



## THANKS TO MIKE FEAZELL

By now, many of you are probably aware that Dr. Mike Feazell, who has served the church faithfully for a total of nearly 40 years, has decided to take an early retirement at the end of this year due to personal health issues. Mike discussed this with me many months ago and we have been spending much time since then working out a smooth transition as he steps down from his many responsibilities with the church. This has not been a simple task, as Mike has played such an integral and vital role with WCG and GCI, especially during our tumultuous doctrinal transformation, which began not long after the death of Herbert Armstrong in 1986.

### Dr. Mike Feazell



Dr. Feazell served my dad as his special assistant for seven years during my dad's tenure as director of ministerial services and church administration from 1979 to 1986, and continued in the same role for another nine years after my dad succeeded Herbert Armstrong as president of the church. After my dad's death in 1995, Mike served as director of church administration for two years before turning that responsibility over to Dan Rogers, then as media director and senior advisor to the president and now for the past ten years he has also been GCI vice president.

As media director, Mike brought ideas for many key projects to me for approval over the years, including Christian Odyssey magazine, Speaking of Life video program, which I deliver each week on our GCI website, and GCI Together, GCI Reflections, and One Quick Thought video programs, You're Included interview series and more recently, Dimensions in Ministry interview series. Mike is our corporate doctrinal editor, chairs our doctrinal review team, serves on the church board of directors, and serves as vice-chair of the board of Grace Communion Seminary.

In Mike's departure there is bad news and good news.

The bad news, of course, is that we hate to see him go. His writing and preaching over the years have been special blessings to a great many people. But the good news is that he will be getting much-needed rest and the reduced stress load will allow him to begin to rebuild his health. We have tentative plans for Mike to continue doing the interviewing for You're Included and Dimensions in Ministry.

### Dr. Gary Deddo



There is also more good news. Mike and I, along with Russell Duke, Dan Rogers and others, have been in discussions for some time with Dr. Gary Deddo, who feels called to serve in GCI, about coming aboard to replace Mike in most of his key responsibilities. As you might recall, Dr. Deddo is a long time senior editor for InterVarsity Press (IVP) and has appeared numerous times on our You're Included program. He, along with his wife, Cathy, has spoken at our regional conferences both in the U.S. and in Canada and both spoke at our international conference in Orlando, Florida, two years ago. Dr. Deddo will be able to devote some time to a period of transition starting in January 2012, and will go full-time in July 2012.

Mike has expressed to me that he feels God's hand and blessing in Gary's sense of call to GCI at this time, and I must say I agree. It is not easy to fill the void Mike will leave, or the void that any of our long-time faithful employees leave, but Mike and I both feel Gary will bring many new strengths and talents that will help GCI continue to move ahead in Jesus' service in the years to come. Gary's job title will be Special Assistant to the President, and he will oversee the doctrinal integrity of our publications and videos as well as assist me in many of the same ways Mike has.

### Dr. Russell Duke

Replacing Mike in the office of GCI vice president will

be Dr. Russell Duke. Dr. Duke has served the church for more than 40 years in many capacities, both pastoral and administrative, including as President of Ambassador University and Executive Director of the Ambassador Center at Azusa Pacific University. Russell is now President of Grace Communion Seminary, and that will continue to be his primary responsibility.



I'd like to ask that you join us in prayer for Mike as he enters retirement and a much-needed rest, for Russell as he takes on the role of GCI vice president, and for Gary as he changes careers to join with our worldwide GCI

team in proclaiming the good news of the God revealed in Jesus Christ!

And I'd like to ask for a word of prayer for myself, too, if you don't mind. Mike and I have been dear friends for the past 45 years, and we will continue to be, of course; but we have also worked together for such a long time with such harmony and singleness of purpose that I will greatly miss his excellent and exemplary work in the gospel and his ever-ready personal support on the job.

I pray for all of you every day.

May God's peace and strength be with you always,  
Joseph Tkach

## AGING TO PERFECTION

BY BARBARA DAHLGREN

It's hard to believe that 2012 is upon us! When I was young the years seemed to go at a snail's pace. It seemed to take me forever to stop putting the previous year's date on my school assignments. When I became an adult, it took a while to stop doing the same thing with my checkbook. This year, though, I started writing 2012 on a check while we were still in October 2011. That's scary! I must really be old. Now years are whizzing by like I'm caught in H.G. Wells' Time Machine.

