

# THE OPEN DOOR

ON THIS DAY OUR SAVIOUR WAS BORN



*Penicuik North Kirk  
Newsletter number 304  
December 2007*

## Dear friend

“It’s the last thing I expected!” How often we will have spoken these words when something totally unexpected has turned up. Perhaps you can recall just such an incident.

Pregnancy was the last thing that Mary’s relative, Elizabeth, expected. In the early years of their marriage, she and her husband, Zechariah, had longed for a child, but she had never conceived – and now she was too old to bear children. Yet, thanks to the God for whom nothing is impossible, she and Zechariah were to be proud parents and they welcomed what God was doing in their lives.

Pregnancy was the last thing that Mary herself expected. In fact, it must have been a bit of a shock. After all, she was engaged to Joseph – and we know that he wasn’t the father. Remember that his first reaction on discovering that Mary was pregnant was to call the whole thing off, thinking that she must have been playing around with other guys and playing him for a fool. That’s probably the story the gossips spread. But then Joseph discovered the truth that Mary had already been told – she was going to be the mother of the Messiah and had conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. Of course she was scared and naturally sought support from her relative, Elizabeth. But she knew that bearing the Messiah was something God wanted her to do and welcomed what God was doing in her life. Elizabeth’s – and her baby’s! – reaction when Mary reached Zechariah’s home further confirmed that these strange circumstances were of God – Elizabeth burst into an exuberant song of praise to God and the baby in her womb skipped like a lamb for sheer joy. Everything centred on Jesus and the hope he came to bring.

And for us this Christmas everything still centres on Jesus and the hope he brings –

## *And it’s a hope for the individual:*

Mary’s reaction was very personal and the parallel stories of these women are a ‘picture’ of how we can come to see God’s activity in our own lives, see how he reveals his interest in our intimate details and his desire that we see beyond the obvious and discover the unexpected.

## *It’s a hope for the poor:*

The song Mary sang particularly echoes the Old Testament message of freedom and justice and centres on this baby who will be good news for those who are disadvantaged in this life – he will knock tyrants off their high horses and give the victims the place of honour, he will sit the starving poor down to a banquet and leave the callous rich out in the cold – a lot of Jesus’ future preaching echoes this message.

## *And it’s a hope for God’s people:*

Almost every word of Mary’s song is a quotation from the Old Testament and links Jesus’ story with Israelite tradition. So the scene is set: later, John the Baptist will point the way to Jesus and his final victory over the powers of evil – to Jesus who is the culmination of the hopes of God’s people down the centuries and in whom we are called to put our trust.

This Christmas may we all discover – or rediscover – the amazing truth that everything does indeed centre on Jesus and the hope he still brings. So this Christmas let us renew our trust in him.

Your friend and minister



## Dear Friends

During the summer, the day starts early. Each morning, at about 3.30am, we are awoken by the many cockerels surrounding our house so it is no wonder that it is normal for people

to rise and get on with their work before the heat of the day. This was brought home to us some time ago when at 4.05am we received a telephone call. Jumping out of bed, and concerned that some major crisis had arisen, I was greeted by one of the priests on the other side of the country asking whether I would like to attend a wedding the following Saturday. We have grown used to this and now accept with little concern the telephone calls from students, clergy and others that begin around 5.00am.

The reason for recounting this is because yesterday brought great joy very early in the morning. I was due to take the early morning service in Mbabane and rising early, walked around the church to open the gate leading to our house. At 4.30am it was still dark but, with great excitement, noticed stars in the sky and the lightness that betokened a new day. This should be no surprise, but for the last four weeks we have rarely seen the sun. The skies have been overcast and the clouds have hung low on the mountains so a gloom pervaded everything. For most of the time a light showery mist has watered the grass but on one or two occasions we have had heavy downpours of rain. Of course we get very excited when it rains but the four weeks of gloom has severely affected our spirits. The sun and warmth of yesterday brought back some of the joy of being in Africa.

