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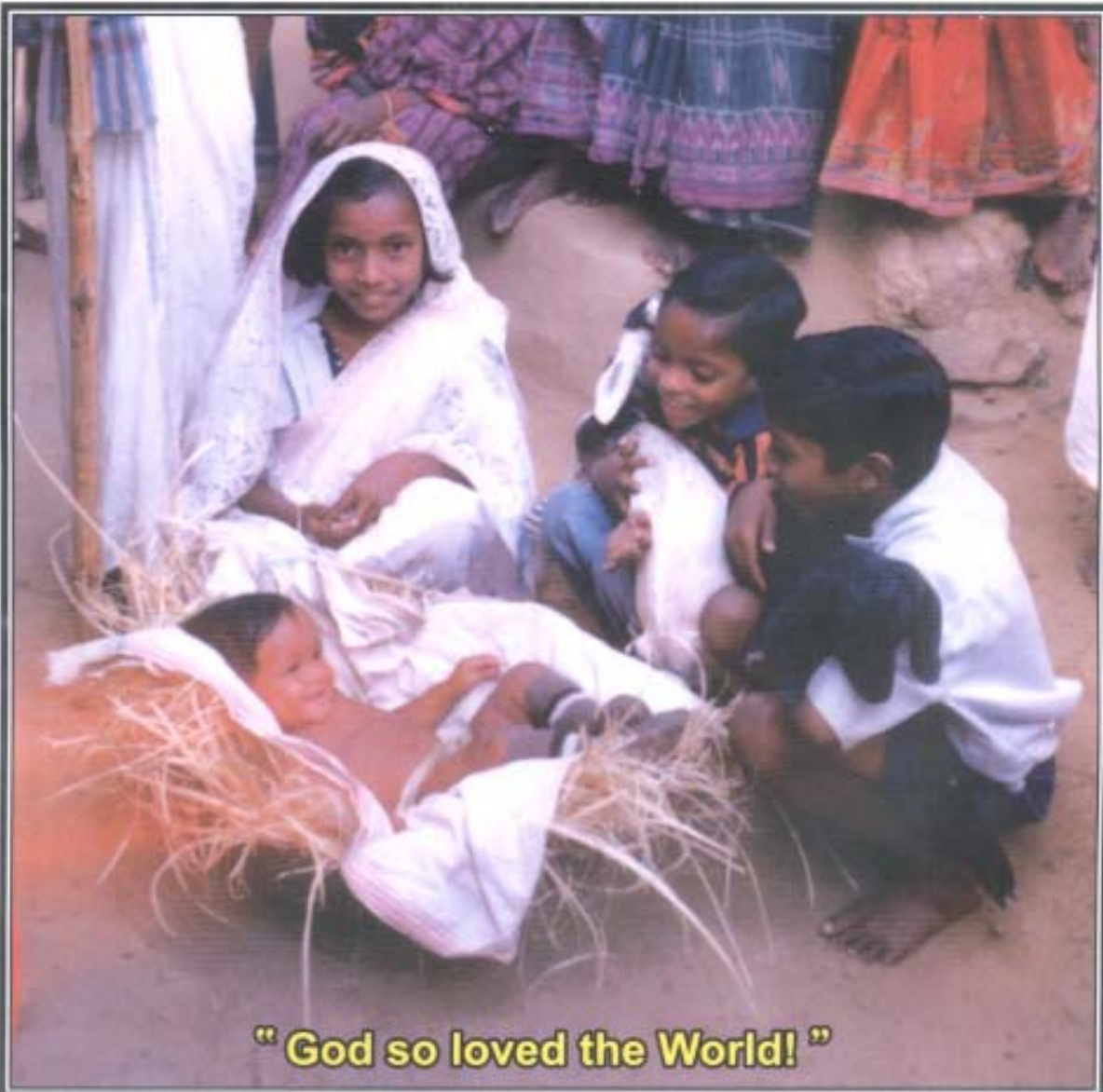


# Blessing

DECEMBER 2007  
Volume 36 Issue 12

Single Copy Rs. 5/-

Annual Subscription Rs. 50/-



**"God so loved the World!"**

# Yo-yo Christmas!

*Dr. Mrs. Lilian Stanley*

**I**t happened some twenty years ago on a sweltering summer's day. A friend had given us his bird cage which he wanted to dispose off. We put the tottering cage up in our terrace without cleaning up the old grains that came with it. One day when we woke up in the morning and went up to the terrace a surprise awaited us. A baby parrot had somehow managed to get in to pick the grains but was trapped. He found no way to come out of the tightly locked cage and kept wailing. Then, as we watched, the parents came flying from nowhere and sat on the parapet wall near the cage and kept responding, not minding our presence. May be a cacophony of "Mummeeee, Dadeeee" and "Babeeee." Back and forth, back and forth went the lamentations. Then the father flew away and brought fruits and started feeding through the mesh but the baby would not eat. Hours flew by. We watched, very moved, now and then from morning till night and went off to sleep. First thing next morning we leapt up the steps to the terrace. There we stood transfixed, our faces etched with shock and disbelief. All was quiet. The mother parrot was inside the locked cage and the baby was perched calm and quiet, the father feeding them both. A knife twisted within me. As my eyes filled and the scene blurred, my perception snapped into brilliant focus. That's Christmas!

