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It's a Wonderful Life....



“Each man’s life touches so many others.”

That’s a line from the classic Christmas Hollywood movie “It’s a Wonderful Life”. It’s one of those films that’s on every Christmas. If you haven’t seen it before I won’t spoil the amazing feel good ending for you, but just to say that James Stewart stars as George Bailey – a man who gave up his dreams of exploring the world, to settle down and save his father’s company – the Bailey Building and Loan Society – in order to carry on the noble principles of his father and stop the mean-hearted plans and schemes of his rival. As he observes the achievements of some of his friends he feels his life has been wasted – viewing it as an ordinary humdrum existence which has had little significance. But he sees a different perspective when an angel, called Clarence, reveals to him the impact his life has had. “Each man’s life touches so many others.” Clarence tells him. And gradually George realises that his life wasn’t really so ordinary and insignificant as he first thought.

An ordinary life...

The Bible tells the story of a number of seemingly ordinary individuals who experience some extraordinary events: Mary – a teenager from Nazareth; Joseph – a carpenter, engaged to Mary; some shepherds – rough and ready blokes, weather worn, not known for their intelligence; some star gazers from the East – not Jewish men, but teachers from a different religion who were more akin to a cross between Brian Cox and Ghandi. Here were a collection of different people, ordinary individuals with different backgrounds. Like George Bailey in the film they probably had their own dreams and expectations as to how their lives would turn out. And also like George, I guess their lives did not turn out quite as they imagined them to be. Yet as the

Bible tells us their stories we discover how the events that unfolded meant that each of their lives had an impact on the others they encountered, and none of them had quite the ordinary lives that perhaps they imagined.

In our celebrity obsessed culture today, it would be easy to feel that most of us fit into that category of having ordinary lives. Could it be that our lives too are not as ordinary as we might think?

No ordinary child...

Each of the people that we have mentioned from the Bible were drawn together by the birth of a child. Children often have a way of drawing people together, don't they? Their presence can frequently break through the barriers that pain or discord can build, in a way that can be quite miraculous. But this child that connected these people was no ordinary child. Mary, the young teenager, was told that her Son would be called Jesus, the Son of the Most High God. Joseph was told to go ahead and marry Mary, and that he should call the child Jesus because he would save people from their sins. The shepherds were told that the baby was their Saviour – Christ the Lord. And the visitors from the East came looking for the baby who was born to be king of the Jews. The child that brought these strangers together was Jesus,

the Son of God.

As his life touched these characters from the moment of his birth, so he continued to impact hundreds of other people during his life on earth, and millions of others over the last 2000 years. And Jesus still changes lives today.

Life in all its fullness....

But how does he impact our life today?

I would like to suggest that there is no such thing as an ordinary life. Each life is unique and valuable in its own right. And each life has a purpose that it alone can fulfil. As Clarence the angel said to George Bailey, "Each life touches so many others". We each make a difference to the world around us, and to the people we encounter. In some cases that impact is more intentional than in others.

You may remember the story in the news of Luke Cameron, who set out at the start of 2014 to do a good deed every day for a year in memory of a good friend. His random acts of kindness included taking the rubbish out for an elderly neighbour, baking cakes for friends, and even paying for the petrol of the person who stood next to him at the till. Luke Cameron impacted the lives of many people in that year, some of whom were complete strangers to him, and he inspired many people to follow his example. But as George Bailey discovered in the film, so often we never realise the impact of our actions, and our lives touch more people than we can ever know.

There is no such thing as a life that is insignificant. No such thing as a life that is ordinary. But impacting the lives of others for the better is only half of the potential

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we each have. Because God has a “wonderful life” for each of us that he longs for us to enjoy. Jesus said: I have come in order that you might have life – life in all its fullness. Now of course, as George Bailey well knew, a wonderful life is not necessarily a life that is immune to the difficulties and sadnesses of our world. But living our life with Jesus brings another dimension to our life, and brings a fulfilment that nothing else can match. Jesus enables us to reach our potential and live life to the fullest, satisfying us in a way that materialism and consumerism cannot match, giving us a purpose and a

sense of achievement that is greater than any profession or act of kindness, although they may well be a part of that purpose, enriching our lives in ways that are beyond our dreams.