As in Britain, the weather is never far from our thoughts because the drought continues to affect the lives of people in a real and threatening way. Sadly, the rain we have thankfully received has been localized. Around us the grass is once again green so that the cattle in our neighbourhood are back in their fields instead of scavenging for plants and grass around our house and along the roads etc. But, elsewhere in the country the land still looks parched and we continue to pray for more rain. Even in

our area, water is scarce and a rationing system means that water is available only between 6.00am/pm-9.30am/pm on alternate days. Thankfully, we have a storage tank and so are not affected by such a restriction. Elsewhere in the country water is very scarce and women and children collect what water they can from long distances in containers of all shapes and sizes which are usually either carried on the head or pushed in a wheelbarrow.

With the drought has come a puzzling phenomenon. We have noticed expensive cars alongside small streams and seen women from these cars washing clothes in the stream. We could not understand why the rich should wish to wash their clothes alongside poor women. Then it occurred to us that in situations of severe drought clothes cannot be washed in money.

As a church we are continuing to distribute food to those suffering the effects of the drought and are extremely grateful to USPG and the Episcopal Church in the USA for helping us to reach out in a small way to relieve the suffering of people. Whilst I have not been involved in distributing maize and other basic foodstuffs, the stories I hear are distressing. On occasions a sack of maize corn breaks open and a little of its contents spills out and there is a rush of people to grab what at most is a handful of corn. Such sights act as a reproof of our riches and wastefulness.

There is one aspect of the drought that brings relief and that is the quality of sugar. Until the rains fall, sugar cane stores its sugar energy within its stalk waiting for the rain to permit further growth. For this reason the sugar content is extremely high. I probably would not know such facts without the help of sugar experts but the look of sheer bliss on the face of cows blocking the roads as they

Sudoku No 13.  
 Answer on page 6

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munch cane dropped by the sugar cane lorries tells it all.

### Lizzie Masilela

Lizzie's home is situated on a hillside surrounded by barren fields that await the rain to allow ploughing and planting. To access her home, a traditional thatched mud hut built on the bare earth, one must travel three or four miles from the town along a mud track which at times is steep and rocky. When I, with the local priest, called to see her she was not expecting us but readily made us welcome and began to tell us about a day in her life which she could only describe as unremittingly hard.

She is caring for her only daughter's three children: Sabelo who is 3 years old, Nkosinathi who is 8 year old and her granddaughter Ncobile who is 13 years old. I didn't meet Ncobile or Nkosinathi who were at school. Anyway, they were not expected home for some time because

his schooling will probably end this year. Ncobile has to provide her own school fees, which she obtains by doing whatever she can – begging, selling things, whatever.

When I asked Lizzie what they would eat that night she replied that they had nothing, but she was praying that God would provide something. My follow up question was swift, "How do you cope, living like this all the time?" Calmly, she replied that she had learned to cast all her cares on God and he had not let her down yet although many times they go to bed hungry.

Lizzie, spends each day caring for her three grandchildren and trying to raise some money to survive. She occasionally takes a loan and uses this to buy some goods that she can sell at a small profit to the richer people in the area. Sadly, her experience of this has not been good as people tend to take the goods and not pay what she requires. Other times she begs for food

each day, on their way home from school, they had to descend the steep hill to a water hole at the bottom to collect water, a task that took over an hour each day.

Lizzie has received help from the church and is obtaining food from World Vision which lasts for about two weeks of each month. World Vision are also paying the school fees of Nkosinathi, but this will be the last year they do so, which means that

and clothes for the children. She has a small plot of land that could provide food but she has no one to plough it and tend it. She is alone in the world with nothing but the thatched roof over her head. Each night she and her grandchildren lay down on the bare earth and pray that God would, one day, change things..

### **Margaret Mahlalela**

Margaret's situation is very similar to that of Lizzie's, however she lives nearer town and has one or two neighbours who occasionally help her with food and clothing.

Margaret is looking after four grandchildren but also has her youngest daughter living at home with her own baby. Together they try to raise money to pay for school fees and food for the children for whom they are caring. This they do by weaving grass mats to sell and by begging for food and clothing and occasionally getting small casual jobs.