How sad! But that's our jubilation. God the Son came to be with us, to sacrifice His life, seeing our plight. Christmas is a time of mirth remembering the goodness of God, even though there is so much pain and sorrow surrounding it. When the expectation of merry Christmas starts tickling us even in the beginning of December, it is always see-see-see and never saw-saw-saw. By that I mean, our feelings of Christmas are invariably up and never drooping. That's how it should be. But in reality, when we go into the details of the Christmas story, it was one of see-saw, up and down, a yo-yo!

The Christmas story starts with a celebration—the engagement function of Mary and Joseph. There was excitement and thrill in the star-struck couple as they exchanged gifts. The relatives gorged themselves on the feast. It was a short-lived joy. The appearance of an angel to Mary was a magic moment. The happiness evanesced as Mary's virgin pregnancy came to light. Joseph was aghast at the turn of events. The one verse in the Bible is not sufficient to reveal the emotional torture the young man underwent, unless you let your imagination run free. A bomb had gone off in his chest.

His tormented soul found relief at the ethereal intervention and the 'saw' started to 'see.' It was joy mixed with sadness. The joy was that God had chosen him as the earthly father of the Messiah. The sadness was that he had to be a married bachelor. Probably friends and relatives blamed him for Mary's condition and his approval to marry a pregnant girl only confirmed their suspicion. Was it see or saw? Then the wedding ceremony. On the one side it was a merry occasion for the godly people who believed Mary's story about the angel. For the other section of the crowd it was a ridiculous fiction supplying material for gossip. People were startlingly outspoken beyond earshot of the couple. Maybe because of the situation it was a low profile wedding. Mary and Joseph were able to take the joy with the trouble, the trouble with the joy.

When parents look forward to their first baby they swell with pride and bubble with excitement preparing everything for the new arrival. But the decree of Caesar Augustus shattered their hopes of a cozy little home for their bundle of joy. A long journey was followed by an anticlimax birth in a cowshed in their own native village. Think of it! Not a soul to take them in their own place! The most wonderful gift on earth was wrapped up in a dirty manger. The joy of seeing their baby's face

mingled with the excitement of being the first persons to witness the face of the Son of God carried them up to the stars. The Shepherd's arrival and their narration confirming the birth of the Messiah made their hearts tremble with glee.

If the Christmas story is followed up, the see-saw continues to swing. The proud parents take Him to the temple on the eighth day to experience exciting events yet return home worrying about the, "sword that will pierce." Simeon's words would have hit them like bullets. Think of big shots visiting you in a Mercedes Benz with gold jewellery and other costly items to present them to you on a platter. It was the same thrilling experience for Jesus' parents when the Magi came looking for Him.

Again the joy was short lived. At the warning of the angel the father and mother had to take up their flight to Egypt in the safety of darkness. Later came the glad news of the death of Herod. Jesus grew up in a carpenter's family living austere to make ends meet, with at least six siblings. Later, He Himself worked as a carpenter and along the way taught himself to read and write. Till His death (saw) and resurrection (see) His life was up and down, joy and sorrow.

The climax in the life of Christ is the glorious resurrection and ascension. In His sojourn, sunshine and shadow were intertwined. There were heroes like John the Baptist and villains like Judas Iscariot. He had friends and foes. There were breath-taking miracles and times when he could not perform many miracles. He was garlanded and goaded, surrounded by praises and poisons. His own brothers did not believe Him though He had a band of faithful followers. He enjoyed exotic feasts but at other times went hungry looking for figs. God spoke to Him from above but forsook Him when he hung on the cross. At times His words were well received and at times there was stiff opposition. There were times when He embraced life with zest and there were times when He cried like a baby.

Is the Christmas story repeating in our lives? Childhood has sweet and sour memories. We grow up bludgeoned with love and affection but at times suffer a hole in our hearts we think will never be healed. Then we strike gold only to be followed by mind-numbing despair, Tragedies and triumphs alternate. Our tinsel world is dappled with black paint. When we feel life can get no darker, the sun bursts over the horizon. Success and failure stalk behind us.

Most of us marry in a daze of euphoria imagining life to be an unbroken crescendo of exhilaration. Far from it. After the exciting engagement comes the degrading dowry talk or a similar bickery. Then the marriage galore like that of Diana and Charles with all gilt and glamour. As soon as the honeymoon is over the couple who climbed the hill of exceeding joy come tumbling down like Jack and Jill. This climbing up and tumbling down continues throughout life. In moments of joy they keep wishing it will last forever but secretly fearing the inevitable crashdown. Some days are rainbows and some days rotten. Health and sickness, bonus and debt, praises and slights, congratulations and condemnations, new friends and broken relationships attention and indifference take their turns to push us down and pull us up. Life is like a game of snakes and ladders. Sometimes we get bitten by a snake and at other times get a ladder to climb. Whatever may happen we must keep moving towards the goal.