This Christmas, I wonder, would you consider allowing Jesus to enter your world, to impact your life today – would you let him show you the wonderful life that he has in store for you, and see the extraordinary plans that he has for your life?

Rev Leesa McKay ~ Minister CBC



Why not celebrate this Christmas with us?

Sunday 13th December
 2:00pm Children’s Party for 2-11 year olds
 4:00pm Carol Service for young families

Sunday 20th December
 3:00pm Christmas Outlook for seniors
 7:00pm Carols by Candlelight
 Enjoy a glass of mulled wine and a mince pie with us after the service

Christmas Eve Celebration
 11:15pm Midnight Service

Christmas Day Praise
 10:00am A 45 min service celebrating the true meaning of Christmas

Central Baptist has close links with Hadeth Baptist Church in Beirut. With more than one million registered refugees in Lebanon, Connect asked Hadeth how they have responded to this crisis.

Refugees of war, displaced people, homeless, asylum seekers... many names to describe one situation: People in need of LOVE.



In Lebanon, and after experiencing a good 30 years of civil war, crime, abuse, mayhem, and constant killings & bombings, we learned to hate the Syrian people. "You're a Syrian", became a curse word on the Lebanese street.

But God came and changed this reality. It was a hard and painful lesson to learn: a lesson of forgiveness; a lesson of love - God's love.

When the Syrian refugees started coming to Lebanon, God worked through our hearts and churches to accept the refugees and to start reaching out to them with physical aid. But that was not enough, we felt God's hand compel us to start visiting them in the streets, in small apartments, in run-down shacks, under staircases, on roofs of buildings, and everywhere else that they were living. As we sat with the Syrian refugees and heard their war stories, their loss, their hurt, and their anger, we were humbled and moved beyond hatred and history. Slowly Hadath Baptist Church, as well as

many other Lebanese churches, were packed with Syrian refugees coming to see the reason behind this active love that we were showing them. Although some refugee families started coming to church with the belief that they might be eligible to aid, the reason that kept them coming was this Love being demonstrated in the lives of the people who were there. Soon they became very much a part of our church family as any other Lebanese person.

After one year of relief aid, we started life groups in their homes as well as intensive discipleship for those who were interested. Today we celebrate the baptism of many of the refugee families and the existence of many indigenous leaders among them!

We have seen God work in the lives of the Syrian refugee families as much as our lives.

His Love has changed us!

We were a people in need of Love!

Lily Malky ~ Hadath Baptist Church

Doctor Foster - some serious, hardcore self-destruction



I got hooked on the five-part BBC drama *Doctor Foster* within minutes. It's beautifully shot and acted; Suranne Jones is mesmerising as GP Gemma Foster, who discovers that her husband of 14 years has been cheating on her. With a 23-year-old. For two years. It's a very simple story which is many ways is banal, but the quality of the acting, and especially the central character, sets it apart.

On Wednesday the final episode aired and I found myself indulging all my least sophisticated knee-jerk emotional reactions, shouting very rude things at all the various characters who have hurt Gemma: her husband, Simon, who has cheated, lied, and shows no remorse when he is found out; Simon's girlfriend, Kate, whose disgust for Gemma makes her easy to hate; Gemma's so-called friends who had known about the affair for months and even socialised with the adulterous pair, saying nothing to Gemma.

It is only in the final episode that Gemma lets on that she knows about

Simon's affair. She manoeuvres herself and Simon into an impromptu dinner at Kate's parents' house, enjoying the fact that Simon is uncomfortably aware of his two lives colliding. This is particularly worrying for him, as Kate's parents do not know their daughter is having an affair with a married man at least 15 years her senior, and Kate's father has been secretly funding his precarious property development project. Gemma's comments during the dinner become increasingly inappropriate, until she finally lobbs the grenade, telling the whole room about the affair with relish, and with predictably catastrophic effect. Kate slaps her in a fury; Kate's father screams for Gemma to get out of the house; Simon sits there paralysed. He finally has to choose: will he go with Kate, who has stormed out, or with Gemma, who has been thrown out? He chooses Kate, and Gemma goes home alone to their son.