I don't mind getting older. Really I don't! Many expensive delicacies are described as "aged to perfection." Certain cheeses, cuts of beef, old paintings, antique furniture, classic cars, retro jewelry, distilled spirits and fine wines improve with age. Although I prefer being compared to fine wine as opposed to cheese, the point is that if we are "aging to perfection" through maturity—gaining wisdom and knowledge and valuable experience—then each year represents more than just being, as Tennessee Ernie Ford used to sing, "another day older and deeper in debt."

Paul speaks of this maturing process from a Christian perspective. He says in 1 Corinthians 13:11, "When I was a child, I spoke as a child." What do some children do to get what they want? Some cry, "Waw-waw-waw!" Some pout. Some throw tantrums. Some hit. Some say, "If you don't want to play my way, I'll take my marbles and go home." Some sing, "Everybody hates me. Nobody loves me. Think I'll eat some worms."

Ideally, a loving, parental hand leads a child out of such behavior. Unfortunately, sometimes we adults continue

to deal with difficulties the same way we did when we were children, just not as blatantly. We harbor feelings of resentment, bitterness, and anger. And yes, sometimes we might still pout, throw a tantrum, take our marbles home and want to eat worms.

However, when one becomes a Christian, something new happens. Our Father's loving, parental hand, through his Holy Spirit, guides us into his truth (John 16:13). We start developing the fruit of his Holy Spirit, such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). We feel a need to pray for those who hurt us, rather than wishing them hurt or dead. Even though we tell God our desires, we rely on his wisdom to do the right thing. We pray, "Your will be done" and more importantly, we mean it!

When we become adults, we can put away childish things (1 Corinthians 13:11). We can be secure in our belief in Jesus Christ and no longer live like children tossed to and fro (Ephesians 4:14-15).

When a Christian is "aging to perfection" the way God intends, facing another year need not be cause for regret about days gone by. It can be a time of rejoicing for what the future holds, and for praising our great God who holds our future.

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# Watford Church's Children Nativity Play

by Peter Beardsmore

Producing a children's performance in a small congregation provides its own set of obstacles to surmount. In Watford we tend to have about 9 children of different ages and abilities each week, but they're not always the same children. Out of a total of 16 or 17 if they all came together the same week, we tend to get a different mix each week. Couple to this the fact that we knew 8 of them would not be there on the day of the performance, a new solution was needed.

This was in the form of an imaginary TV Station, called BBC Bethlehem with its associated News Channel.

The performance was all scripted to be read, just like TV News, so whoever was there on the day would read it straight out of the script.

The play starts with a Documentary all about Royal Babies, and all the preparation that is involved in a Royal Birth, with its associated medical specialists and expensive equipment. This is contrasted with the "facilities" or lack of them that surrounded the most important Royal Birth in history, the birth of Jesus, the Son of God.

A series of important news flashes keeps arriving, giving (through the miracle of Time-Travel, which our TV Station has the technology to provide) the amazing events surrounding the birth of Jesus. Pictures appear on the 'screens' behind the newscasters—carefully drawn and painted during Children's Church during the previous few weeks.

It continues through to the killing of the baby boys by Herod, whose mental state we are not even allowed to question on this TV Station, for fear of reprisals. The documentary finishes by contrasting this new-born king of mercy, kindness, compassion, sacrifice and love, with the kind of king that was all too common in those times; Despots of greed, arrogance, conceit and violence.



## Nottingham Pastoral Council Commissioned!

On the 10th December the first Nottingham pastoral council was commissioned by National Ministry Leader, James Henderson. Council members (left photo) are Ian Woodley, Richard White and Marlene Cliff (who was not able to be there on that day). Also on the 10th John Gent (right photo) was ordained as a deacon.



# Looking on the Bright Side

by Hilary Jacobs

The article on the cover of a well-known news magazine really caught my eye.

It read: The Science of Optimism. Hope isn't rational so why are humans wired for it?<sup>1</sup>

I read the article with great interest, backtracking several times in order to grasp the point the researcher was making. He found there was something called the optimism bias in every race, region and socioeconomic bracket. Though most people agreed that world conditions were a cause for great concern, they viewed their own future and that of their families through rose coloured spectacles.

Why, I wondered, would human beings consciously ignore the dismal truth of what was happening all around them, but cling to the unrealistic hope that somehow they would escape all the flack and emerge to live happily ever after? It got me thinking about my own life — about when I became a Christian, and whether doing so made a difference to my degree of optimism.

