues.

Britain's *The Sun* newspaper reports the team vicar at **Daventry Ministry**, Northamptonshire, said she and her hubby had an "open relationship" and left their children at home to go on swingers' trips. Davies denied the jaunts until confronted with entries on a swingers' website.

The Church of England disciplinary

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tribunal, at the Anglican Communion Office in London, also heard she was drunk while trying to hold services three times in 2006. Parishioners claimed she was unsteady on her feet.

Ecumenical News International

Israel 'top priority'

Christian leaders in Syria say the new President Barack Obama will have to focus on renewing peace efforts in the Middle East, with the top priority being the settlement of the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian standoff.

"That is the heart of the problem," said Antoine Audo, the Chaldean Catholic bishop of Aleppo, Syria. He suggested that settling the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was an even higher regional priority than the Iraqi war, because of the way it has polarised and distorted Middle East politics and geo-relations.

However, Bishop Audo said the US-led Iraq war and the humanitarian crisis it has spawned, including the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees into Syria, must also be dealt with. He hoped that the United States "leaves the war quickly, peacefully and with honour".

Ekklesia



On the Agenda

Christian right regroup

By Michelle A Vu

For Christian right leaders, Senator Barack Obama's election as US President last month was a huge setback that left some in the midst of a grieving process. While things may not be going well for the movement, some of its leaders vowed to not only survive under an Obama administration but to thrive.

"Nothing unites Christian conservatives more than a common enemy, and here the enemy is a radical liberal agenda," said Rebecca Hagelin of the conservative think tank Heritage Foundation on Christian Broadcasting Network after the election.

Hagelin emphasised that president-elect Obama himself is not the issue, but rather a "nation and a Christian movement" that she believes has fallen asleep and left the door open to a radical liberal agenda.

"There are a lot of dangerous social agenda items and I think you will see the church rise up to fight these like never before," she contended.

Issues at stake, she noted, include a long list of measures preventing abortion – such as parental notification, informed consent and bans on partial birth abortions – and free speech if the Fairness Doctrine is passed into law.

Similarly, Wendy Wright of Concerned Women for America predicts that Obama's radical leftist policies could have a reverse effect on many Americans. "If [president-elect Obama] implements the policies that he says that he believes," Wright said, "many people in America ... may be shocked enough that we'll see the pendulum swing the other way."

While David Kuo, CEO of the social networking site Culture11.com for the cultural conservatives, also foresees great opportunity for conservatives, he thinks that the movement will ultimately evolve to be more progressive in the next few years. He said the movement was undergoing a generational shift and that it was likely to stay socially conservative but be more progressive in terms of the agendas it advocates for.

Some evangelical leaders have already begun to pursue agendas beyond the movement's big three issues of abortion, marriage and justices.

Well-known conservative evangelicals such as the Rev. Joel Hunter, a megachurch pastor in Florida, and the Rev Richard Cizik of the National Association of Evangelicals, have embraced the global warming issue and

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are forging a new relationship with the Obama administration and Democrats.

While this emerging breed of centrist evangelicals is finding itself in a comfortable position with the new administration, the Christian right movement still needs to decide how it will approach a more liberal post-Bush White House.

Religious violence rejected

By Jenna Lyle

World leaders have concluded a major UN conference on interfaith relations by rejecting acts of terrorism and violence against civilians committed in the name of religion.

In the declaration read by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon last month, "participating states affirmed their rejection of the use of religion to justify the killing of innocent people and actions of terrorism, violence and coercion, which directly contradict the commitment of all religions to peace, justice and equality."

The two-day conference in New York brought together 14 heads of state as part of an ongoing international level dialogue between the world's major faiths initiated by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia to overcome religious divisions and foster peaceful relations between the major faiths.

Speaking through a translator, the Saudi king called for a rejection of terrorism. "Terrorism and criminality are the enemies of each and every religion and civilisation," he said. "They wouldn't have appeared had it not been for the upset of the principles of tolerance."

Saudi Foreign Minister Saud Al-Faisal indicated to reporters, however, that there would be no immediate change in Saudi Arabia, a country which follows a strict form of Islam known as Wahhabism that forbids public adherence to any other religion.

Ban stressed the need for people of faith to find common ground.

"King Abdullah's initiative has come at a time when the need for dialogue among religions, cultures and civilisations has never been greater," he said. "The challenge now is to go beyond the powerful, positive words we have heard."

