

## CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

from Pastor Ian Sleeman



Once again we enter the season of strife, busyness and stress. Oops!!! I mean the season of peace and goodwill.

The question this brought to my mind is "What are my hopes for Christmas this year?" I guess many of us face a busy time with lots of things to organise and lots of people to see or write cards to. I think part of the stress comes from trying to create the perfect Christmas. For others the season may not be so busy, but carries sad memories and an empty feeling.

The thought also struck me "WHAT ARE JESUS' HOPES FOR THIS CHRISTMAS???" Surely he didn't come to bring us a season that makes us feel desperately busy or that brings sadness. Surely he came to bring relief from these things. The first Christmas, God came to earth to meet people and show them what it was to know God and to know his love.

The perfect Christmas doesn't need all the trappings - great though they can be. It can surpass old memories and create new ones. The perfect Christmas is created very simply - people meet with Jesus, accepting the love and friendship he offers. The perfect Christmas needs Jesus, just as it did about 2000 years ago.

### \* A Christmas Prayer \*

Loving Father, help us remember the birth of Jesus,  
That we may share in the song of the angels,  
The gladness of the shepherds,  
And the worship of the wise men.  
Close the door of hate and open the door of love  
All over the world.

Let the kindness come with every gift  
And good desires with every greeting.  
Deliver us from evil by the blessing which  
Christ brings,  
And teach us to be merry with clear hearts.  
May the Christmas morning  
Make us happy to be Thy children,  
And the Christmas evening  
Bring us to our beds with grateful thoughts,  
Forgiving and forgiven,  
For Jesus' sake. Amen!

Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894)

## CALENDAR DECEMBER 2007

Saturday December 1	Family Worship	Mary Barrett 11am
Wednesday December 5	Toddler Club	9.30-11.30 & 13.00-15.00
Thursday December 6	Toddler Club	9.30-11.30
Saturday December 8	Family Worship	Ian Sleeman 11am
Sunday December 9	Adventurer and Pathfinder Club	
Monday December 10	Senior's Club 12 noon	Members' Christmas Party
Wednesday December 12	Toddler Club	9.30-11.30 & 13.00-15.00
Thursday December 13	Toddler Club	9.30-11.30
<b>Saturday December 15</b>	<b>Toy Service</b>	<b>11am Paul Tompkins</b>
<b>Saturday December 15</b>	<b>Concert</b>	<b>7.30pm Adventus Domini</b>
<b>Sunday December 16</b>	<b>Book and Craft Fair</b>	<b>11.00-17.00</b>
Sunday December 16	Adventurer and Pathfinder Club	Club - Christmas Event
Wednesday December 19	Toddler Club	9.30-11.30 & 13.00-15.00
Thursday December 20	Toddler Club	9.30-11.30
<b>Saturday December 22</b>	<b>Christmas Carol Service</b>	<b>Ian Sleeman 11am</b>
<b>Monday December 24</b>	<b>Christmas Eve Service</b>	<b>7pm</b>
<b>Tuesday December 25</b>	<b>Christmas Day Service</b>	<b>10.30am</b>
Saturday December 29	Family Worship	Dennis Porter 11am
Monday December 31	New Year Service & Social	8.00pm

## JANUARY 2008

Saturday January 5	Youth Service	11am Dejan Stojkovic
Sunday January 6	Adventurer and Pathfinder Club	
Monday January 7	Senior's Club	2.00-4.00pm
Wednesday January 9	Toddler Club	9.30-11.30 & 13.00-15.00
Thursday January 10	Toddler Club	9.30-11.30
Saturday January 12	Family Worship	Ian Sleeman 11am
Wednesday January 16	Toddler Club	9.30-11.30 & 13.00-15.00
Thursday January 17	Toddler Club	9.30-11.30
Saturday January 19	Family Worship	11am Mary Barrett
Sunday January 20	Adventurer and Pathfinder Club	
Monday January 21	Senior's Club	2.00-4.00pm
Wednesday January 23	Toddler Club	9.30-11.30 & 13.00-15.00
Thursday January 24	Toddler Club	9.30-11.30
Saturday January 26	Family Worship	11am Ian Sleeman
Wednesday January 30	Toddler Club	9.30-11.30 & 13.00-15.00
Thursday January 31	Toddler Club	9.30-11.30

