

The Watford Word

www.watfordchurchofchrist.org

What's on

Sunday 29th Dec: 10:30 AM. Malcolm speaking on Psalm 91. Pot-luck lunch. Bring and share.

January Theme - Psalm 91, and the Lord's Supper

Sunday 5th Jan: 10:30 AM. Stefan speaking

Sunday 12th Jan: 10:30 AM. Malcolm speaking

Wednesday 15th January: 8 PM. "From Seed to Harvest" - outreach equipping series first Zoom session - "The Heart of Outreach"

Sunday 19th Jan: 10:30 AM. Malcolm speaking

Sunday 26th Jan: 10:30 AM. Daniel Miller & Emma Whitworth are our visiting speakers from the East London international church of Christ.

Monday 27th January: First mentoring training session on Zoom

Sunday 02 Feb: 10:30 AM. Toby Agerbak is our speaker from the NW region of the London ICOC.

Wednesday 5th Feb: 8 PM. "From Seed to Harvest" - outreach equipping series second Zoom session - "Building Relationships" with guest speakers TJ & Sonia Masalanami.

3 Christmas 'Corrections'

Based on an article by Michael F. Bird on substack.

1. Christmas is not based on pagan festivals

It's often said that the date of Christmas is based on the pagan festivals of Saturnalia or Sol Invictus. Is this true? No evidence of a connection exists until the 1100's in a marginal note on a manuscript of the writings of the Syriac biblical commentator Dionysius bar-Salibi.

Early Christians believed Jesus was conceived on March 25 (the Feast of the Annunciation), which would place His birth exactly nine months later, on December 25. The fact that it coincides with the festival of Saturnalia or any other pagan festival is a coincidence.

"Most significantly, the first mention of a date for Christmas (c. 200) and the earliest celebrations that we know about (c. 250-300) come in a period when Christians were not borrowing heavily from pagan traditions of such an obvious character." How December 25 Became Christmas, A. McGowan

2. Mary & Joseph didn't struggle to find a hotel



The word translated 'inn' can also mean 'guest room'. Mary and Joseph were likely staying with somebody they knew. The overcrowded Palestinian peasant home would be single-roomed with an animal stall under the same roof. Sometimes, the only distinction was that the family was raised on a platform. That form of home existed for thousands of years. My parents' house, built in the 1450's, was originally like this. A dirt floor area for the animals and a raised platform for the sleeping and eating area for the family at one end. All under the same roof. This is why the latest version of the NIV reads:

"She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them." Lk 2:7

3. Xmas isn't taking Christ out of Christmas

Have you heard people complain that using 'Xmas' is taking Christ out of Christmas? Maybe. Maybe not. Consider the ancient practice of writing the 'nomina sacra', or sacred names.

"In ancient manuscripts, certain sacred names could be abbreviated so that God/Theos was TS, Jesus/Iesous

was IS, and Christ/Christos was XS. So changing "Christmas" to "Xmas" is not taking Christ out of Christmas, it is using the Christian scribal tradition of turning Christ's name into a nomina sacra, a sacred name." Michael Bird

Examples are in the Codex Sinaiticus in the British Library (<https://codexsinaiticus.org/en/>). Why did the early Christian writers use abbreviations? Firstly, writing materials were extremely expensive. Secondly, shortening divine names made them stand out. Thirdly, they may have followed the Jewish tradition of not speaking or writing God's name.

Conclusion

How important are these Christmas corrections? On one level, school nativity plays with a mean innkeeper or a unicorn in the manger are no big deal. However, sceptics often dismiss the Christmas story as myth or legend, partly due to misconceptions or inaccuracies presented by Christians themselves. By sharing the story with care and clarity, we can better engage with those who question the Bible's credibility.

God bless and Merry Christmas! Malcolm

Afghanistan

In agreement with the Taliban, we started 2 new courses earlier this year. 195 students were accepted onto the courses which focussed on a) Mobile Phone Repair and b) Graphic design (websites etc). 54 of these stepped out part-way because they secured jobs or set up their own businesses. (One of these was interviewed on national TV). The rest are graduating, receiving certificates from the Afghan Ministry and "start-up kits"). We have also been asked to commence a new course for Electrical Hardware (again a necessity for rebuilding the country).

Your brothers, Barry & Leon



To give online:



WATFORD CHRISTMAS COLLECTION
<https://www.hopeworldwide.org.uk/give>

- Select amount
- Tick "I am a UK taxpayer" if you are one (this gets an additional 25% from the government)
- Select "Afghanistan General" from designation dropdown
- Put "Watford Collection" in the comment box

Aspirations

Preparing for 2025

As we think about our vision for next year, our church aspirations might be worth revisiting. I list them below.

Our prayer is that we can make God look G.R.E.A.T. by focusing on these five aspirations:

1. God-focused
2. Relationship-based
3. Enabling our children to become Christians
4. Always free, yet spiritual
5. Toiling to build the church well

Please take time to pray about these aspirations. Are they still relevant? Do they need updating? What do they mean to you and this church?

Watford Contribution Details

Church bank account: Three Counties churches of Christ
HSBC

Sort Code: 401915

Account Number: 04759613



Watford Media

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watfordchurchofchrist6708>

Podcast: <https://www.podbean.com/pu/pbblog-aiinq-iaef00>