Again the description of life they provide is 'hard', and when talking to them one wonders how they can face the pressure of each day living hand to mouth, knowing that tomorrow will be the same.

### **Western Ideals**

I returned from visiting these two families deep in thought trying to imagine what life was like having nothing, only to find that it was one of those nights when there is no electricity, thus no oven, no light, no music, no computer, and no television! The frustration was considerable but the evening was balmy with almost a full moon. We sat on our doorstep and listened to the music of the evening composed by crickets, toads and tree frogs and marveled at the beauty with a sense of peace and joy.

At one moment during the evening the electricity returned for three or four minutes

and I rushed to get on the computer and start to do things. The stupidity of my action only came as the electricity disappeared once again and I had to accept a night without the pressures of doing things.

I am in no way belittling the suffering of the gogos of Swaziland left to care for their grandchildren, but how foolish we are to miss the joys around us by shutting them out with technology and things.

### **We ask prayer for:**

More rain!

Distribution of Food Aid may get to those most in need

That through the training hearts, minds, wills and lives may be transformed

Hope for those who live from hand to mouth, particularly gogos bringing up grandchildren  
A growth of love and care within the Christian churches that will affect society

*Andrew and Rosemary Symonds*

PS. The full letter can be read on the Website [www.pnk.org.uk](http://www.pnk.org.uk) or on the notice board as you enter the church.

### **The Leprosy Mission**

The Leprosy Mission has had another successful year, thanks to the continued support of the local community in general, and the North Kirk family in particular; the amount raised during April and September, when we 'hosted' after-the-service tea/coffee, totalled £270 - many thanks to all who contributed, be it pennies or pounds!

Our annual Pancake Day in June made the magnificent sum of £1032, while our recent Coffee Evening took nearly £600, with an additional £200 spent on TLM goods. Both these events proved to be happy social gatherings, which was a bonus, as far as the committee was

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*Answer to soduko 13*

concerned, to the financial success.

This year's chosen project was the funding of the training of Sudanese field-workers in the diagnostic and medical care of leprosy sufferers in Darfur; the 'cost' of this project was £2500. I am happy to report that I have sent a cheque for this amount to the Stirling office. Many thanks to all those who helped us to achieve our target; we value the continued support of the North Kirk family as we, and the committee, work to rid the world of Leprosy.

*Roberta Mackenzie*

### **Penicuik Silver Band**

Penicuik North Kirk's own Silver Band, sometimes referred to as Penicuik Silver Band will be performing in the North Kirk on Saturday 15th December 2007, the band will be assisted by Cuiken Primary School Choir. The programme will consist of a selection of Christmas musical along with carols performed for the audience to sing along to.

The band would like to thank headteacher and staff at Cuiken Primary School for supporting this event, and we would also like to thank the North Kirk Events Team for their continued

support at all the bands concerts past, present and in the future

Tickets priced £5, Concessions £3, Family Ticket (2 + 2) £12 are available from all band members or at the door on the night.

### **The Boys' Brigade**

**The Anchor Boys** (for boys in Primaries 2 and 3) meet in the Back Hall on Tuesday nights, from 6.30pm to 7.30pm. Activities include games, handicrafts, stories and singing.

**The Junior Section** (for boys in Primaries 4, 5 and 6) meets in the North Hall on Tuesday nights, from 6.30pm to 8.00pm. Activities include badge work, figure marching, games, football and handicrafts.

**The Company Section** (for boys in Primary 7 to Secondary 6) meets in the North Hall on Friday nights, from 7.30pm to 10.00pm. Activities include Christian Faith, badge work, physical training, sports and games.

Our members are training hard for forthcoming Battalion competitions, including chess, 5-a-side football, Physical Training and Drill.

In October we had a good attendance at our annual Dedication Service in Penicuik North Kirk.