As a child I remember my father reacting fiercely to anything that looked like pessimism. If I ever expressed a feeling that I might come last in the race, miss the bus or not get top marks in the exam, he would thump his fist on the table and say, “Will you stop looking on the gloomy side of things. Don't be like your grandmother!”

I never really knew this grandmother, so I had no idea what he meant. It seemed he just wanted me to be happy and positive and have “more faith in myself,” as he frequently put it.

I never did develop that “can do” mindset, and never got to have “faith in myself.” There were always those unmentioned fears that I would forget my lines, say the wrong thing, take the wrong turn, or be attacked by a shark if I went for a swim. I just didn't talk about them — especially to my Dad.

## Outlook changed

But then something changed my outlook completely. Becoming a Christian was a multiple bonus experience for me. Not only did I realise I had a Saviour in Jesus Christ, but it became clear too that there was a cause for all the misery and suffering in the world. Jesus was to return to earth, set up his kingdom, and remove the cause of all sin and suffering. A wonderful new world was on its way, and I was going to be there! How's that for optimism?

But life goes on, and so do the problems. I learned that the real hope for Christians does not lie in this world (1 Corinthians 15:19). It became clear that World War 1 was not “the war to end all wars.” The earthquakes, economic woes, tsunamis, famines and uprisings that make

headlines today are not going to end tomorrow. The subtle enemy, who first persuaded humans to cut off their relationship with their Creator, will not give up his demoted grasp until God intervenes (Revelation 20:2-3).

So why do we humans have this amazing thing called hope? The researcher whose findings resulted in this article actually stumbled on to the brain's innate optimism by accident. Complex tests on the memory system revealed that while we tend to forget details of past events, we are capable of imagining future events with great optimism. The volunteers in another study reported that their images of desirable events were richer and more vivid than those of undesirable ones. This test revealed heightened activity in two critical regions of the brain which are central to the processing and modulation of emotion and motivation. The more optimistic a person was, the higher was the activity in these regions.

Then again, these two critical areas of the brain showed abnormal activity in depressed individuals. Interestingly, the researcher says people with mild depression are relatively accurate when predicting future events. They see the world as it is.

Without these crucial areas of the brain acting as they do, humans would be chronically depressed, and might never move forward, invent anything, or enjoy life at all. The resulting despair would have hindered any such thing as concern about global warming, attempting to live healthily, even having children. Surely this is why God designed these characteristics into the human thought processes. He intended for humans to live, not to die before we were born.

## Hope for our future

The Bible is full of promises of a great future hope for all mankind. Jeremiah – sometimes called a prophet of doom because of all his dire warnings, said to Israel, “So there is hope for your future, declares the Lord. Your

children will return to their own land” (Jeremiah 31:17).

Jesus said he would draw all men to himself after his resurrection (John 12:32). The last chapters of the Book of Revelation clearly depict a wonderful future for mankind.

I have to admit though; I still don't feel optimistic about this world. Evils are mounting on all sides, and it's distressing to have enjoyed a meal when you know that up north on the same continent, there is rampant starvation. I love watching the waves break over the rocks down at our local beach. The bigger and more powerful they are, the more spectacular and entertaining. But then I remember it was a super-sized one of these which engulfed an entire Japanese city. I'm aware every time I get into my car that accidents happen out there. At least my chances of being eaten by a shark are now almost non-existent seeing I don't swim in the sea anymore.

But even in the midst of this depressing world, we can right now, have great joy in coming to an intimate relationship with our Saviour Jesus. As we draw close to him and share our concerns and requests with him, we are assured that the peace of God—something beyond the grasp of any science researcher—will guard our hearts and minds (Philippians 4:7).

What has changed is the kind of optimism I have. I no longer look at what this world has to offer me. Don't get me wrong. I enjoy good things like family visits, good music and movies, and dinner with friends. But it's short term. What really turns me on is the thought of Jesus ruling the world with perfect love, peace, justice and joy.

That's really worth looking forward to, and it's for sure.

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<sup>1</sup> Time magazine June 9 2011, page 34, 'The Optimism bias by Tali Sharot'



# day BY day

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# THE SOURCE

BY IAN WOODLEY

Modern science is a triumph of human reasoning. Is it not amazing that we can search out and find evidence that proves all physical things can be traced back to one source?