The conference performed a rare feat in bringing the Saudi king and Israeli President Shimon Peres together in the same room, although the two never spoke directly with one another.

Oldest Hebrew inscription

By Michael Ireland

An Israeli archaeologist digging at a hilltop south of Jerusalem believes a ceramic shard found in the ruins of an ancient town bears the oldest Hebrew inscription ever discovered, a find that could provide an important glimpse into the culture and language of the Holy Land at the time of the Bible.

The five lines of faded characters written 3000 years ago, and the ruins of the fortified settlement where they were found, are indications that a powerful Israelite kingdom existed at the time of the Old Testament's King David, says Yossi Garfinkel, the Hebrew University archaeologist in charge of the new dig at Hirbet Qeiyafa.

But Fox news reports that other scholars are hesitant to embrace Garfinkel's interpretation of the finds. The discoveries are already being wielded in a vigorous and ongoing argument over whether the Bible's account of events and geography is meant to be taken literally.

Fox News says the site overlooks the Elah Valley, said to be the scene of the slingshot showdown between David and the Philistine giant Goliath, and lies near the ruins of Goliath's hometown in the Philistine metropolis of Gath.

The shard has five lines of characters known as proto-Canaanite, a precursor of the Hebrew alphabet. Carbon-14 analysis of burnt olive pits found in the same layer of the site dated them to between 1,000

and 975 BC, the time of David.

The script, which Garfinkel suggests might be part of a letter, predates the next significant Hebrew inscription by between 100 and 200 years. History's best-known Hebrew texts, the Dead Sea scrolls, were penned on parchment beginning 850 years later.

Hebrew University archaeologist Amihai Mazar said the inscription was "very important," as it is the longest proto-Canaanite text ever found. But he suggested that calling the text Hebrew might be going too far.

"It's proto-Canaanite," he said. "The differentiation between the scripts, and between the languages themselves in that period, remains unclear."

Fox News is also reporting that some scholars and archeologists argue that the Bible's account of David's time inflates his importance and that of his kingdom, and is essentially myth, perhaps rooted in a shred of fact.

"But if Garfinkel's claim is borne out," the report said, "it would bolster the case for the Bible's accuracy by indicating the Israelites could record events as they happened, transmitting the history that was later written down in the Old Testament several hundred years later.

"It also would mean that the settlement — a fortified town with a 30-foot-wide (10-meter-wide) monumental gate, a central fortress and a wall running 770 yards (700 meters) in circumference — was probably inhabited by Israelites."

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Freedoms under threat

Right talk can be code for removing them. Gird up your loins.

Religious freedom is not something ordinarily on the radar of Australian Christians. Yes, we know and remain concerned about the persecution of Christians in some overseas countries, such as China, the Middle East and more recently India. But surely our freedom to express religious convictions in Australia, whether in worship, conversation, and even evangelism remains untrammelled, doesn't it?

Well, without in any way wishing to be paranoid, this freedom to practise and propagate our Christian faith is currently under threat and the question is: will we roll over or will we defend our religious freedom in the court of public opinion?

As someone who has engaged in debate in public forums on specific moral issues, including euthanasia, abortion, stem cell research and human cloning, I can say that there are considerable numbers of people who think Christians have no right to express their convictions in the public domain.

Just this year, when debating the abortion issue on Online Opinion, using material from my "Abortive Morality" article in the August edition of *Australian Presbyterian*, one respondent attacked me saying: "David, no one is asking you to have an abortion. Kindly mind your own damned business and get your nose out of other peoples. ... David seems determined to mind everyone's business as well as his own, and further, to enforce his morals on everyone else. You may well deny it, David, but you are an unfeeling, bigoted, bully who has decided what is right for the world, and everyone else can go to buggery."

This is typical of the intolerance of many secular humanists, especially those asserting atheism. Nowadays, without question, the bigot is found to be the self-described atheist. If you are unsure of what our fellow Australian secular humanists think about the right of Christians to speak out publicly from a Christian perspective, then read *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins or *God is not Great* by Christopher Hitchens. Both these books have been bestsellers in Australia.

In 2002, the Victorian Government's Racial and Religious Tolerance Act



David Palmer

became law and within a short period of time a number of complaints were made against Christians, the most scandalous and widely reported being the complaint against Catch the Fire Ministries and two Pastors brought by the Victorian Muslim community.

This is an opportunity that Christians, including Presbyterians, must take up. There will be no shortage of submissions from other religions and community groups.

two pastors in terms of personal reputation, time, money and emotional stress, the complaint was dismissed on appeal in the Victorian Supreme Court.