## FEBRUARY 2008

Saturday February 2	Youth Service	11am Dejan Stojkovic
Sunday February 3	Adventurer and Pathfinder Club	
Monday February 4	Senior's Club	2.00-4.00pm
Wednesday February 6	Toddler Club	9.30-11.30 & 13.00-15.00
Thursday February 7	Toddler Club	9.30-11.30
Saturday February 9	Family Worship	11am Ian Sleeman
Saturday February 16	Family Worship	11am Ian Sleeman
Sunday February 17	Adventurer and Pathfinder Club	
Monday February 18	Senior's Club	2.00-4.00pm
Wednesday February 20	Toddler Club	9.30-11.30 & 13.00-15.00
Thursday February 21	Toddler Club	9.30-11.30
Saturday February 23	Family Worship	11am
Wednesday February 27	Toddler Club	9.30-11.30 & 13.00-15.00
Thursday February 28	Toddler Club	9.30-11.30

## MARCH 2008

Saturday March 1	Women's Day of Pray & Mothering Service	Mary Barrett 11am
Sunday March 2	Adventurer and Pathfinder Club	
Monday March 3	Senior's Club	2.00-4.00pm
Wednesday March 5	Toddler Club	9.30-11.30 & 13.00-15.00
Thursday March 6	Toddler Club	9.30-11.30
Saturday March 8	Family Worship	11am Ian Sleeman
Wednesday March 12	Toddler Club	9.30-11.30 & 13.00-15.00
Thursday March 13	Toddler Club	9.30-11.30
Saturday March 15	Youth Service	11am Dean Stojkovic
Sunday March 16	Adventurer and Pathfinder Club	
Monday March 17	Senior's Club	2.00-4.00pm
Wednesday March 19	Toddler Club	9.30-11.30 & 13.00-15.00
Thursday March 20	Toddler Club	9.30-11.30
Saturday March 22	Easter Service	Ian Sleeman
Saturday March 29	Family Worship	Dennis Porter
Monday March 31	Senior's Club	2.00-4.00pm



Stanborough News

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Editor: June Coombs Layout: Arlon Printers Senior Minister: Ian Sleeman

WINTER 2007

# SONS AND DAUGHTERS

**Donald McFarlane's\* personal, balanced and thought-provoking view of the Slave Trade - with a surprising twist at the end linking it to the Christmas message.**



DONALD MCFARLANE

Keen to know how a black Jamaican like me ended up with a Scottish name, I asked an old aunt of mine to explain. She shared with me that my great, great, great grandfather was asked by the Scottish owner of the estate on which he worked to give his children his surname, as he had no children. I love my association with the Scots but I have a basic handicap in life, I don't know who I really am from a human point of view. I tried doing a family tree a few years ago and was only able to go back four generations. This is a sad legacy of slavery.

At university my son participated in a project in which the genes of a number of Afro-Caribbean students were studied to see where in Africa their ancestors most likely came from. The results indicated that his forebears on his mother's side most likely came from Guinea Bissau. That was the first and only time that we were able as a family to make a genealogical connection with Africa.

This year we are celebrating the passing of the Act of Parliament to abolish the Slave Trade. I must confess that until all the publicity given to the abolition of the Slave Trade I hadn't thought very much about my particular relationship to slavery. In looking closely at the subject, however, I have had to face a number of facts that made me very uncomfortable:

1. The inhumane conditions in which slaves were transported from Africa to the Caribbean and the Americas beggar belief. They were robbed totally of all dignity and treated worse than animals. Olaudah Equiano, a slave who subsequently became an Abolitionist, wrote extensively of the brutal conditions in which slaves were transported.
2. African rulers colluded with Europeans to sell their own people as slaves.
3. Slavery was supported and justified by Christians and the Church itself. Many Christians who supported slavery claimed that the Bible positively endorsed and legitimised slavery. The work of William Wilberforce and the other Abolitionists was not easy, for the pro-slavery lobby thought that they had God on their side.