This is all highly enjoyable: Gemma has been badly wronged and it seems right that those who have wronged her be shamed, insulted and made to face up to their crimes against her.

But even while shouting at the TV I was uncomfortably aware that, even though her behaviour might be in some way just, it isn't right. It is an orgy of self-destruction in which she takes so many people down with her. The moment when she stands outside Kate's parents' house alone, watching her husband drive away with his pregnant lover, is a moment of real desolation. Despite everything, she loves her husband, and he has chosen someone else over her. Despite all her righteous anger, she has still lost the battle. And she has hurt innocent people along with the guilty: Kate's parents, who are nice people; they probably needed to know the truth, but not like that. Kate's teenage brother, who has to hear his sister's sex life discussed in lurid terms. And her neighbours, whom she visits after the disastrous

dinner party, in order to throw another grenade. Gemma tells the wife, a friend of hers, that she has slept with her husband. An act of adultery Gemma committed after she learned the truth about Simon's affair, because if he has done it to her, why shouldn't she do it to him, and to another wife?

I'm an emotional person, and quite a jealous one: goodness knows how much grace I would show in a similar situation. But as Gemma allowed her pain to explode out of her in such a devastating way I thought of Jesus' command to love our enemies. It's not just, it's not fair, and I know from experience of forgiving far less serious wrongs that it's not easy. But it is the better path.

Rev Emma Nash ~ Leigh Road Baptist

Want to find out more about Christianity?

If you would like to find out more why not join our next Alpha course starting in January?

This is an opportunity for anyone to explore the Christian faith. It's relaxed, low-key, friendly and fun. It's a place where no question is too simple or too difficult.

To find out more email
info@centralbaptistchelmsford.org



Going Nuts for Christmas

When I was a little girl - which is rather a long time ago—I always associated nuts with Christmas. You always knew Christmas was coming when you saw nuts in the supermarkets - brazil nuts, walnuts, hazelnuts. They were sold in their shells. You needed a strong pair of nutcrackers if you wanted to eat them and it was always a challenge to get the brazil nuts out whole. Life has moved on. Nuts are no longer just for Christmas. We can get nuts all the year round. There are more varieties.

Cashews are now the most popular nut in Britain. Most nuts come ready shelled and they are often in shiny packets with a variety of seasonings. We take nuts for granted. Indeed we should probably eat more of them. Did you know that people who eat a handful of nuts four times a week are less likely to develop coronary heart disease or type 2 diabetes? Yet, do we ever stop to ask how they get on the shelves? How do they get here? Where do they come from?

Behind every packet of nuts there is a farmer and a family and a community whose ability to survive and prosper depends on their ability to market their crop. Brazil nuts, for example, came mainly from Bolivia rather than Brazil and are found deep within the Amazonian rainforest. The nuts are contained within heavy round pods known as coconuts that fall from

trees up to 160 feet tall onto the forest floor. The forest is vast. Coinacapa is a co-operative of nut collectors based in Northern Bolivia where the rainforest covers the equivalent of 16 million international football pitches! Gatherers can spend weeks in the forest collecting the nuts and it is a vital source of income for remote communities such as the village of Puerto Perez on the edge of the forest which consists of just 40 families. Gathering the nuts enables them to earn a living in a sustainable way that preserves the unique forest ecosystem. Coinacapa sells its nuts on a Fairtrade basis to Liberation Nuts

The humble Brazil nut is one of the UK's most beloved superfoods and a true nutritional powerhouse. It is a great source of protein, minerals and several amino acids that help protect the body from serious disease.

and its members receive a Fairtrade price which reflects the effort they put into their work so that, as one of the workers explains, "It's as if we've gained our freedom. It feels like we are not slaves any more. We have more income, more work and more dignity."

Cashew nuts on the other hand are cultivated on farms. Aniamma Roy for example has been a cashew nut farmer for 15 years in Kerala, India. Her family's farm is in a remote hilly area. At one stage the farmers there were so poor that many were planning to abandon their land and move down to the plains in the hope of finding work as day labourers even though such work is precarious and poorly paid. Fortunately Fair Trade Alliance Kerala (FTAK) was able to help the farmers by providing them with long-term loans to plant crops



such as cashews and coffee. FTAk is a workers' co-operative and by selling their produce through this organisation on Fairtrade terms the farmers were able to secure a regular income that helped them stay on their land and plan a future which would enable them to hand on their farms to their children.