Earlier, in 1998, the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission issued a report, *Article 18: Freedom of Religion and Belief* which had as its main recommendation the establishment of a federal Religious Freedom Act – code for religious vilification law. Article 18 refers to the particular article in the Covenant dealing with the individual's right to freedom of religion.

A further report, *Religion, Cultural Diversity and Safeguarding Australia*, commissioned by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, appeared in 2004 as part of the Federal Government's, "Living in Harmony" initiative and was authored by Professors Gary Bouma, Des Cahill

and Dr Hass Dellal from the Australian Multicultural Foundation.

This report was predicated on the assumption that "the construction of social harmony" in accord with the "social policy of multiculturalism espoused by both sides of the political fence" requires "religious moderation" and "interfaith activity".

As asserted by the authors of the report, among the threats to the stability of Australia's social fabric were such matters as "a continued emphasis on one religion being superior or the correct one as holders of the total truth", "the refusal to co-operate or interact with other faith communities", "the anti-Islamic views of some extremist Christians", and so on.

The report, arguably prejudicial to traditional Christianity, included a considerable number of recommendations, mostly falling into the category of "big brother is watching you, so don't step out of line!". An example of the big brother mentality is the recommendation for the monitoring of the websites of Australia's ethnic and faith communities for material or links "damaging to Australia's social cohesion".

The previous Federal Government quietly shelved both reports. However, with a new Federal Government these issues are to be revisited with the recently announced review by the Australian Human Rights Commission of religious freedom in Australia to be known as the Freedom of Religion and Belief in the 21st Century Project (FRB Project). Submissions to the inquiry must be made no later than 31 January 2009.

The commission has commissioned the Australian Multicultural Foundation in association with RMIT University and Monash University, to prepare a report on the FRB Project. More particularly, Messrs Bouma, Cahill and Dellal have been appointed the report's three researchers.

The discussion paper for the FRB Project, available at <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/frb/>, sets out specific issues for those making a submission to consider:

- An evaluation of the relevance and impact of the *Article 18: Freedom of Religion and Belief* report;

- An assessment of the adequacy of the Australian Constitution's section 116 to protect freedom of religion, an assessment which will bring the question of a charter of rights into play;
- An investigation of interactions between religion and the delivery of services such as welfare and the funding of faith based schools;
- Consideration of the impacts upon freedom of religion following 11 September 2001 which is about the perceived marginalisation, vilification and misunderstanding of Muslims;
- An examination of how freedom of religion and cultural aspirations might conflict with issues such as gender equality and sexual diversity. The question "is there a role for religious voices alongside others in the policy debates of the nation?" clearly sets the scene for both secularists to press the exclusion of religious views from the public domain and for the religious to assert their right to be heard;
- Consideration of whether media practices and emerging technologies affect religious freedom.

The Presbyterian Church of Australia will make its own submission to the inquiry. However, the commission says that it is concerned that ordinary Australians should also "tell their stories" by way of individual submissions.

This is an opportunity that Christians, including Presbyterians, must take up. There will be no shortage of submissions from other religious and community groups. Submissions don't have to be particularly sophisticated or long. Even a couple of short paragraphs are sufficient for people to share about what their faith means to them in practice.

The timeframe for the FRB Project envisages a final report to Government sometime in 2010, which is when the real debate will begin.

Has the church anything to fear from the Freedom of Religion and Belief in the 21st Century Project?

It is not hard to foresee the final report recommending the enactment of federal religious vilification legislation together with additional "multi-faith reforms" of various kinds, all seen as ways to promote social harmony in an increasingly religiously diverse nation.

There are other agendas, however.

At the launch of the FRB Project, Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs Laurie Ferguson – presumably representing the Government's views on

the matter – said that he saw the FRB Project as an important part of a national action plan that has been drawn up for the benefit of the Muslim community. He said: "Although its focus will be on the Islamic Faith it will include many aspects building on the 1998 HEREOC report, on the Freedom of Religion and Belief" [sic].

While it is highly desirable for government to work for social inclusion, with such action deserving the support of Australian Christians, Muslim exceptionalism must be resisted. Muslims need to accept the dominant culture which brings them many benefits and then, if they so desire, work from within for change just as Christians, secularists and others must do.



We have a robust story, a cogent case to present, and nothing to be ashamed of.