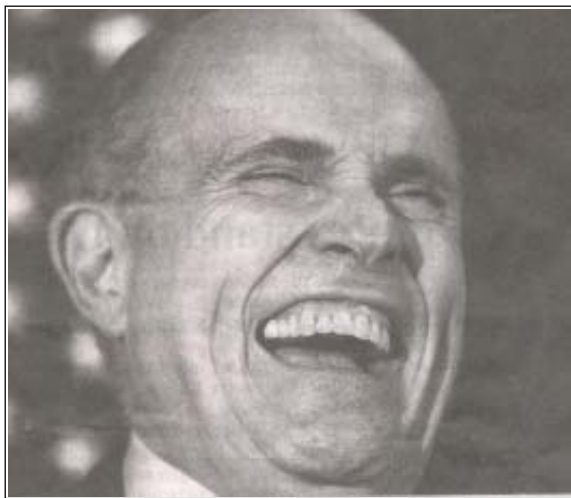
Talk to anyone and he'll tell you how his life is following the harrowing ECG pattern. If you pull back the facade in every admired personality you will find moments of deep depression. It is scary when you go down the lowest low and you quickly conclude "It is finished." The human mind is specialist in focussing on the downs, ignoring the ups. The problems of children, parents, neighbours, in-laws, friends, spouse, finance, sickness all toss us about like tornadoes. But God blesses us with good times too. That's why we sing, "Count your blessings." "He who can't

endure the bad, will not live to see the good” says an Yiddish proverb. Jesus set the joy of eternity before Him so every trial would seem like a mosquito bite. That’s what Christmas is all about.

Take a foolscap paper, paint a small dot in the centre and show it to a friend. Ask her what she sees. She will most certainly reply, “A dot.” No one will ever mention the large white space around the dot. That’s we. Christmas is the time to see the large white space in our lives and close our eyes to the dot.

I read in a *Guideposts* magazine about Gail Gorumba who had lost her husband, her father and son, all in one year. Yet she was the one comforting her family. Giuliani asked her how she could get through so much tragedy with such remarkable poise. “Whenever terrible things happen” she said, “I focus on the good things life gives you. So now, I’m thinking about my daughter’s wedding.”

Rudy Giuliani, New York’s Mayor during 11 September 2001, says, “The idea that in the worst times of life, you have to take full advantage of the beautiful things that come along—I think that’s what living is all about.” “Life isn’t always ideal or romantic. It’s a series of triumphs and disappointments and that’s okay,” says Adrian Grenier, star of the HBO series



*Republican presidential aspirant Rudy Giuliani at a recent campaign function in Washington.*

“Eutourage” whose father dropped out of his life when he was just five.

May be your life is full of ugly black dots. But when you finally connect the dots a beautiful picture will emerge. That’s a fun-game God plays with us. If you get to see the big picture it’s a Christmas. Worrying is like a rocking chair. It gives you something to do but takes you nowhere. So stop running about like a headless chicken and enjoy the blessings of life.

I watched my 2 year old granddaughter as she licked her ice-cream dripping all over her with a gleeful grin. Then she got down from her perch, tripped, fell down and screamed. I thought within myself, “That’s life—ice-creams and screams.” That’s Christmas too! If you focus on the good things of life your insides will light up like a Christmas tree and your life itself will become another Christmas! **f**

*A timely book...*



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# Born to go!

S. Isaiah Selvakumar, Thiruvallur (Tamilnadu)

**I**NDEED they are very strange people, born to go! Some depart from their homes leaving their loving parents and caring brothers and sisters, and some their beloved children, and some their high-yielding lands too (Mk 10:29). Some have resigned their highly remunerative jobs and left their lucrative professions. Some have hardened their hearts against the cry of their kith and kin—"Be the breadwinner of our family." Why?—For the sake of the Lord Jesus and for the sake of the propagation of His gospel. They are none other than our missionaries. They sacrificially spend themselves to build the Kingdom of God. They are in the forefront of the battle in the mission field.

A certain missionary came too late for the funeral of his brother. He was already broken-hearted. To add fuel to the already burning wound he was ridiculed by the villagers. "Oh! they are missionaries. They would not care to associate with any affairs of the family!" What a piercing comment!

From dawn till dusk and sometimes beyond midnight, Gospel work continues unceasingly. Thought of beach or park for a spell of rest never appears in the minds of missionaries! Looking at the same faces time and again should not bore them! Sometimes some novel experiences do happen in their lives too!—snakes sneak into their beds and panthers prowl on their paths. One learns the real meaning of the word 'horror' by receiving severe beating from cohabiting villagers for no reason, by being burnt alive along with the vehicle if they sleep outside their cottage inside the vehicle. Be careless for a second, you may be put on some altar as a human sacrifice.

The Great Commission of the Lord—Go everywhere, preach the gospel to every race and tribe, make him or her the disciple of Christ—is accomplished by the committed few (Mt 28:19). Be it a thick forest or a steep mountain, the luxurious vehicle the missionary uses is a pair of legs. Following are some shocks they go through—

## *Relationship Shocks*

When Jesus was hanging on the cross, He entrusted His helpless mother into the hands of His disciple John (Jn 19:26,27). These missionaries can't do even this. Patronizing their parents becomes a monetary burden.