The “Big Bang” is the name we commonly give to this source. From this point we can trace the timeline of the Universe, through the formation of stars, galaxies and black holes.

We also see the creation of our very own Sun and planet Earth. Biologists plot the rise of life from “primordial soup” to complex beings, including ourselves.

All the things of this physical world – gravity, electricity, chemical reactions, the creation of gas, oil & coal, dinosaurs and bees – to name just a few, can be traced back and eventually be explained from the point that is the “Big Bang”.

But here’s a puzzle that sets my mind racing. All those physical aspects can be explained. But what about the non-physical ones?

For example, where does Beauty come from? Perhaps beauty is just an accident. As human beings “fit” in the world, maybe we have evolved to like the things that suit us.

A tougher one: Justice. On what basis do we have the idea that the universe should in some way be just? Yet, humans construct great legal systems to promote, even fight for, justice. Where does this view of the cosmos come from?

One that makes my brain hurt: Mercy. As far as I see, there is nothing in the physical universe that promotes the concept of mercy. Lions eat zebra; asteroids crash into planets and black holes consume galaxies.

Is it possible that the source of all things is not just physical? That perhaps there was a mind at work – that there is an immaterial aspect to the “Big Bang”? That would be a plausible way of explaining beauty, justice and mercy.

Human reasoning is so powerful that we can work out how all things got here. What about reason itself? Why is the universe reasonable? Does this point to a “Reason” – a being (for want of a better word) – behind all things?

The “Big Bang” explains many aspects of our universe. But not all. Where do all those immaterial qualities come from? Perhaps the idea of “God” has a lot going for it.

# Don't Be Spooked

by Joseph Tkach

It seems to be great sport in some circles today to question, undermine and ridicule Christian faith.

The whole idea of God is a delusion, argues the noted atheist, Professor Richard Dawkins. Others say that religion has had a negative impact on human society and should therefore be banned. Some believe that those who teach religious concepts to children be considered guilty of child abuse. And recently published books ask us to believe that certain extra-biblical “gospels” may give us deeper insights into understanding Jesus than the New Testament.

Meanwhile, amazing new scientific discoveries about the nature of physical reality are being commandeered by skeptics to challenge the relevance of the Bible. Some of their arguments are sophisticated and technical, far above the education and expertise levels of most believers.

We ordinary Christians seem to be outnumbered and outgunned. But before we allow ourselves to be spooked by new discoveries and technical information we aren't equipped to deal with, let's keep in mind that all truth is God's truth. Science can only discover what God put there to begin with.

In other words, the arguments of the skeptics are not as overwhelming as they sometimes seem. And even though most of us do not have the training and background to enter the fray, God has called many capable men and women who are more than able to defend the Christian turf in the scientific world.

They have education and experience, and they are not intimidated by atheistic arguments of fellow scientists who can't see God behind the new frontiers of discovery. When given the opportunity, they can more than hold their own, and show that the atheist viewpoint does not have the final word.

Many believing scientists assure us that the ever-increasing understanding of life's mysteries has deepened, rather than shattered, their faith. Truth has nothing to fear from more truth, and you can be sure that Jesus Christ is not afraid of anything science has or ever will discover about the universe he created. Neither should we.

It's also helpful to keep in mind that the Christian faith spread through the Roman Empire in the first century not by winning technical debates, but because Christians lived in the love of Jesus Christ. In times of plague and famine, it was the Christians who cared for the sick and destitute. In an age when slaves and women were without power, it was the Christian way of life that gave them a voice and self-respect.

So don't let the anti-religious, anti-Christian propaganda destabilize you. This is not a time to cower and bury our Christian heads in the sand. Most of us are not trained to challenge complex scientific arguments or indulge in sophisticated debate. But all of us are more than able to make a significant contribution in a way that really does count – by being the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

## 50<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary

by Nancy Silcox

Jack and Rosemary Stokes celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary on 7 December 2011. They were married 50 years ago in Oakhampton in Devon and came into the Worldwide Church of God in 1969 with both of them being baptized in Minehead that year. Jack worked as an auto-mechanic at Ambassador College in Bricket Wood for a few years and then as a free-lance mechanic until ill-health made work impossible. They have three children, Alison, Susan and Robert, and seven grandchildren. Rosemary is an active member of the Watford congregation, but Jack is unable to attend due to ill-health.



