The Master's Mariner

THE MISSION TO SEAFARERS

Caring for seafarers around the world

Christmas –
The State of Origin

In the Old Testament, it is common to find dates of specific events recorded with great precision and for festivals to be both mandatory and celebrated at specified times.

In contrast, the New Testament gives little emphasis to 'holy' days and/or sites. This is because, in the light of a risen, living Saviour such things become insignificant! After all, why fuss about the site of Jesus' death and burial when he is risen from the dead? In his letter to the Christians in ancient Rome (Romans Ch. 14), Paul teaches that Christians who regard one day as 'better' (i.e. more holy) than another, although seeking to honour the Lord, are of a less mature faith than those who 'esteem all days alike'.

Consequently, dates and locations of specific events in Jesus' life are recorded with sufficient detail to preserve their historicity, but with sufficient vagueness to discourage a 'holy day' or 'holy place' mentality. The Gospel writers were concerned to establish Jesus' credentials as Messiah, so their accounts of Jesus' birth emphasise him as a descendant of David and the fulfiller of specific prophecies concerning the Messiah's coming. Jesus' birth date is not relevant to this end. However, simply as a matter of interest, we know that shepherds were able to stay outside at night with their flocks only during the April-November months!

Why then is Christmas on 25th December? 25th December was the 'birthday' of Mithra, a pagan sun-god prominent throughout the Roman Empire. Ancient Rome made this into a holiday known as Saturnalia, honouring the god (not the planet) Saturn and the rebirth of the sun-god during the winter solstice. This holiday began the week before 25th December.

The early Christians didn't have Christmas but, (with the collapse of the Roman Empire), the Church grew more interested in power and politics and sought to increase its own prestige and influence over the population. One of the ways of doing this was to establish Christian 'religiosity' in the form of 'holy days', 'holy sites' etc.. In c.336 AD Emperor Constantine changed Saturnalia into the 'Christian' holiday of Christmas.

Australians love Christmas, but are still very uncomfortable about Jesus' place in it. It's OK to sentimentalise Christmas and to keep Jesus as a harmless, dependent baby, but we dare not consider that the baby in the manger grew up to become… However, despite all the commercialisation and de-Christianisation of Christmas, it still provides opportunities to share and demonstrate the truth about Jesus as we live as festive 'thermostats' (who set the temperature) and not as 'thermometers' (who merely reflect it).

So how should Christians celebrate Christmas? Daily, as we live out the virtues described in Colossians 3:1-17 –humbly aware that Christmas was the beginning of Jesus' journey to Easter!

Ian Porter

Chaplain George Gayagay

Atypical Seafarers

Although most seafarers are very grateful for our ministry to them, some atypical

seafarers treat us with disdain. These seafarers appear to believe that, because we will not charge for our services, our ministry is worthless and we are to be treated as slaves who are at their beck & call.

Recently, one turbaned officer demanded I ring his home for him. He said imperiously, 'Please get me connected to call my wife, that is your job'. I told him, 'It is not my job to call your wife.' To his credit, he then smiled and apologized.

On another recent occasion, a tanker crew came to our Centre. The Chief Engineer and the 2nd Engineer each bought SIM cards and asked me to help them activate the cards. As you probably know from dealing with Telecommunications companies, this can take some time! As I was doing this for him, the 2nd Engineer demanded a refund, saying, 'I am in a hurry, and you are too slow'.

A few minutes later he was relaxing and chatting to a shipmate. I said, 'I thought you had gone out - you said you were in a hurry'. He sneered, 'Why does this concern you; who are you?' and left.

Shortly afterwards one of his shipmates came in and began hitting the pool table, yelling drunken abuse. We told him to stop or we would call the police and refuse him transport back to his vessel. His Chief engineer pleaded with us not to call the police and took him outside.

The bus trip to return them to their vessel was scheduled to leave the Mission at 10pm.

The belligerent 2nd Engineer bought a drink before he left. I asked him why he had spoken to me as he did. He replied 'I am a 2nd Engineer and you are nothing, F#*k you. As I served another of his shipmates, I turned to see our Reception telephone keystation soaked in soft drink, and the 2nd Engineer walking away towards the front door with a can of drink. I grabbed some napkins to dry the keystation as the Chief Engineer tried to apologise for his subordinate. After the bus had left, I found that the telephone had no dial-tone. I radioed our driver to ask him to report this to the Chief Engineer, only to find that, as they were crossing the Harbour Bridge, the drunken 2nd Engineer was banging on the bus windows and getting out of his seat to abuse the driver.