As well, there will be considerable pressure from secularists seeking to limit the influence of religion in general and Christianity in particular, including what they see as the privileging of religion through prayers in Parliament, the funding of faith-based schools, the use of religious groups to deliver welfare services, exception clauses favourable to religion in Equal Opportunity Acts, and so on.

Again, in comments reported by ABC News, Mr Tom Calma, the Race Relations Commissioner, noted that there is "evidence of a growing fundamentalist religious lobby, in areas such as same-sex relationships, stem-cell research and abortion". Now just who are all these "fundamentalists" concerned about "same-sex relationships, stem-cell research and abortion"?

However, it would be wrong for Christians to respond to the FRB Project from a negative standpoint, as undoubtedly some will feel inclined to do.

Whether we like it or not, the commission, in launching the FRB Project, is only doing its job, having been mandated to make recommendations to government in relation to international human rights agreements.

The FRB Project offers the church the opportunity to press for genuine freedom of religion in legislation. There are aspects of the UN human rights agreements that are favourable to religion, including Christianity, that have not yet been enacted in Australian legislation.

With the recent experience of the Victorian vilification legislation, we are in a strong position to argue for the amelioration of any such legislation, certainly the deletion of the civil provisions that bedevil the Victorian legislation. And why should we not argue that if there is to be such legislation, the exception clauses that allow the entertainment industry, academics and media to vilify religion be withdrawn? Why should certain segments of the community, the cultural elites, have these special privileges?

Your prayers and interest are requested as we work over the summer in preparing our submission in cooperation with other Christians. There will be subsequent opportunity to participate in forums with the researchers and the commission, as well as making clear our views on the FRB Project to government.

Now is the time, as my colleague from Moore College, Andrew Cameron says, for the Christian community "to carefully marshal our forces, sharpen our arguments, and make such a strong case that people really do see that our concern is for the good order of society and not merely for special Christian interests".

We have a robust story, a cogent case to present, and nothing to be ashamed of. But we also have resolute opponents, both ideologically and religiously driven, with whom we must engage. In order to prevail, we will need to employ the four voices of the church that I have previously written about, in this instance placing emphasis on the academic/professional voice and the persuasive voice, hopefully with the support of the artistic voice as well. Brothers and sisters, if you have talents in these areas, please get involved!

David Palmer is convener of the Victorian Church and Nation Committee. 

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Radical rights

The Christian's right is not to retaliate but humiliation.

The Australian Human Rights Commission has a striking vision: "Human rights: everyone, everywhere, every day". It is inspiring in its simplicity and audacious in its complexity; it speaks volumes about our society's underlying perspective on human rights. We are a rights-obsessed country, and so it is no surprise that the government is in serious discussions to create a bill of rights for all Australians.

Arguably the right that we as Australians are most obsessed with is our right to retaliation, our right to respond when we are being treated unfairly, to remedy our situation when injustice has been done to us: "an eye for an eye".

Retaliation is enshrined in Article 8 of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law." It's a good thing isn't it? It shows that we are a somebody; we're not a nobody. If we are violated we deserve to have that remedied. We are taught to demand our rights in our schools, in our universities, in our workplaces – "he crossed me and he got what was coming to him!" We sometimes call it "tough justice", but it's essentially "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth", nothing more than perfectly logical, rational and just retaliation.

Jesus has a different perspective on our right to retaliation. In Matthew 5:38-42 He teaches that members of the Kingdom of Heaven are not to have anything to do with retaliation. In what is probably one of the most debated and misunderstood statements of His entire preaching career He says, "do not resist an evil person". Do you feel uncomfortable when you hear this? Do not resist an evil person! Doesn't Jesus know that the only thing evil needs to succeed, is for good people to do nothing? Yet Jesus is outrageously frank – members of the Kingdom of Heaven are called not to retaliate when evil people persecute them.

Jesus is calling members of His kingdom to be completely counter-cultural in the way we respond to persecution, and He illustrates what this looks like by pre-



Jeremy Smith

senting three scenarios in which evil people do evil things.

The first scenario is striking to say the least. An evil person has come up to you and struck you on the right cheek. Jesus identifies the right cheek for a reason. In a right-handed culture, if someone is to slap you on the right cheek, he is not going to use his left hand, he's going to use the back of his right hand. He is giv-

Nothing is more cutting and devastating than a direct, humiliating, public insult that robs us of our dignity and leaves us feeling worthless. Jesus says: "Turn the other cheek."



ing you a back-handed slap which is a stinging insult and something of great shame. People who received back-handed slaps in Jesus' day were children and slaves. It was a public slur against your honour, a statement of inferiority.