# Is Christianity a Copycat Religion?

by Shaun de Greeff

What if I told you that there was a historical narrative that told of a god born of a virgin in a cave on the 25th of December?

In this narrative he was a great travelling preacher, had 12 disciples, and promised them immortality.

He eventually sacrificed himself for world peace. Furthermore he was buried in a tomb, rose after three days and instituted something similar to the Lord's Supper. And finally that he was considered "the redeemer" and "the way, the truth and the life."

If you thought that I was talking about Jesus, you would be wrong.

## Christianity claimed to be a cheap knockoff

In recent years authors like Hugh J. Schonfield and John H. Randall have claimed that Christianity has copied many of its doctrines from pagan belief systems. Core beliefs like the virgin birth of Jesus, his death and resurrection, have been clouded in controversy because these authors claim such concepts pre-date Christ.

Timothy Freke & Peter Gandy who wrote the book *The Jesus Mysteries* said the following: "Why should we consider the stories of Osiris, Dionysus, Adonis, Attis, Mithras and the other pagan mystery saviours as fables, yet come across essentially the same story told in a Jewish context and believe them to be the biography of a carpenter from Bethlehem?"

## Building the defence

Before we start looking at specific examples that refute these statements it is important to note two things.

1) History proves that Jesus lived and died: With more than 24 000 manuscripts and complete copies of the New Testament books that date between 50 and 300 years after they were originally written, the Bible stands out as the best preserved ancient document of all time. Not only that, but we have 17 contemporary non-Christian sources that provide specific information on Christianity and Jesus, and 11 of these speak of the death of Jesus in varying detail. Even if there were striking similarities between the pagan religions and Christianity, it still does not explain away the historical events that we are confronted with when examining the Bible as a record of history.

2) Similarities in themselves do not undermine the authenticity of the biblical text: In *The Apologetics Study Bible For Students*, edited by Sean McDowell, the author describes the following story: There once was a British Ocean Liner that set sail with an inadequate number of life boats, and on its maiden voyage collided with an iceberg and sank. The ship carried 3000 passengers of whom only 1000 survived.

If I asked you the name of the ship and you answered the Titanic, you would be wrong. The ship would be the Titan, a fictional ship described in Morgan Robertson's book, *Wreck of the Titan* (Buccaneer Books, Cutchogue, New York, 1898). The story of the Titan was written 14 years prior to the actual events which happened on the Titanic. So does this mean that the Titanic is fiction because of the striking similarities? Obviously not!

## Refuting the critics

In his book *The Case for the Real Jesus*, Lee Strobel tackles the theories that critics of Christianity have developed by interviewing leading Christian scholars on this subject. In short, the various experts refute the notion that Christianity is a copycat religion by looking at the following:

### The death of many of the pagan gods are tied to cycles

With many of the resurrection myths associated with the Pagan religions, the death and resurrection of their gods were tied to vegetation or seasonal cycles. It was used as a means to explain why things would die in the autumn and grow again in the spring, or why we had rainy or dry seasons. Baal, the god of thunder and rain for example, would die and be resurrected on an annual basis in line with the rainy season. His followers believed that it stopped raining when he died and started once again when he was raised from the dead.

Attis, another example, was loved by the goddess Cybele. He was however unfaithful to her, and when she found out she drove him mad. In his demented state he then castrated himself and died. She apparently took pity on him and resurrected him. Yearly rituals were kept in order to guarantee good crops.

This is in stark contrast with Jesus, whose death and resurrection was a onetime event and had nothing to do with vegetation or seasonal cycles.

## Some gods become zombies

Osiris, one of the other mythical gods is supposedly killed by his brother who cuts him into 14 pieces and scatters him all over the world. The goddess Isis then takes pity on Osiris, collects 13 of the 14 pieces and then buries him. Unfortunately Osiris is not really resurrected but instead “zombified” and becomes the god of the underworld, because he could not be completely put back together again.

## No dying and rising Gods that precede Christianity

The Myth of Attis mentioned above pre-dates Christianity, but the resurrection myths only appear on the scene after Jesus’ death.

T.N.D Mettinger – a senior Swedish scholar and professor at Lund University admits in his book *The Riddle of the Resurrection* that the consensus amongst modern scholars is nearly universal that there are no dying and rising gods that precede Christianity.