[Editor: *Thankfully, such appalling behaviour is the exception rather than the rule among the 12,000 seafarers we transport and care for each year, but it does happen and sometimes tests our commitment to 'love our neighbour'.*]

Chaplain Un Hui Tay

Recently, I drove the 2nd Engineer from *POS Melbourne* into The Mission. He told me that his certificate needed to be verified and endorsed by the Philippine Consul General as he expected to be promoted to Chief Engineer later in the year. Without the official verification and endorsement, there was a risk that he may not get the promotion, so he asked me to take him to the Consulate.

I brought him there that afternoon, but the Consulate was closed. Although disappointed, he was still positive and said, 'Don't worry. I will come back again the next voyage.' When his vessel retuned to Port Botany, he came in early to the City. The first thing he said to me was, 'Do you remember that you took me to the Philippine Consulate last month and it was closed? Can you take me there today?'

At the Consulate, I introduced myself as a MtS Chaplain from MtS and told them that I was there to assist this seafarer. A few minutes later the Consul, J Anthony Reyes, invited us into his office where I introduced the 2nd Engineer and myself. We had a good conversation and he said that he had met our Principal Chaplain and that he has a very high regard for the ministry of MtS.

The 2nd Engineer explained his situation to the Consul. He was asked to take an oath before the Consul and his certificate was then verified and endorsed. He came back to The Mission smiling and very happy and I congratulated him for his promotion and his success. The following day, I visited his vessel and his colleagues were very happy for him too.

P&O's *Pacific Jewel* came to Darling Harbour, Sydney in mid-October. They had no plans to remain here for a long period of time, but due to a 'propulsion problem', they were required to go into dry dock and remain in port for five to six weeks. While they were docked at Glebe Island I brought some materials and maps to pass on to the crew to let them know about The Mission, but I was denied entry at the Security. I was able to contact the Captain, who then spoke with our Principal Chaplain. He told us that he appreciates our ministry to the seafarers and invited us to visit when the ship is at dry dock.

I received a message from *Pacific Jewel's* 'People & Performance Manager' inviting us to visit the ship on the next Monday at 11am. Although it was my day off, I accepted the invitation and thank God for a fruitful time on board.

Because of this, I was invited to conduct a Sunday Service on board, which was attended by 80 crew. After lunch, I met with the Captain, Lorenzo Paoletti, who expressed his appreciation for our ministry to the officers & crew of *Pacific Jewel*. He presented us with a plaque to display at The Mission.

[Editor: *During Pacific Jewel's stay we cared for 922 crew members, who made full use of our facilities as they sought to fill in their days ashore. Our November internet bill exploded from $1,045.00 to $7,053.98, and we don't know how we're going to pay this bill, but the crew were cared for in ways that will leave a lasting and very positive impression of a Mission that is 'always there for them'.*]

Chaplain Jong Nam Jo

In the last few months of my ministry I have sought to serve the Lord Jesus Christ in all my duties, whether Driving, Crew Visiting, as Duty Chaplain or at Reception. There are many opportunities to minister very practically to the seafarers I meet.

During these times, I also try to encourage them to read the Bible daily as God's living word and to live as genuine Christians.

In October a certain vessel arrived again at Port Botany. Last September the Captain and I played golf together at Eastlakes. On the greens he told me that he was a non-practicing Roman Catholic and that he had little interest in his spiritual life. As we talked he was interested to hear my story of how I came to follow Jesus. It was a good day, albeit a long one because after the golf, in the evening-time, I was on duty as the driver for the seafarers!

A Chief Engineer from same vessel told me he was a Christian but was struggling with his faith in Jesus because his faith was not based on the 'solid rock' of the Word of God, but based on the 'sand' of emotions and supernatural experiences. That night I was Duty Chaplain in the Mission and was able to spend time with him discussing the Christian life. I was able to encourage him to

restart his faith on the right track, with his foundation on God's Word. At the end I gave him a copy of the Bible and encouraged him to read it often.

I will try to meet him when he next comes to Sydney.

Christmas: Tall Tales or True?

What has shaped your understanding of Jesus' birth? Is it shaped by Christmas cards, Christmas Carols and the like, or by the Gospels? Try this quick quiz – you may be surprised at the answers (which may be found at the end of the newsletter)!