Now we can pretend that sticks and stones can break our bones but words will never hurt us, but we know that nothing is more cutting and devastating than a direct, humiliating, public insult that robs us of our dignity and leaves us feeling worthless. What then does Jesus command us to do in this situation? He says: "Turn the other cheek", forsake our right to retaliation and invite further insult.

This is something we all need to know, we will all be publicly insulted for being members of Jesus' kingdom. This will happen in people talking about us behind our backs, calling us "self-righteous"

because we won't join in with certain behaviours, calling us "judgmental" because we believe certain things are absolute truths. If you are a member of the kingdom of heaven, you will receive back handed slaps, it's a promise, and when you do be aware that you are being called to turn the other cheek.

This is also something that we need to understand in order to be faithful evangelicals, submitting to and being guided by what the Scriptures say. A large portion of the church in the Western world has already jumped ship on faithfully preaching the Bible and has joined with the surrounding secular culture to strike us on our right cheek, calling us "fundamentalist", "intolerant", "sexist" and "backward". What is our response? It's to turn the other cheek. We are not to stop nor to cower, nor to give in, but to continue being faithful members of Jesus' kingdom, and in that way invite more insult. We rest in the knowledge that it is the Lord's right to make the judgment; we do not make it ourselves.

The second scenario sees a person suing us and taking from us our tunic. In Jesus' day someone would have three or four tunics but only one cloak. The tunic was a lighter garment that you would wear next to your skin, kind of like a first century version of underwear. The cloak however was your outer garment, and it was heavier, like a blanket. At night you would use your cloak to keep warm, and then when day dawned you would put it on and go on your way. But you only had one cloak.

Under Jewish law if you owed someone money and you couldn't pay, they could sue you for your tunic to make up the difference. Your cloak, however, was yours, always. Legally, no one could take it from you (Ex. 22:26, Deut. 24:13).

What Jesus is saying is that we need not only to forsake our right to retaliation, but we are not to claim even our basic legal rights. Our churches are full of people who stand on their rights and clutch on to their privileges. But Jesus says here that members of the kingdom of Heaven are to think not of their rights but of how they can forsake their rights to serve oth-

ers. He is calling us to be completely counter-cultural, not having a bill of rights but a bill of responsibilities, taking our needs off our agenda and replacing them with the needs of others. We need to be other person-centred and self-sacrificial to the point where it will hurt us in a similar way it would have hurt the early Christians to give away their only means of staying warm at night; we need to learn to give up not only our tunic, but our cloak as well.

In the third scenario a Roman soldier commandeers us to carry his luggage for a mile. The Jews were never wealthy enough to pay the amount in tax that the Roman senate would have liked. To make up the difference a Roman soldier could force a Jewish peasant to carry his pack for a mile, but only a mile. To go a second mile meant aiding and assisting the foreign occupying force. Realistically it meant becoming a traitor in the eyes of those around you.

But what does this mean for us? It means that we aid and assist those who persecute and oppress us. I think this is where the sting of Jesus' teaching in non-retaliation is strongest. This teaches us that here and now in the kingdom of this world there is no victory for members of Jesus' kingdom. We are called to forsake our rights, forsake our honour, possessions, and time, to take up our cross and suffer in this lifetime. This makes me feel really uncomfortable; it goes against all our society's thinking on our rights. But the command is to trust Jesus and to reject the constant pressures to clutch our rights; let us instead fight evil with good.

The final thing Jesus says is: "Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you." It is a statement that is the natural outworking in our lives if we are to live counter-culturally: turning the other cheek, giving our cloaks and going the extra mile. Although Jesus is using the

illustration of giving money to a beggar, we need to understand that this is not a hard and fast rule, money can often be a harmful thing to give to people who are in need. Having said that we should also not immediately jump to the conclusion that all homeless beggars will use the money for booze and drugs; that is simply a false assumption.

It calls for wisdom to assess the situation each time. But we have to give something! Whether that something is money, food, time or a listening ear, we need to be aware that the only thing a member of Jesus' kingdom cannot do, is to do nothing. When we walk by a homeless person and we don't do anything, we have failed to follow Jesus' command. We have let our rights and our desires direct us. If we live the life of the kingdom of heaven then we should desire to give to all who ask of us.