While it is shameful that the Church supported and justified slavery, even to the extent of owning slaves, we can take courage from the fact that it was Christians who worked for its abolition.

Much is made of what William Wilberforce and the so-called Clapham Sect did in ending slavery. However, long before they started their work the Quakers were arguing against slavery and seeking to bring it to an end.

Slavery in any form is a denial of the common brotherhood of all people.

It is not difficult to treat those close to us as brothers and sisters, those who share our culture, our religion, and our world view. However, often it is more difficult to accept those who are different from us as our brothers and sisters. It is important to remember that all human beings are sons and daughters of God. Consequently, we are all brothers and sisters.

How can we best celebrate the bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade?

### Let me suggest 4 things we can do:

1. Like the Abolitionists 200 years ago we can work to end slavery in our world today. It is estimated that there are about 12 million people throughout the world in slavery today who are forced to work through the threat or use of violence. Some of these unfortunate people are in our own country, brought here against their will and forced to work in inhumane conditions.
2. We can also work to end the exploitation of people in the United Kingdom, especially people who have come from poorer countries. Many have come to what they thought would be wonderful opportunities for self-advancement, only to be forced into various forms of exploitative labour. We need modern day Clarksons, Wilberforces and Equianos to speak out against such injustices, so as to allow such unfortunate people, whatever their nationality, creed or culture, to live in the practical reality of common brotherhood with the rest of us.
3. We must ensure that we do not follow the example of those who used the Bible to defend and justify slavery, in using the Bible to support positions that are unjust or unfair.
4. We should constantly scrutinise our desires, ambitions and plans to ensure that they are in harmony with acceptable ethical standards. Both the Holocaust and the Slave Trade showed that seemingly good people are capable of committing great evil, given the right circumstances.

As heinous and as dehumanising as the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade was it pales into significance when compared with Sin's slavery. Wilberforce is celebrated today as the chief Abolitionist. However, I propose that history's greatest abolitionist is Jesus Christ. In ROMANS 7:21-24 Paul describes enslavement by sin and our utter helplessness in the face of sin. Then comes the good news in verse 25 - "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Two thousand years ago Jesus came into our world in human form for the sole purpose of liberating us from sin's slavery. Joseph, His earthly father, was told, "... and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

On the night He was born the angels declared, "... I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."

Whatever the exigencies of life that we experience, no one can deny us our birthright - our dual birthright by creation and redemption from sin through Jesus Christ. We are sons and daughters of God.

**\*Pastor Mc Farlane is based at the British Union Conference Office on Stanborough Park.**

## COME AND CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS WITH US ...

Saturday 15	11am	Annual Toy Service
Saturday 22	11am	Christmas Service
Monday 24	7pm	Christmas Eve Service
Tuesday 25	10.30am	Christmas Day Service

Everyone is welcome to join us for all of our Christmas services which will consist of a fairly traditional mixture of carols, readings and musical items - by candlelight.



**The Toy Service**, which forms a special part of the Christmas programme, is an annual event which was started over three decades ago by the late big-hearted Alf Kelly MBE (referred to by the 'Watford Observer' as *Watford's Father Christmas*).

Concerned that some local children were missing out at Christmas as their parents could not afford Christmas presents, he set about rallying the members to help fill the gap.

Generous church members donate toys, which are presented to a representative of Watford Council, usually the Chairman or the Mayor, at the service. Since Alf's death this tradition has been continued by his daughter, Pat Walton, seen right with Councillor Rabi Martins who attended last year's service. The donated toys are collected by Watford Social Services which is responsible for distributing them to needy local children over the Christmas period.