Missionaries are stationed so far away that neither kith and kin nor their friends can visit them as and when they like. They can seldom participate in the jubilation or the mourning of their dear ones. This results in strained relationships. Communication gap gives a false idea that the missionaries are well off and they would not care for the less privileged relatives. This results in quarrel and the missionaries are so neglected that they find themselves in total darkness about any household events, both good and bad. What an affliction!

Children have to be left in the hostels. Separation from them is a crude shock to the missionaries which they have to endure all through their lives compulsorily. Their children are born to go too! They cannot sit by their children to teach, cajole or encourage them when they have to write their examinations. They can't even sit beside their beds when they are sick. Even birthdays are celebrated at two different places without seeing each other. Happy occasions are debarred privileges for the missionaries. Holidays bring children to their empty homes, because parents work on their holidays too. More number of days of the vacation is spent on trains and buses than with their parents. Soon after the graduation breadwinning jobs snatch their children not only from their sight but also from their bosom. Girl children have to leave their parents. Separation becomes imminent.

Sometimes missionaries are forced to leave their spouses amongst adversaries in the base camp to visit believers in the far off villages. Most of the missionaries do not have any handy facility to inform their spouses their whereabouts,

good or bad incidents in the field or their inability to come back home that night. The spouses are left in the dark and spend the nights in fear. Amidst all these the ministry should not be stopped or slowed down. They go ahead fullsteam in spite of devouring fears or unforeseen calamities.

### ***Displacement Shocks***

Nature designed each body in tune with the place of birth and climate. The mission fields have different climatic conditions. It takes quite sometime—months or years—for the body to adjust to its surroundings. In the meantime missionaries fall sick and sometimes die due to adverse geographical positions and climatic conditions.

Samuel Morris, a stalwart of faith, died at the age of 21. One of the children of missionary William Carey did not cross his childhood when he died. The beloved wife of Missionary David Livingstone hastened to Heaven before the work assigned was accomplished.

Freezing cold in Lucknow, unbearably scorching sun in Rajasthan, floods on one side and drought and famine on the other side of Orissa, make the missionaries either frozen or bone dry or famished. One should strain worms and other insects before boiling the water. Otherwise you get only soups, not drinking water! This happens right inside Tamilnadu on the Neimalai Hills. Polluted air, food and food habits that are unacceptable to the tongue and tummy, un-understandable languages and dialects, no electricity—this is the lifestyle of the missionaries!

When the Lord calls them, the missionaries leave their spacious houses, speedy vehicles, bulky purses, lucrative jobs, etc., deny themselves the ordinary comforts of life, kill their selfishness, carry their crosses and follow Jesus (Mt 16:24). With the meager pay they adopt a frugal lifestyle for themselves and their children.

Forgetting their vehicle rides, now the missionary's feet become insensitive to the stones or thorns as they daily walk down the ravines, up the mountains and through the clefts and what not. In some places they are not permitted to take drinking water from the common

community pipes. What an ugly restriction in free India! Under cover of darkness, the missionaries take water—one jug for drinking purpose, two jugs for bathing, and three jugs for washing their linen. What a disgrace! These adverse circumstances do not hinder our missionaries from active work—preaching the Gospel. They are really praiseworthy, aren't they?

### ***Culture Shocks***

In India culture captures a more important place than religion; culture and religion are inseparably entwined. The society, being more powerful, dictates terms to its constituents. This social setup prevents people from accepting Jesus as Saviour.

Even though some have “understood” that Jesus is their only Saviour, corporate Hindu family system never permits them to “accept” Jesus as their Saviour. People are afraid that once they accept Jesus as their Saviour they might be excommunicated from their families and dislocated from their hometowns.

Many wrong notions about Christianity are afloat in the air—Jesus is a ‘foreign God;’ missionaries are paid by foreign forces to convert people; people will be forced to denounce their culture; the identity of the convert will be changed; it would be difficult to get a life-partner from their own tribe, race or religion; people cannot receive concessions from the government, etc, are some of the wrong ideas afloat.

In some parts of this Country people worship the cow as god. These people will not accept the God of beef-eaters! To extricate people from their culture is always a mighty challenge. Our missionaries are a shade better and cleverer than anyone in making these people accept Christ as their Saviour in accordance with the Word of God, not diluting its contents, but skillfully interweaving it with their culture.

### ***Ministry Shocks***

Afflictions are a part and parcel of God's ministry. During the time of earthly ministry of Jesus many villages did not accept Him. In some

places though they beat the missionaries, they open their hearts to Jesus. In some places the people are very pleasant to move with but would not accept the gospel however much you try and would not let the missionaries stay in their villages to pray or worship the Lord.