1. When Mary learned she was to become pregnant outside of marriage, she called God her...
a) Beloved   b) Helper
c) Master   d) Saviour
e) Tormentor   f) Friend

2. When Mary became pregnant, Joseph ...
a) Was angry   b) Praised God
c) Wanted a divorce   d) Got married
e) Fainted   f) Went to Egypt

3. Who was told to name the baby 'Jesus'?
a) Mary   b) Joseph
c) Mary & Joseph   d) the local Rabbi
e) Mary's relative Elizabeth

4. The name 'Jesus' means ...
a) God loves   b) God rules
c) God saves   d) Strong one
e) Christ   f) Son of God

5. Who told Joseph & Mary to go to Bethlehem?
a) An angel   b) A prophet
c) A high priest   d) Caesar

6. Who prophesied that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem?
a) Mary   b) Joseph
c) Micah   d) Mary's obstetrician

7. Mary & Joseph travelled to Bethlehem with ...
a) Mary on a donkey   b) Levi & Hanna Epstein
c) Both on donkeys   d) Mary on a camel
e) A caravan party   f) The Bible doesn't say

8. What did the inn-keeper say to Joseph& Mary?
a) Ah, you should have booked!
b) Come back after Christmas!
c) There's no room   d) I've only the stable
e) Both c) & d)   f) No one knows

9. When the shepherds saw the angel, they were...

a) Washing   b) Excited
c) Singing   d) Terrified
e) Sleeping   f) The Bible doesn't say

10. *What did the angels sing?*
a) 'Joy to the world'   b) 'Jingle Bells'
c) 'White Christmas'   d) 'Glory to God'
e) 'Hallelujah'   f) 'Silent Night'

11. *Which animals were present at Jesus' birth?*
a) Sheep and cows   b) Cows and asses
c) Sheep and goats   d) Donkeys and camels
e) Goats and oxen   f) The Bible doesn't say

12. *How many wise men were there?*
a) Four   b) Seven
c) Three   d) Bible doesn't say

13. *When King Herod heard of Jesus' birth, he ...*
a) Planned a party   b) Sent expensive gifts
c) Asked Joseph to come and see him
d) Ordered many babies' deaths
e) Followed the star   f) None of the above

14. *The wise men found Jesus in ...*
a) A stable   b) The inn
c) A house   d) Good health
e) The bullrushes   f) Record time

15. *Jesus had his beginning in ...*
a) 4 AD   b) 4 BC
c) Eternity   d) 0 AD
e) 6 BC

16. *Where are the Christmas details in the Bible?*
a) Matthew   b) Mark
c) Luke   d) John
e) Matthew & Mark   f) Matthew & Luke
g) All of the above

Chaplain Jack Starmans

Most of the seafarers I speak with are religious by birth, rather than having a personal faith of their own. They are usually cultural Christians, Muslims, Hindus, or Buddhists. But occasionally I speak with a seafarer who has a personal faith of his own.

A short time ago I spoke with a seafarer called Muhammad, who is a Muslim by faith, not just by birth. We got into a discussion while I was driving the bus.

When we arrived at The Mission the other seafarers went into the centre, but Muhammad stayed in the bus talking with me. He would not be convinced that the Christian Bible was anymore than fairy stories about Isa (Jesus). He was fully convinced that the Angel Gabriel had dictated the Koran to Muhammad. However, he agreed to take a copy of Luke's Gospel and read about Isa (Jesus).

We can pray that God will open Muhammad's eyes as he reads His Word.

Flying Angel Update

In our last newsletter to you I described the circumstances of The Sydney Bethel Union and the impact of those circumstances upon us. In addition

to seeking alternative properties from which we would minister, The SBU has invited Property Consultants APP to consider options for Flying Angel House. Since October a team from APP have inspected FAH a number of times and will report back to SBU with suggestions / recommendations in the near future.

In the meantime we continue as usual, thankful for the increased numbers of seafarers and the financial provisions we have enjoyed and trusting that, whatever decisions are made concerning our future location, they will serve to enhance the effectiveness of our ministry.

Answers to the quiz

1. [d] – Luke 1:47	2. [c] – Matthew 1:19
3. [b] - Matthew 1:21	4. [c] - Matthew 1:21
5. [d] – Luke 2:1	6. [c] – Micah 5:2
7. [f] – Luke 2:1-7	8. [f] – Luke 2:1-7
9. [d] – Luke 2:9	10. [d] – Luke 2:13,14
11. [f] – Luke 2:1-7	12. [d] – Matthew 2:1,7,16
13. [d] – Matthew 2:16	14. [c] - Matthew 2:11
15. [c] - John 1:1,2; Colossians 1:16,17; Hebrews 1:2	16. [f] – Matthew 1:18 – 2:23; Luke 1:26 – 2:41