



Dear Friends,

During this most unusual of Christmases I pray that you all have a safe & blessed time. On Christmas morning we would love to see you from 9.30 to 10.15 as we enjoy a Carol Zoom. After 40 weeks, next weekend there will be no Staying Connected, but it will be back on 3<sup>rd</sup> Jan 2021.

After a very difficult year it is lovely to read on page 2 from Sylvia & Susie.

May the joy of the LORD truly be our strength in the uncertain days ahead. Bless you all, Haz



Portstewart contacted Helen to say that they had felt led to send a gift towards a project or something for the children at Christmas! When Helen mentioned the “bags of hope”, they were delighted as the mum has 2 young children & is a teacher herself. Here was joy from knowing that whilst we were being obedient to God & the Great Commission in these uncertain times, by doing something I’d never done before, God was coming along side us to help provide the funding.

**The Christmas story shows 3 things that are barriers to having, or that may steal our joy.**

**(1) Anxiety.** In Luke 1:29-30 Mary was “greatly troubled” & the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid”. Mary in v47 in translation says, “**My spirit finds its joy in God, my Saviour**”. When we focus on God He removes our anxiety, He gives us peace & joy.

**(2) Resentment over a hurt.** When Joseph found out that Mary was pregnant he must have felt wounded & betrayed. He didn't seek retaliation or revenge but was minded to quietly divorce her, Mt 1:19, but having had his character tested, an angel of the LORD spoke to him in a dream. Joseph believed & was obedient to the instructions given to him.

**(3) Confusion.** The Christmas story is full of joy, anxiety & fear, but also full of confusion. In fact everyone at some stage gets confused except the angels. Mary was confused, Joseph was confused, Zechariah and Elizabeth were confused, Herod was confused and even the Wise Men were confused & didn't know which direction to go in Mt 2. Our confusion is cleared when we read God’s Word, Ps 119:105 “**Your word is a lamp to my feet & a light to my path**” and allow the Holy Spirit to guide us as we are filled with joy.

Using our Christmas theme **SHARE THE LIGHT**, we have looked at **HOPE, LOVE & PEACE**. This week our focus moves on to **JOY**.

When the rough sleeping shepherds saw an angel of the LORD they were terrified, but the angel said to them in Luke 2:10, “**Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all people**”. The theme of joy is central to the Christmas story & to the Christian faith. Jesus said in John 15:11, “**These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full (or complete)**”. Joy is the second “fruit of the Spirit” mentioned in Gal 5:22. It’s sad to see miserable looking people who claim to be Christians. If they have no joy, where is their strength as per Nehemiah’s words in 8:10, “**the joy of the LORD is your strength**”.

Joy is an emotion, it is different from happiness. When life's significant challenges come along and external circumstances adversely affect us, we may understandably not be happy, but joy is internal. At my mother’s funeral

whilst I was sad at her passing, I had an incredible inner peace & a sense of joy knowing that she had gone to her heavenly home. I read recently, “*Joy is the settled assurance that God is in control of every detail of your life, & the quiet confidence that ultimately everything will be alright. Joy is a determined choice to praise God in all things*”.

Obedience to God in times of uncertainty brings joy. The Magi’s difficult perilous journey travelling for many months were “overjoyed” when they saw Jesus. This week it was a real joy to give out 170 “Bags of Hope” to the children in Pool House, knowing that if each child or mum or dad read those books they would understand what the true meaning of Christmas is. **Please do pray that they will read them and ask more searching questions about Christmas & Jesus.** As these bags were being prepared I was aware that the costs of doing 170 of them was growing significantly. I shared this with Helen as a prayer point & we said nothing to anyone else. Within 2 days a young couple back in

## SYLVIA & SUSIE SAY



Many times over the last year, Susie & I have said that we could write a book. It was just a year ago that my precious David went to be with the LORD. Where has that time gone? We have focused on the blessings (Philippians 4:4-8), the first being that the LORD's timing is always right. We thank God that David knew us right up until the end, that we didn't "lose him". He was still our wonderful husband and dad, and we were thankful that we were saved from the exasperations of advanced memory loss.

Despite the challenges we've been continuing to focus on the blessings we've received throughout 2020. Numerous lifts have been given, shopping done (which is not always easy for someone else but all my shopping has been perfect), many meals have been made for us and all have been different, with perhaps the exception of Irish Stew which has appeared more

than once (from... guess who?), visits to the tip, many errands and jobs undertaken. We have also had our garden tidied up (there's not a weed in sight!) and now we even have a "Helpline"!! The "Happy Bags" that appear from time to time, are full of lovely treats, and so I could go on and on. Susie's carers have been superb. They are very happy to help me, make a cup of tea, even do a bit of housework (not my favourite pastime), nothing is too much trouble for them. We are grateful.

The year has had its frustrations, with for example, cancelled appointments, difficulties getting the right medication, waiting for physios and trying to book ambulance transport. I think the most distressing thing has been the slow progress of Susie's recovery, but believing, as I have already said, that the LORD's timing is always right, we have to leave it with Him. Added to this, I broke my wrist eleven weeks ago, and although the cast is off, it is still quite painful. Having said this these were few compared with the blessings that we have received.

As I pondered what we have been doing in our 'spare time', I realized that it's amazing how time runs out on us.

We have been reading through the Bible together, plodding through Job, Isaiah and Jeremiah which is not easy reading, but it is making us think. We have each been reading our favourite authors, C.S Lewis and the Bronte sisters for me, John Grisham and "The Bible Speaks Today" study books for Susie, although we have many more. A friend has sent us a jigsaw every other week and we are getting through them too, so if anyone would like a jigsaw, please ask, I'm sure someone would collect and deliver it to you. To keep the brain cells working we enjoy doing crosswords too. We watch the Advent programmes online, the NWBA services and Steve's Vlogg.

So, to sum up our year, the time has been very full and active. The LORD has proved to us that "His Grace is sufficient". We thank you all so much for your constant love and support. We have been strengthened and encouraged by the many reminders that God's loving arms are around us & that He is using His people to fulfil His purposes.

A HAPPY CHRISTMAS AND BLESSED NEW YEAR TO YOU ALL.

**SYLVIA & SUSIE**