The accent of missionaries may differ from the locals. Further, pronunciation differs from place to place. This makes the locals label the missionaries as 'foreigners.' So mass conversions as seen in Acts 2:41 are not experienced. Sometimes it takes five long years to win one soul for the Lord. In some districts one cannot find a single Christian. Transforming a desert into a blooming garden is not an easy job. Isn't it?

The main target of the missionaries is the Headman of the village. If the head of a village is brought to the Lord it is easy to bring the rest into His fold. So more time is allotted to fast and pray for the salvation of the Headman. It consumes the time of the missionaries. Hence the work is slowed down. In some places it takes much time to understand the people. Fear of organizational pressure to show fruits begins to torment the missionaries. Missionaries from different backgrounds will apply different tactics and follow different approaches. When the news of big harvest in other fields reaches them, the missionaries long for such results in their territory and fall prey to depression, fatigue and frustration.

Keeping Paul and Barnabas as their role model who tirelessly worked in spite of being stoned these missionaries who have held the ploughshare do not turn back in spite of trials, tribulations, physical beatings, threatening etc., (Acts 14:19,20; Lk 9:62). More stress and strain, and fatigue and frustration! Some of them are broken down. Our hearts should break into a thousand pieces to know that a mental health centre has been built in Lucknow exclusively for the missionaries. Isn't it our duty to pray for them?

### **Failure Shocks**

It is very difficult to make the illiterate understand the gospel. Remember, even some of the disciples of Jesus Christ, who lived and ministered with Him, deserted Him (Jn 6:66).

The villagers, who believe the saving power of Jesus Christ without seeing Him, backslide easily. It is no wonder! These people have a wrong notion that once you accept Christ, you should not fall sick or incur any loss.

Some governmental and social organizations force reconversion. They, with the help of friends and relatives even rowdies, threaten the believers. The believers who are less in number cannot stand against such a giant force.

In spite of trials and tribulations, losses, heartache and depression, there are converts who stand firm just like the house that was built on the rock (Lk 6:48). Their faith is strong and steadfast. They pray, struggle in prayer and receive many miracles. They believe and depend on God completely. Even illiterates memorize Bible verses and repeat them. To worship the Lord they walk many miles tirelessly because Churches are far. The life of the missionaries and the local believers transform many villagers.

There are lots to write. Space constriction restricts me! Separated from their children, ignoring the sighs of their parents, deserted by the relatives these missionaries go on and on. They go where we dare not go! They go down the well holding onto our prayers and support with great confidence. Their only hope is that we will uphold them. The moment we fail in our duty these missionaries will fall into the well and may not come up alive.

Should not we bend our knees and pray with broken and contrite hearts so that opposition in the mission fields disappear and the harvest is bountiful?

*(The author has a penchant for missionary work. Often he stays with missionaries in the field to encourage them. He has produced a poignant VCD in Tamil depicting the triumphs and tears of missionary life in Chitling Valley. It will stir up the zeal lying dormant in you. Cost Rs.50/-. Write to Mr. Isaiah Selvakumar, 78/7 Thatco Nagar, Thirupatchur Post, Thiruvallur 631203. Mobile: 94444-96492).*



## *The Faith Chapter continues in Christmas...*

*E.L. Ephraim*

Hebrews eleventh chapter may be continued in the Christmas history as follows:

**1. By faith, Zacharias** was righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless. Though he did not have an heir for his family, he counted it a privilege to execute the priest's office in God's temple. He got his prayer answered through the promising Word of an angel whom he met face to face. This glorious vision excited him much and the divine revelation brought blessing in his personal life. Yet he stayed back in the temple until the days of his ministration were accomplished. When the relatives wanted to name the child according to the usual custom, he clung to the godly manner and praised God by naming his son as John. By faith he was filled with the Holy Ghost and prophesied that the Lord had remembered His holy covenant; By faith he declared that his son would be called the prophet of the Highest and shall go before the Lord to prepare His ways (Lk 1:6,8, 11,13,23,59,63,64,67,70-76).

**2. By faith Elizabeth**, though well-stricken in years, conceived and gave birth to John. She testified to the glory of God which removed her reproach. She by faith identified Mary as the Lord's mother and testified that blessed was she who believed. She, like her dear husband, obeyed God's revelation and named her son as John (Lk 1:8,24,41,43,45,58,60).

**3. By faith Joseph**, being a just man, not willing to put Mary to shame, decided to put her away secretly. By faith he believed the dream and accepted her as his wife. Obeying the decree from Caesar that all the world should be taxed, he went up to Bethlehem and accepted the humble manger for the child. The angel of the Lord appeared to him more than once and he named the child "Jesus" who would be the Saviour of the world. Submitting himself to the divine order, he gave up his legitimate rights, accepted shame and mockery and became strong in faith. Considering the safety of his family, he took up a strenuous journey to Egypt by night.

Again he went back to Nazareth that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene." As it is written in the law of the Lord he brought Jesus, the first male child to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord. It was he, by faith, who paved the way for a generation of faith through Jesus (Mt 1:18-20, 23-25; 2:13,14,19-23; 13:55; Lk 2:1-7,22-24,44).