This raises the obvious question: "how?" What Jesus is teaching here is so hard, so radically opposite to everything we have been taught and believe. If you're asking that question, then you are asking the right question. There are three things that will help us answer this question:

First, every time you find yourself in a position where you have been persecuted or injustice has been done to you, exercise your wisdom. Jesus is giving illustrations here to teach His principle of counter-cultural non-retaliation. Don't take them as legalistic requirements. When Peter and John are told by the religious authorities to stop preaching the gospel (Acts 4:1-22), Peter and John could not obey these authorities for in doing so they would be

disobeying God. They had to obey God before men. They kept their resolve, but they did not retaliate. We too need to exercise wisdom in living this out in our lives.

Second, Christ has not left us alone to do this by ourselves. The only way to truly live this out is by humbly relying on God and resting in His promises for us. Yes Jesus tells us to give our tunic and our cloak, but He also says in Matthew 6 that the Lord who clothes the flowers of the field knows that we will need a cloak. Yes Jesus says give to all who ask you, but He also says that when we ask we shall receive, when we seek we shall find and when we knock the door will be open unto us. In God's promises, we find His gracious provision that allows us to live this life of the Kingdom.

Third, Jesus Himself walked this road; He turned the other cheek when the soldiers and the Jews mocked him; He gave up his rights and He gave up his tunic and his cloak to watch the soldiers casting lots for them; He aided his murderers, He healed the soldier's ear in the garden and prayed "Father forgive them for they know not what they doing"; and to the thief being crucified with Him, He gave him the right to walk in Paradise that day. We who follow the Lord Jesus follow in His footsteps; we follow Him when He tells us in this life to take up our cross. Jesus did not retaliate while being murdered on the cross; we don't retaliate when we are persecuted. And when He is finally revealed in all His glory to the entire world, so that all will see that the cross was not defeat but was victory, so shall we who are united with Him be revealed in glory to the entire world. Then we will claim the victory of the Kingdom. "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."

Jeremy Smith works with refugees in Sydney and worships at Ashfield Presbyterian Church.

ap

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DECEMBER 2008

- 21 Sydney Prsty 21 chgs 1 hm stn 3540 c&a 1135 yf 4 rtd min 15 uj 1 def chpln, 2 schl chplns, 2 dcns, 3 theol tchr, 8 cndts, Ngaire Moore clerk.
- 22 Wollongbar charge NSW. 105 c&a, 35 yf 4e. Steve Teale.
- 23 Recovery from Nov. storm damage. Qld and elsewhere.
- 24 Owen Seto Exit appt asstg D. Law, Burwood Chinese charge Sydney 385 c&a, 120 yf, 6 e.
- 25 Titus 2:11-14 Praise God!
- 26 NSW PY summer camp, Stanwell Tops. Jeff Read speaker.
- 27 Safety for all going on holiday.
- 28 A godly vision for your parish for 2009.
- 29 Andrew Pearce Ext appt Shailer Park hm stn, Bne. 17 c&a, 14 yf, 1 e.
- 30 Cranbourne hm stn Melb., 2 cgns 70 c&a, 5 yf, 1 e. Alex van der End. And Samoan cgn 35 c&a, 30yf, 5e. Kainano Opetai.
- 31 Prsty of WA. 7 chgs, 3 hm stns, 3 PIM ptrls, 675 c&a, 205 yf, 3 rtd min, 2 uj, 2 missries. Stuart Bonnington clerk.

JANUARY 2009

- 1 Damian Carson Ext appt asstg R. Mathews Norwood Para Hills chg SA 100 c&a, 40 yf, 6 e.
- 2 Family missions around the nation.
- 3 Skipton hm stn V. 2 cgns. 30 c&a, 10 yf, 4 e. Hui Lim.
- 4 Vacant Westlakes hm stn, Warnervale NSW 80 c&a, 30 yf, 3 e.
- 5 Hervey Bay chg Q - 140 c&a, 15 yf, 9 e. John Roth.
- 6 Grenfell chg NSW 2 cgns, 70 c&a, 35 yf, 9 e. Bern Merchant.
- 7 Protection from bushfires.
- 8 Stephen Gould exit appt asstg W. Morrow in Penrith chg NSW 190 c&a, 45 yf, 8 e.
- 9 Templestow hm stn Melb. 50 c&a, 30