Mithras



Baal



Zeus

## Virgin births

Another popular claim is that gods like Zeus impregnated virgins without copulation. Their offspring were then half man half god whose lives began at conception.

The Christian concept of the virgin birth of Jesus is quite different to those of the Greek gods, who had sex with humans to satisfy their lusts. Zeus may have impregnated Danae with a golden shower, but it was to satisfy his lusts. These gods were depicted as beings driven by what we would call the desires of the flesh, whereas the same could not be said of Yahweh (God). Furthermore Jesus was fully God and fully man and his life did not begin at conception but he has always been I Am, in other words eternal. It must also be said that the prophet Isaiah prophesied the virgin birth of Christ hundreds of years before it took place. So even though Jesus’ birth might be after some of the other gods, the special nature of his birth was predicted much earlier than most of his so-called counterparts.

## Refuting Mithras

One of the closest parallels that have been drawn to Christianity must be the myth of Mithras mentioned in the introduction. But on closer inspection we find that the facts have once again been twisted to suit an agenda.

Firstly, although Mithras was born on the 25th of December, he was not born in a cave but from a rock. Sculptures of Mithras show him emerging from a rock at his ‘birth’.

Secondly, the Bible makes no mention of the date on which Jesus was born. The early Christians celebrated the 6th of January (as some still do to this day). In all likelihood the 25th of December was chosen by Constantine in 336 AD as the date to celebrate the birth of Christ.

Thirdly, Mithras was not a travelling teacher, he was a god and never explicitly promised eternal life. Why would one want to follow a god in the first place if there

was no promise of a better future?

Finally, he did not sacrifice himself, but killed a bull, whose blood was supposed cleanse the sins of his followers. We also have no textual evidence to support a resurrection, and most of the other claims such as the Lord’s Supper, and about him being the way the truth and the life, is Christian theology that was later imposed on this religion.

In the final analysis, there is just not enough evidence to convict Christianity of being a copycat religion. History affirms that Christians worship the real Jesus, not some fake knock off invented to suit our needs.

Indeed Jesus at no time promised his followers a bed of roses, but that they would have tribulation in this world. Hardly the kind of message that would draw followers unless he actually was the way, the truth and the life.

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# Happy New Year, Billi7. Whoever you are.

by John Halford

As I write this, the world's population will have topped seven billion.

October 31st was the estimated date, although that is only a guesstimate. Population analysis is, at best, an inexact science. Some countries, especially very large and very poor ones, have no idea how many people they have. It is highly likely that our seven billionth inhabitant will be born into one of these countries. There is a just better than even chance that he will be male, as the statistics indicate slightly more males born than females.

What does life hold for him? Well, unless he was born into a very poor country, his chances of surviving infancy are quite good. So also, believe it or not, are his chances of not being killed in a war or a terrorist attack. A recent report showed that more of the world is living in peace than ever before.<sup>1</sup>

Peace maybe, but not prosperity. Life for most people in our world is still a grim struggle for survival. Average income worldwide is around £4,500 a year. However, the distribution is uneven. The median annual income is only around £1,100. About half the world's population has never made a phone call, and about 40% have never ridden in a car. With the rapid spread of cheap digital technology this will almost certainly change during his lifetime. He can expect that life to last about 64 years (unless the seven billionth person is a girl—women live on average four years longer). Statistics like this can only be general. And in this precarious world, it all could change—for the better or the worse. He will have to take his chances. It is hard to predict anything certain about his future.

However, there is one thing we can say for certain. We may not know who the seven billionth person is, or where he is, but God does. The Creator, who is “sustaining all things by his powerful word” (Hebrews 1:3) is very much aware of the details of his creation. Jesus told us that whereas “five sparrows are sold for two pennies ... not one of them is forgotten by God.” (Luke 12:6)

How many sparrows are there? There are at least 35 kinds of sparrows in the world. Some flocks have been estimated as numbering 20 million. So how many individual birds are there? God knows.

Jesus also said that we humans are of much greater value to him. “Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered,” he explained. Our seven billionth baby probably doesn't have too many hairs on his little head yet, but God knows about him, loves him, and has plans for him. Those plans were established “before the foundation of the world.” Jesus, the Son of God, was born as one of us. At that time there were probably only about half a billion people alive. He lived, died and was resurrected for them. And for all who had gone before and would come after—a number estimated at just over 100 billion altogether.

So welcome to the human race, whoever you are and wherever you are. And Happy Christmas—it is good news for you too.