**4. By faith Mary** found favour with God. She became the blessed among all women since the Lord was with her. By faith she gave birth to the Son of God in her virgin womb and proved that with God nothing would be impossible. All these happened dramatically because and only because of her submission to God by faith. She recognized Jesus as her Saviour rather than her son and glorified God.

By faith she kept all things and pondered them in her heart. She accepted her humble state and offered a simple sacrifice of a pair of turtledoves. She brought up Baby Jesus feeding Him with the sincere milk of the Word that He became wise enough to sit amidst the doctors in the Jerusalem temple, both hearing them and asking them questions. She recalled the prophecy given 33 years ago, "Yes, a sword shall pierce through your own soul also" and tolerated the great suffering inflicted on her Son even before her eyes. She by faith became the firstfruit of enjoying the outpouring of the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost (Lk 1:28,35,37,38,46-53; 2:19,24,35, 46,47,51; Acts 1:14).

**5. By faith Simeon** was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel. In fulfilment of the revelation by the Holy Ghost that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ, he saw the heavenly Child. He came by the Spirit into the temple, took up the Child in his arms and blessed God. He testified that seeing Jesus caused him to depart in peace. By faith he prophesied that the Child would be a light to the Gentiles, and the Glory of the people Israel (Lk 2:25,26,28,30,32).

*(Contd. next page)*

## A Soul in the Graveyard!

A few years back I attended the funeral of a family friend. When I asked the family people whether I could be of any help to them, they requested me to oversee the excavation work in the cemetery. Heeding their request I went to the cemetery. There the grave diggers had already started digging the grave. I found a man already there supervising the said work. On enquiry he said he was a subordinate of the dead person's son and sent by him to the graveyard. He was an unbeliever and confessed ignorance of Jesus Christ or His plan of salvation. I asked him whether he knew where he would be going if he had died in place of the man who was to be buried. He was visibly startled at first but instead of taking offence admitted he did not know.

I presented the gospel to him and told him that Jesus Christ is the only way and He alone bore our sins on the cross of Calvary; that Christ rose from the dead on the third day and still living. I told him that if he confessed his sins and pleaded to the Lord Jesus to wash his sins, the Lord would do so by his shed blood on the cross, then and there. To my surprise he accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour like a timid lamb and got himself washed in His blood. I could see the light of the Lord radiant in his face. He thanked me and I encouraged him to go to some spiritual Church near his house. I left the place happily that a soul was won for the Lord.

—M. Philip Rajeswar, Chennai

## A Fish in my Net!

I came to know the Lord as a Hindu and now serving Him in my spare time. I am from a small village called Budalur (Tamilnadu). I was married into a Hindu family. All my husband's relatives were staunch Hindus. My husband's sister's son Suresh was an ardent Hindu devotee. Whenever he came home he used to shout at my husband, "Babhi is serving her God. You be careful not to change. Instead you must make her a Hindu." He used to argue a lot. I kept on praying for him.

One day he came home and started his arguments. I just gave an ear and continued with my cooking. He took up the *Blessing for You* tract lying on the table and started to read casually. Suddenly he shouted for me and I ran from the kitchen. With the tract in hand and tears in eyes he asked, "What should I do to make your Jesus my God?"

Both of us knelt down then and there and prayed. He started confessing his sins with tears. He accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour and became a changed man.

Today his mother and wife have accepted Jesus Christ as their Saviour and are leading a joyful life in a little village named Kadaman-gudi and are witnesses for the Lord. He is my strong pillar of support in my husband's family. This fish fell in my net. Hallelujah!

—Mrs. Baby Raja, Budalur

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### *Faith Chapter...*

**6. By faith Anna** gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. She was eightyfour years, but by faith she served God, with fasting and prayer, night and day (Lk 2:36-38).

**7. By faith the shepherds** came with haste to see the Baby Jesus, soon after hearing the glad tidings from the angel and when they had seen Him, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning the Child (Lk 2:15-18).

**8. By faith the wisemen** followed the star which they saw in the east and spared no pains to travel afar to see the divine Child. When they saw the star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. They fell down and worshipped Him and when they had opened their treasures, they presented Him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way (Mt 2:9-12). **f**

# A fig tree and a fantastic servant!

*Pastor V. Punithan, Idappadi (Tamilnadu)*

The Bible portrays the Church as His field and servants of God as His coworkers (1 Cor 3:9). Keeping this theme in mind, Jesus Christ paints a beautiful picture in Luke 13:6-9.

It is the picture of a vineyard full of green and black clusters of grapes hanging like decorations. A fig tree stands straight and stout in that vineyard. For three consecutive years, the Bible says, the expectant owner sought fruits from that tree but in vain. Disappointment grew into anger. The master ordered, "Cut it down." With a heart of compassion, the vinedresser pleaded, "Lord, leave it alone for one more year, and I will dig around it, and fertilize it. If it bears fruits next year, well; and if not, then cut it down." He pleads with his master to heed his request. Let us, servants in God's vineyard, learn from his four qualities how we can better ourselves.