Aniamma Roy works hard. She starts each day at 5am by milking the cows and then works on the farm with her husband until late at night. In addition she is now vice-chairperson of FTAk and has to find time to leave her village at least once a month to attend co-operative meetings. Yet, at least she now has a secure living and a future for her family. We need small-scale farmers. They provide around 70% of the world's food and have a vested interest in sustainable farming that works with the environment because they want to pass their land onto their children. The Fairtrade premium has, for example, been used to erect solar powered fencing that protects the cashew trees without harming the elephants that like to munch on them.

FTAk markets its cashews through Liberation Nuts which buys nuts from

co-operatives of small-scale growers and farmers who in turn own 44% of the company. Liberation Nuts brings together cashew nut farmers from India and El Salvador, peanut farmers from Malawi and Nicaragua and brazil nut gatherers from the Amazon rainforest and is the UK's only Fairtrade farmer-owned nut company. Small-scale farmers like these are vital to the world's economy. After all, human civilisation depends ultimately on an adequate food supply. Yet farmers like these make up 50% of the world's hungriest people. If we are to solve the problem of world hunger and if we are to conserve the world's resources for future generations we need to ensure that these farmers receive an adequate reward for their products. We need to support brands such as Liberation Nuts.

Unfortunately at the moment it is quite difficult to buy Fairtrade nuts on the High Street because companies such as Liberation Nuts don't have the advertising clout and bargaining power of the multi-nationals who dominate the food industry. So it is all

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Call the Midwife!



I came to the UK (Scotland actually) to train to be a midwife almost 30 years ago. I left my home, my family, to follow what I believed to be a stepping stone to serving as a nurse/midwife in the 'outback' of Australia. I was given the words of Jeremiah 29:11

"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

How strange that God's idea of a future turned out differently to mine!

In my 30 years as a midwife I have seen the role change substantially. We are less driven by the holistic needs of women to being driven by national standards and statutes, and although our priorities remain the same- the safety of mum and baby- the processes by which this happens are more rigid in their structure.

You'll be pleased to know that the one thing that has not changed substantially is childbirth!

As a Christian I believe my role has always been to help bring meaning to the experience of childbirth in both its joys and its disappointments. This is part of bringing God's love to parents and their families. It

is difficult to share faith overtly at times but prayer is powerful and I consider it a privilege to have the opportunity to do this for others, particularly at the beginning of a person's life.

In the last few years I have become more aware of the sporadic nature of the psychological and emotional support offered in the maternity service. Partly because of this, and also because of a long standing personal desire to explore the possibilities of counselling, I have for the past three years been doing a counselling course here in Chelmsford. This has been and continues to be hard work, but I believe this is a vocation I need to test. Whether this is something that I can indeed use in my professional area of midwifery - most of you will be aware that childbirth is a highly emotive experience, not just for mothers but their families too – or whether it is something that I take up personally in a general sense, I am unsure yet. I wait and listen to God's voice in this.....

"Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you."

Psalms 55:22

Jo Elgar

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the more important to buy them wherever you find the Fairtrade Mark. The Fairtrade stall at church has a selection of Liberation Nut packets as well as peanut butter and is open once a month on Sundays and on Tuesdays in term-time from 10.30am to 2pm. Every purchase helps farmers

like Amimma to get a proper reward for their hard work and promotes sustainable farming. Nuts are no longer just for Christmas but if you buy Fairtrade nuts you can make the world a better place and enjoy the spirit of Christmas all the year round.

Gill Parker

The CBC Fairtrade stall is open on the third Sunday of each month after the morning and evening services and also on Tuesdays in term-time between 10.30am and 2pm.

You can also order Traidcraft products direct from traidcraft.co.uk

A Christmas Carol, by Charles Dickens in aid of GOSH

If you are like my husband and I you will find Christmas incomplete without revisiting Dickens' classic tale of redemption, "A Christmas Carol". A few years ago our love of this story led to my husband, Jim, adapting it to be performed by 7 voices and together with the help of friends we raised nearly £500 for Great Ormond Street Hospital at two performances. Two years later we again assembled a cast, begged, stole and borrowed costumes and raffle prizes and raised about £450. Once again the draw of the story has spurred us to reform. This time under the auspices of Theatre At Baddow.