- yf, 1 e. Adrian Kebbe.
- 10 Central Qld Prsty 6 chgs, 2 hm stns, 16 cgns, 720 c&a, 215 yf, 1 rtd min, 1 uj. David Secomb clerk.
- 11 Mid West patrol WA with Mt Magnet. Albert & Penny Pierce, C&D Griffiths.
- 12 Vacant Abbotsford chg Syd. 65 c&a, 12 yf, 6 e.
- 13 Korean Blawyn chg Mlbn 100 c&a, 30 yf, 4 e. Suk-Won Kim.
- 14 Glen Innes chg hm stn 25 c&a, 25 yf, 4 e. Lance Jackson.
- 15 NQ PIM Patrol - David Rodgers.
- 16 Russell Smidt Exit appt asstg M. Oates in Epping chg Syd. 530 c&a, 90 yf, 29 e.
- 17 John & Lynette Ellis, V. APWM wkrs, South Asia, theological teaching.
- 18 Rokeby spec. (hm) chg, Tas. 47 c&a, 23 yf, 4e. Neil McKinlay.
- 19 Ashburton chg V. 65 c&a, 10 yf, 3 e. Peter Orchard.
- 20 The new US administration.
- 21 Nthn Rivers Prsty NSW 15 chgs, 24 cgns, 2300 c&a, 710 yf, 1 rtd min. Hamish Burke clerk.
- 22 Vacant Bingara hm stn NSW. 2 cgns 45 c&a, 5 yf, 2 e.
- 23 Andrew Vines exit appt as Convener, Presbyterian Youth, Vic.
- 24 Ian Stenhouse exit appt Riverwood chg, Syd. 65 c&a, 40 yf, 5 e.
- 25 The Redlands chg Capalaba Bne - 2 cgns, 75 c&a, 15 yf, 3 e. Gordon Jackson, Linda Fooks.
- 26 Ross Pethybridge exit appt Dalby chg Q. 2 cgns, 210 c&a, 325 yf, 17e.
- 27 Peter Dimond exit appt Bell hm stn Q 3 cgns, 60 c&a, 30 yf, 7 e.
- 28 Steve Pym Exit appt asstg P. Logan North Sydney charge 2 cgns, 210 c&a, 40 yf, 16e.
- 29 Ministry in your local public schools this year.
- 30 Vacant Bega hm stn NSW. 45 c&a, 8 yf, 7 e.
- 31 Melb Nth Prsty 8 chgs, 2 hm stns, 11

cgns, 705 c&a, 330 yf, 1 min uj, 1 def & 1 schl chplns, 1 theol tchr. Tony Parle clerk.

FEBRUARY 2009

- 1 Mod. Gen. R. Benn ministering at 50th aniversary, Blaxland, NSW.
- 2 Phillipa Crossan APWM/ECM worker, Sydney.
- 3 GAA Standing committees this week.
- 4 Eltham chg Melb. 90 c&a, 40 yf, 4 e. Don Elliott.
- 5 Logan hm stn Slacks Creek, Bne. 57 c&a, 22 yf, 4 e. Kawa Allisaia, John Ng.
- 6 Vacant Bowral hm stn, NSW. 120 c&a, 45 yf, 6 e.
- 7 Noorat charge W Vic. 62 c&a, 17 yf, 5 e. Miles Fagan.
- 8 Mod. Gen. R. Benn ministering at Cairns, Q.
- 9 West Footscray hm stn, Melbn, 55 c&a, 11 yf, 5 e. Richard Jaganathan.
- 10 Preparation for Annual Congregational meetings.
- 11 Wagga W. Prsty NSW 10 chgs, 1 hm st, 27 cgns, 1620 c&a, 360 yf, 1 rtd min, 2 uj, 1 def chpln. Yvonne Forsyth clerk.
- 12 Cronulla chg Syd. 110 c&a, 40 yf, 5 e. Russell Stark.
- 13 SW Qld patrol - Andrew & Kerri Purcell.
- 14 Brett Graham exit appt asstg D Tsai Sydney Chinese ch., Surry Hills, 650 c&a, 150 yf, 18 e.
- 15 Mod. Gen. R. Benn ministering at 50th anniversary, Belconnen ACT.
- 16 Steven Mannyx exit appt asstg Paul Cooper Becroft charge Syd. 295 c&a, 80 yf, 14 e.
- 17 Vacant St Georges charge Geelong 84 c&a, 5 yf, 7 e.
- 18 Hamilton chg NSW 195 c&a, 15 yf, 16 e. John Webster.
- 19 Redcliff Peninsula chg Bne. 2 cgns, 115 c&a, 50 yf, 7 e. Peter Whitney.
- 20 Mod. Gen. R. Benn speaking on Islam at Eltham family camp, Philip Is, V.