## ***Humble Servant***

"Lord..." (Lk 13:8). Doesn't the multi-dimensional noble quality of the vinedresser astonish us! He addressed his master "Lord"—a word of much respect. By this he placed his master on a plane high above his. He identifies the master-servant relationship. He did not think high about himself than what he was. Humility is the first and foremost quality of a servant of God. Now a days giving respect to elders has become a diminishing practice. If one belongs to a lower level, inspite of his age, experience etc., respect is denied. Sometimes, to their dismay, the lowly are illtreated, teased or abused. The Bible clearly admonishes—"Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted" (Mt 23:12). It is really foolish to think high of oneself than what he really is. Further the Bible reveals, "It is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends" (2 Cor 10:18). Let us make the desire of the master our lifestyle—"The greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves" (Lk 22:26). Only then a servant becomes a "true and faithful servant" in the sight of the Lord.

## ***Hard Worker***

Secondly, he was not of the ilk who will finish his work and take an idle nap. He was diligent in his work. That's why, inspite of the order to cut down the tree he begs, "Let it be. I'll work on it." This statement makes him a thinker with originality and enthusiasm. He was not directed by the master to preserve the tree. He puts forth his own idea to the master. He did not have the hireling's mentality—"Is the garden mine? Let me cut down the tree as instructed. Who cares? I am here to just obey orders." He deeply cared for his master. He wanted to fulfil the deepest longing of his master's heart. The master was not for destroying the tree. His desire was to see fruits. That's the very reason he waited for three full years. If his desire could be satisfied atleast belatedly, the servant wanted to give it every chance. He was an optimistic labourer.



As servants of God are we satisfied with what we are doing? Or, are we worried? Our enemy knows his end is nearing and seeks to devour whom he can (1 Pet 5:8). We should outsmart the devil wisely with diligence and speed. Let us not lose heart looking at the barren trees. Let us dig deeper and put more fertilizer. "The root of the righteous flourishes" (Prov 12:12).

## ***Prayer Warrior***

Thirdly, the passage under consideration may be depicted as a prayer. This is a prayer of a warrior who knows how to pray. "If we ask anything according to His will He hears our prayer: This is the confidence we have in approaching God" (1 Jn 5:14). What does this verse teach us? We must ask anything according to His will. Secondly we must have confidence that God hears our prayer. If we are certain that our prayer is according to God's will, we can be confident. The gardener had that sort of confidence in his master. The desire of the master was to have a good harvest of fruits. The vinedresser knew for sure

that once the master knew there was a way to solve the problem he would certainly accept to implement it. The master would not hinder his servant if he knew that his servant was trying to satisfy his heart's desire.

If a subordinate tries to satisfy the heart's desire of his superior, the superior feels happy and contented. He might even praise the subordinate's wisdom. How much more would our divine Master feel happy and contented when He finds His servants doing His will. Those who have intimate relationship with God and those who hear his voice through the Word of God will know God's will and God's ways. Prayer is stressed by many in many ways. There is no dearth of books on prayer. Take any missionary conference, the teaching is, "If you are a servant of God pray, pray, keep on praying." But the sad story is that 'prayer' has become a casual word. 'Please pray for me,' 'I'll pray for you,' 'We'll pray for your ministry'—such expressions have become the trademark of Christians. Prayer circulars may be distributed by the thousands. The bitter truth is, not even 50 pray with burden over it. In spite of all the lectures on prayer a minister's prayer life is not deepened by an inch. He only goes on a guilt trip. When preachers quote prayer warriors who pray for hours on end the congregation is condemned, not convicted.

Prayer is as natural as the blooming of a flower. A man's prayer life depends on his love for God, and the depth of his relationship with God. The pattern of prayer life varies from person to person. One need not follow the other. Let each person feel free to follow his own dictates to set the time and duration. One's prayer life does not grow by pressure from outside rather it is by the individual's perseverance and practice. One who truly loves God cannot but pray. Even if he neglects prayer God will convict him and bring him down on his knees. It is the symbol of a personal relationship between father and son. So let's develop the habit of prayer, not out of compulsion but out of love for our Saviour. Then it will be the happiest time for us.

### ***Intercessor***

Fourthly, this passage gives a pictorial description of the word 'intercession'. This servant is faithful to his master. He can be used as a rod to measure our faithfulness to our master. Three fruitless years gone by. The gardener's heart trembles and he worries, "If I had been the tree I

would have showered fruits on my master. But this has drunk my blood and remains unfruitful." But he decides to stand up to the master's expectation and put in extra effort. His concern for the tree and his recommendation for the tree makes him an extraordinary intercessor. He could have cut it without his master's instruction. But instead with the spirit of intercession and love he pleaded, 'Lord, don't be in a hurry. Let alone the tree for one year. I will dig around the trunk so that the roots may have breathing space. I will water regularly. I will put the right kind of fertilizer in due season. The tree may bring forth blossoms and fruits.' A wonderful and adorable servant indeed!

What is our reaction when we encounter spiritually barren people? "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves" (Rom 15:1). Do we obey this command? Jesus never broke a bruised reed nor snuffed out a smoldering wick. Do we follow Him or do we trample on the weaker section?