As many people previously told us they would have come if there was a matinee we have two scheduled at 2:30pm on the 19th and 20th of December in addition to evening performances at 8:00pm on the 18th, 19th and 20th. Tickets will include a hot drink and a mince pie or biscuit and a large proportion of the ticket money will go to Great Ormond Street Hospital. Performances will be in The Reading Room, Bell Street, Great Baddow. (There is ample free parking nearby and no stairs to negotiate.) Why don't you enjoy again the story which has the true spirit of Christmas at it's heart?

Tickets at £6 - £8 available from www.theatreatbaddow.co.uk

Beth Crozier

About our twin: Backnang

The Chelmsford Town Twinning Association mentions *'the concept of twinning spread in this country, in Europe and across the world after the Second World War when people of goodwill sought consciously to build contact and friendship with communities in other countries and to promote a better understanding of each other. Now the main purpose of twinning is to widen horizons and promote international friendship'*.

Our church began its twinning with a Baptist Church, the Friedenskirche in Backnang, just prior to the commencement of the official town twinning arrangements and there has been a steady flow of visitors between our two churches every two or so years since.

If you visit Backnang Square in Chelmsford you will discover the distance to Backnang is 950 kilometers, or about 594 miles. An inscription on the 'friendship' bridge joining the square with Annonay Walk symbolises the friendship between Annonay, Backnang and Chelmsford. Backnang is the capital of the region of Baden-Wurttemberg and is about 18 miles north-east of Stuttgart in Southern Germany. The town of Backnang celebrated its 750th Anniversary as a recorded town in 1987. Situated on the banks of the picturesque river Murr and is surrounded by beautiful countryside, characterised by gently rolling hills and idyllic orchards. Following

discussions between major electronics firms there and Marconi in Chelmsford, twinning began in 1990.

A party of 15 members from CBC set off by train in September to spend the weekend in Backnang. The language barriers challenged us to think about why our friends are often competent in the use of English whilst we are so reluctant, or unable, to speak in German.

We enjoyed a guided tour of Langenburg Castle and its many interesting exhibits. The castle is set high on a hill and is the residence of the royal Hohenlohe-Langenburg family. It has important family links with our own royal family and both the Queen and Prince Charles have



Langenburg Castle

made state visits there. Lunch at the castle cafe afforded excellent views of the Jagst valley. This was followed by a visit to the town of Schwäbisch Hall whose former wealth and importance was founded on salt, the 'white gold', during medieval times. Salt was produced here as early as the fifth century and the city still boasts one of the most attractive spas in the region



The walled city of Nordlingen

and holds various annual festivals and a salt day in the autumn. Today the wealth of this area can still be seen in some gothic buildings such as St. Michael's Church (rebuilt 1427–1526) with its impressive stairway (1507). The church houses a rich treasury of fine works of art and has a very impressive organ whilst the tower offers a spectacular view of the old town. The town became a festival town in 1925 and professional open-air performances have been held on the 508 year old steps leading up to the church since that time. Another quality venue for theatre is the Globe theatre modelled after the world famous original in London. It holds 550 seats and has outstanding acoustics.

We also visited the town of Nordlingen, one of only three in Germany having a complete city wall. (2.6 km long with five gates, 11 towers and one bastion). Part of our tour was to the Rieskrater Museum in the well-preserved medieval tanner's quarter where we marvelled at a piece of real moonstone, which is a loan from NASA to express its thanks for letting its astronauts train in the nearby quarry in 1970 for the Apollo 14 mission. Nordlingen dates its recorded history to 898 having celebrated its 1100th anniversary in 1998

On Sunday we shared in the church service together. Their pastor preached, with a very helpful interpretation into English provided for us, on the Biblical story of Moses' calling at the burning bush. He encouraged us all to consider that God has a specific calling for every individual mentioning it is our task to discover it and to gain a new passion for the aspirations and dreams that God has already given us.

Backnang church is currently being challenged to engage with the newly arrived 200 Syrian refugees currently housed in a gymnasium in the town.