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<sup>1</sup> Associated Press, Oct. 22, 2011



[www.wcg.org.uk/donate](http://www.wcg.org.uk/donate)

## Donate Online

Did you know that you can donate via Paypal online at the Worldwide Church of God Website?

The image shows a screenshot of the Worldwide Church of God (WCG) website's donation page. The page has a purple header with the URL 'www.wcg.org.uk/donate' and the text 'Donate Online'. Below the header, there is a section titled 'A thought for the week' with a small image of a person. The page also features a sidebar with various links and a main content area with text and a red arrow pointing to a 'Donate' button. At the bottom, there is a message about donating via Paypal.

# Members In Greece

by Nancy Silcox

Nancy and David Silcox visited out small group of Church Members in Greece during December 2011. Michael and Sonja Marcou met them at the airport and took them out to dinner the first night to discuss plans for the coming few days together. They had arranged a Bible Study followed by a meal together at the home of Manuel and Evgenia Phoenix.

Following the Bible Study, the group had a lengthy discussion about the situation of the members in Greece and the role that our fellowship might play into the future. They are hoping that with the funds they hold in the Church Bank Account in Greece, that they will be able to sponsor a visit from a Minister at least once a year.

We then enjoyed a wonderful banquet provided by Evgenia and Manuel in their home. Besides Michael and Sonja Marcou, and Manuel and Evgenia Phoenix, Mi-

chael Wells had come down on the train from Thessalonika. Unfortunately, Michael's wife, Yiota, and their twin daughters were not able to come. Panos Mandrides was also not able to attend.

The next day there was a 'Church Outing' together—the Marcou's, Phoenix's and Silcox's drove over the mountains to Marathon, where we enjoyed lunch together on the sea front. After driving back to Athens, we spent a couple of hours together over coffee and cake in a restaurant, which gave us plenty of time for fellowship and discussing various topics and questions that arose.

David and Nancy were able to spend more time in the next two days with Michael and Sonja before they returned from the balmy Mediterranean climate of Greece to the frosty UK.



## Photos from Our Paignton Autumn Harvest Festival



# Speaking of Life: Contagious Love



During Jesus' ministry, he often upset the religious establishment of the day by extending love to people considered "unlovable." As in all societies, during Jesus' day, there was the "in" crowd and the outcasts.

The "in crowd," as characterized by the Pharisees and Sadducees, was a group, smug about their goodness and holiness. They could make a great show of treating each other well, but made no time for the lower elements of society.

In contrast, Jesus spent most of his time with the outcasts. He forgave a woman caught in the act of adultery. He treated a prostitute with dignity and respect. He made friends with the much-despised tax collectors and with others who were considered beyond the pale of polite society. He touched and healed lepers – the ultimate outcasts of the day. Jesus found his closest friends among the common working people of his day.

Jesus revealed that our human capacity to love, needs to be extended beyond just those we know and like. He told his followers to pay special attention to those whom society has rejected. In the parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31-46), Jesus identified with the suffering of the sick, the loneliness of the prisoner and the plight of the poor. He told us to help them, saying in verse 40, "...whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

That kind of love is contagious. It often brings out the best in anyone who receives it or witnesses it. Jesus was remembered as a man who "went around doing good," Acts 10:38 tells us. Those who followed him after his resurrection were soon called "Christians," and it was not long before their unusual way of life

began to be noticed.

In hard economic times Christians were generous. When plagues struck, Christians nursed the sick. When widows and orphans were left to fend for themselves, Christians cared for them. Even though Christians were often despised and persecuted, their lives of love also tended to prick the consciences of those who knew about them, causing many to join them in their labors of love.

We do the same today, but if our labor in Christ is to be genuine, it should never be geared to draw attention to ourselves, or to get people to come to our church. We don't serve others to show them something about us, but to show them something about them. When we help the poor and the outcasts we let them know that they do matter and that they are included in God's love, no matter who they are or what they have done.

Once we begin to understand that there is no place and no person that God's love does not reach, we can look at ourselves in a different way, as God's beloved children. We can also look at others in a different way. There is no "in" crowd or outcasts. Everyone matters, and everyone has been included in God's love. There is redemption for every person; all they have to do is believe it and embrace it.

Maybe your life of love and service in Christ will help them do that!

I'm Joseph Tkach, speaking of LIFE.

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