Now a days relationship between believers and their pastors is floundering. Sugarcoated gestures cover up the hatred and bitterness in their hearts. Index finger always points out some defeat or failure of the other. The spirit of tolerance is missing. Many have forgotten what they have read or heard—"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Eph 4:32). "If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other" (Gal 5:15). Some do not even take notice of this admonishment.

Look at the gardener. He did not hate the barren tree nor did he neglect his duties. Quite contrary to the ways of the world, he had a concern for the tree. He tried to find a new way to help the tree yield fruits. He decided to try harder. By his faith he overcame the past failure. Enthused by the confidence on his master he designed a new plan of action.

Shall we follow the footsteps of this fantastic servant by knowing ourselves, working hard, training ourselves in the school of prayer and interceding for the souls under our care? **f**

*(Pastor V. Punithan, M.A., leads the Rhema Ministries and Church in Idappadi, Salem District. He and his wife are blessed with two sons who are working and a daughter who is married to a servant of God.)*

## “No God” to “Know God”

K. Gunasekaran, Missionary, BYM.

I hail from a small village called Soriampatti consisting of thirty houses, in the Harur circle of the most backward Dharmapuri District of Tamilnadu (spiritually too). My family is Hindu. In the year 1969 I completed my tenth standard. Then I joined the Harur Cooperative Society as a salesman. I was posted in the Sitteri Hills Branch. There I was wooed by the love of BYM missionaries.

I lived as a faithful follower of the doctrines of E.V.R. Periyar who established the *Dravida Kazhagam* and proclaimed that there was no God. So even though the love of missionaries captivated me I could not accept Jesus Christ as my Saviour and Lord. I did not believe in sin either. “Where is sin and what is service? I earn by my skill and I live by my merit” was my challenge to missionaries. But I knew I was gradually losing my peace. In search of peace I gave in to smoking, drinking and gambling—which only led me deeper into darkness. ‘Why should I live, for what purpose?’ screamed my innermost being. I could not read the New Testament that missionaries had given me sometime ago, because it went off like, “Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, Jacob...” But a day in January 1982 in the quiet hours of noon when I opened it, the pages fell open at Romans chapter seven. When I read from verses 15 to the end God started to deal with me. I did not have the good habits that I loved; rather I was possessed by evil habits that I detested. My eyes were opened to see the power within me that was working against me. I understood that very minute that that power was sin (Rom 7:15-17). The next I knew was, I was kneeling down and confessing my sins, engulfed in the presence of God. Thus I was saved. My family which should have rejoiced over my transformation to a clean personality hated me from the depth of their hearts.

By the grace of God in 1984 I married a Christian girl. Whenever possible I joined the missionaries in Sitteri Hills to serve God. In 1985 I became a missionary of Blessing Youth Mission. Along with missionary Regunathan I worked in Arnoothu Hills being stationed at Aladipatti village for a year. We fanned out to 15 villages. Now around 50 tribal people worship in the Aladipatti

Church built by BYM. Weekly once we walked 20 km to reach Pungamaduvu, stayed there for two days and evangelized. Now about 50 tribal believers worship in the Church built there.



In Sitteri Hills there are three centres: Sitteri, Aranoothu and Chitling. God gave me an opportunity to work in all these centres and the villages around them. In Chitling a 30 year old Lambadi Tribal by name Dhanapal was a drunkard. He committed his life to Christ when I shared with him from 1 Corinthians 3:16,17. He became our assistant in ministry in that area. His daughter was trained in a Bible College and is serving God now.

In 1993 I was transferred to Vellore to assist brother Stanley in the publication of the *Blessing* magazine and books. From that day till today I help in the computer work of our literature ministry.

I am also responsible to coordinate the headquarters staff for village outreach once a month. My wife Nirmala and I visit the local Blind School every Saturday and minister to the children there.

In 2001 I was involved in a major road accident. My whole body was bruised. I was caught in the front wheels of a lorry and dragged along for 20 feet. I sustained multiple fractures in my right lower limb. Right upper limb bones were broken in six places. But God spared my life. Today I run about doing my job. Glory to God. Even if I had died in the accident the Christian community would have lost nothing. But God’s plan was to keep me down here for some more years. Please pray that I will keep myself in the centre of God’s will and prove myself worthy of His grace. My son Samraj has completed his B.D.S. and my daughter Sheeba is doing her M.Sc.

“I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinks about me” (Psa 40:17). f



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Registered with the Registrar of Newspapers  
for India under No. 30302/76

Published on 28th of every month

Postal Registration No. TN/CCN/139/06-08  
Licensed to post without prepayment  
WPP No. TN/CCN/23/06-08 (Inland)  
189 (Foreign) 06-08



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Printed by Paul Aravamuthan at M/S Bapuji Printers, 5 Kurban Ali Street, Woods Road, Mount Road, Chennai 600002 and Published by V. Ashok Immanuel on behalf of Blessing Ministries, No.21 West Coovam River Road, Chitadripet, Chennai 600002. Editor: Dr. M. Arthur John