Peter Prentice

“Seek the kingdom of God above all else,...” Matthew 6: 33 NLT

I wonder is this a message that can speak into the heart of Christmas celebrations? These are the words Jesus speaks as an adult and yet it seems so relevant at this time of the year when we reflect and celebrate Jesus as an infant, because throughout the celebrations our hearts and minds can so easily be distracted.

Before the frivolity of the festive season begins this is where our hearts and minds should be centred – on God. Christmas is a time to focus on God for it is a time we remember

that He moved into our world and all our lives.

Christmas is an opportunity to direct attention on God as we remember the time when He moved in to offer His direct help to humanity. Christmas illuminates the fact that things are about to change in a positive way. God becomes directly intertwined with us, as had been the original intention from the moment of our creation. Christmas is all about Him coming to us and this should stimulate and reassure our minds for the year ahead, where we can welcome the positive change God can make in our lives.

Christmas, therefore, is a cause for **great celebration!** We can welcome the festivities and the opportunities they present to celebrate this awesome act of love – God moving in with humanity and leaving His heavenly home in order to be with us and love us. These celebrations can become muddled with the additional features of the season, which have gradually crept in over the years, and this is why those words of Jesus – **“Seek the kingdom of God above all else”** are key



words to remind ourselves of at Christmas and for the year ahead as we **celebrate our direct relationship with God.**

Let these words of Jesus then act as a daily guide throughout Advent, Christmas and into the New Year.

Naomi Rowlands

Bangladesh

Bangladesh is described as a secular state, but there have still been cases reported of pressure on Christians to deny their faith and of them having to give up their shops or businesses. There have also been attacks on atheists and on people of other faiths.

Bangladesh is also a country that is increasingly beset by natural disasters – these have been worsened by the effects of climate change.

Pray for the Government of Bangladesh, that stability will come to the nation after a year of various ups and downs and political challenges.

Thailand

Over 95 per cent of Thailand's people are Buddhist, albeit from different traditions. The next largest faith group is Muslim, with Christians only comprising approximately one per cent of the population.

Pray for the various groups in Thailand who find themselves largely excluded from their community.

Pray for BMS mission partner NightLight, reaching out to women in the red light area of Bangkok.



(Extracts from BMS prayer diary
bmsworldmission.org)

Somalia

UK Prime Minister David Cameron announced at the end of September that the British government will send dozens of British troops to support African Union (AU) troops fighting against the Islamist militant group, al-Shabaab.

Al-Shabaab has publicly declared that it 'wants Somalia free of any Christians'. Those who are suspected of being Christians are frequently killed on the spot, meaning Christians must keep their faith completely secret.

Pray that the AU and international troops will be able to restore peace and stability to Somalia

Pray for protection for Somali Christians, who are at great risk if their faith becomes known.



Open Doors

60 years of serving persecuted Christians

(Extracts from the Open Doors prayer resource: www.opendoorsuk.org)

Church Diary ~ Main Events

Key dates to put in your diary

<i>Sun 13th Dec</i>	Children's Christmas Party 2:00 pm Carols for Young Families 4:00pm
<i>Sun 20th Dec</i>	Christmas Outlook 3:00pm Carols by Candlelight 7:00pm followed by mince pies and mulled wine
<i>Christmas Eve</i>	Midnight Communion 11:15pm
<i>Christmas Day</i>	Family Christmas Day Praise 10:00am
<i>Thurs 31st Dec</i>	Watchnight Service
<i>Mon 11th Jan</i>	New Alpha Course begins

Regular Events

<i>Monday</i>	Ladies Circuit Training 8:00pm Badminton Club 8:00pm
<i>Tuesday</i>	Baby & Toddler Group 10:00am Ozone - youth club for any young person in school years 7-13 7:00 - 9:00pm
<i>Thursday</i>	Girls' & Boys' Brigades
Check our website for latest details	

We'd love to hear from you.

To get in touch you can email us at: info@centralbaptistchelmsford.org, call us on 01245 264163 or pop in and see us at: Central Baptist Church, Victoria Road South, Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 1LN

If you'd like to contribute to Connect or have any comments then you can email us at: connect@centralbaptistchelmsford.org