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Books

Apostles of Fear
A church cult exposed

Morag Zwartz
Melbourne: Parnesis Publishing, 2008.
Reviewed by Madeleine L. Turner

Truth has always been under attack, but perhaps the most sinister assault of truth comes from within the church itself. Morag Zwartz's very well-written book is a candid exposure of some of the inner workings of a church cult and the devastation wrought upon the lives of those held in its clutches.

The author charts the beginnings of the Immanuel church cult, renamed Melbourne Christian Fellowship and closely linked with Brisbane Christian Fellowship (BCF), among other churches that are part of the Immanuel group of churches. Tracing the emergence of key leaders of Immanuel/BCF and ideological shifts that occurred within the movement, this book uncovers the power play, manipulation, blackmail and deception of a church built on exclusivity, mysticism, confusion and hyper-legalism.

Yet this is more than just a history (and by no means intended to be a definitive one), but a rigorously researched critical analysis and evaluation of Immanuel/BCF's dogma and the impact such teaching had and still has on people's lives. The personal accounts are extensive, highlighting the scandal, abuse, emotional, psychological, spiritual, sexual and financial exploitation of members, and the orchestration of family and relational break-ups. But these accounts are just the tip of the iceberg, representing the count-

less individuals who have been sucked in and spat out mercilessly, left to pick up the pieces of their fragmented lives.

However, the book – a great read – isn't just an investigative indictment of the Immanuel/BCF cult. At the heart of this work is a strong desire to uphold the truth of the gospel and honour God. The author challenges us to understand the importance of sound doctrine, highlighting the dangers of teaching that promotes "faddish" practices, and leans heavily on experience and anti-intellectual spiritual superiority at the expense of Scripture. Error abounds when we sideline Christ and are willing to interpret Scripture to suit our agenda. When we see it happen we need to speak up and act. Truth is at stake and we need to guard it.

Madeleine Turner tutors in history at the Conservatorium of Music in Sydney.

The Preaching of Jonathan Edwards

John Carrick
Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2008.
Reviewed by Gregory Goswell

This is a book that all lovers of Jonathan Edwards (1703-58) will savour and enjoy. The opening chapter outlines Edwards' legacy that includes his work as a preacher as well as that of a philosopher-theologian of the highest merit. His reputation suffered an eclipse in the 19th century but revived mid-20th century, in part due to the campaign of Perry Miller, resulting in the progressive publication of the Yale Edition of his Works, as well as due to the enthusiasm of Martyn Lloyd-Jones.

However, Edwards' preaching has not received the same recognition and attention as have his philosophical and theological endeavours. John Carrick, who lectures in homiletics at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, South Carolina, has written this exhaustive analysis of the sermons of Edwards to fill this notable gap.

His preaching was Christ-centred and Christ-exalting, and in his sermons there are many passages of great beauty and power when he is describing the person and work of Christ. Edwards' sermons have a clear central thrust, for a key idea is drawn from the text, and this idea is questioned and logically analysed, with logic that is always the servant of the Scriptural truth.

His preaching was plain and

unadorned, yet at the same time it was full of oratorical power, though whatever usefulness and spiritual blessing attended his preaching was ascribed by him to the Third Person of the Trinity. Recent research has shown that the usual picture of Edwards just reading his sermon manuscript in a monotone does not do justice to his attempts at an extemporaneous element, as well as the personal intensity and fervour in his preaching that greatly moved his hearers. The careful analysis provided by Carrick makes this a virtual handbook on preaching. If you are preacher, you will benefit from this splendid resource.

Gregory Goswell lectures at the Presbyterian Theological College, Melbourne.

Through the Year with William Still

ed. David C. Searle
Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2006.
Reviewed by Peter Barnes

This is a series of Bible comments, drawn from every book of the Bible and designed for daily Bible reading. The Bible reading plans of Robert Murray M'Cheyne or Don Carson might stretch the capabilities of the busy and less well-equipped Christian, but William Still's book of daily Bible readings will prove a helpful, if ultimately less than satisfactory, substitute.

Still is able to capture the essence of a text and apply it directly to his readers. Occasionally, there is more leap frog than exegesis, but overall this is a work which will prove an ideal companion, especially for the reader who is just starting to find his or her way through the Bible.

Peter Barnes is books editor of AP.

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