Sgt Michael Thomson represented the Battalion at the National Remembrance Day Ceremony in Edinburgh. He laid a poppy wreath at the Stone of Remembrance at the City Chambers before attending a Service in St Giles' Cathedral. The remainder of the Company attended the Remembrance Service in St Mungo's Parish Church before parading to Penicuik War Memorial where Sgt Stephen Vacher laid a poppy wreath.

For information about any Section, please contact Alan Anderson on tel. (01875) 853281 or Email alanandcarola@aol.com.

### **The Lighter Side**

#### **A Smile**

A smile costs nothing but gives much.  
It enriches those who receive it without making poorer those who give.  
It takes but a moment but the memory of it sometimes lasts forever.

None is so rich or mighty that he can get along without it,

And none is so poor that he can be made rich by it.

A smile creates happiness in the home,  
Fosters goodwill in business, and is the countersign of friendship.

It brings rest to the weary, cheer to the discouraged,

Sunshine to the sad and it is nature's best antidote for trouble

Yet it cannot be bought, begged, borrowed or stolen

For it is something that is of no value to anyone until it is given away.

Some people are too tired to give you a smile,

Give them one of yours as no one needs a smile so much as he who has no more to give.

Smile please

#### **"True" Friendship**

Are you tired of those sissy "friendship" poems that always sound good, but never actually come close to reality?

Well, here is a series of promises that actually speak of true friendship.

1. When you are sad -- I will help you get drunk and plot revenge against the sorry individual who made you sad.

2. When you are blue -- I will try to dislodge whatever is choking you.

3. When you smile -- I will know you are plotting something that I must be involved in.

4. When you are scared -- I will rag on you about it every chance I get.

5. When you are worried -- I will tell you horrible stories about how much worse it could be until you quit whining.

6. When you are confused -- I will use little words.

7. When you are sick -- Stay away from me until you are well again. I don't want whatever you have.

8. When you fall -- I will point and laugh at you.

9. This is my oath..... I pledge it to the end.

"Why?" You may ask;

"Because you are my friend"

—

At Sunday school, Mr Duncan told that God created everything, including human beings. Freddy seemed especially intent when Mr Duncan explained that Eve was created out of one of Adam's ribs.

Later in the week, his mother noticed him lying on the floor and asked, "Freddy, what is the matter?"

Freddy responded, "I have a pain in my side. I think I'm going to have a wife."

#### **Worship at the North Kirk**

From September to June our morning worship services begin at 11am.

Communion is celebrated on the second Sunday of every month.

Our evening worship services begin at 7pm except on the second Sunday of every month when, at 7.30pm, we host Tribal Generation,

a youth-friendly worship event.

There is a short “*Start the Week*” service every Monday at 11.45am

### **Christmas Services:**

*16 December*

11 am All-age Nativity Service

7pm Christmas Songs of Praise

*23 December*

11am All-age worship at Christmas

7pm Lessons and Carols (In St. Mungo’s)

*24 December*

6.30pm Carols around the Christmas Tree in  
Precinct

8pm All-age worship on Christmas Eve

*25 December*

10am All-age worship on Christmas Day

*30 December*

11am All-age worship to end the year

7pm Lessons and Carols 2

### **Groups And Organisations At The North Kirk**

Creche facilities are available during the morning worship service.

Sunday Club for children and young people in S1 to S3 meets during the morning worship service.

In the North Hall next to the church, a group for young people in S4-S6 meets on Sundays at 7pm – except *Tribal Generation* nights.

*During the week we also have:*

The North Kirk Music Group for pre-school children (Monday and Wednesday mornings), PiNKies for pre-school children (Friday mornings) Boys’ Brigade (Tuesday and Friday evenings), The PNK art group (Friday afternoons) and

Bible Study Groups (Monday afternoons, Monday evenings and Wednesday evenings).

The Open Door Cafe is open from 10am to 12 noon and 2 to 4pm Monday to Friday throughout the year and offers real coffee, tea, home baking and friendship! The church is open at the same times.

### **News Of The North Kirk Family**

#### **Funerals**

*“Death is destroyed! Victory is complete! Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!”* Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian Christians chapter 15, verses 54 and 57.

*October 4th*

Alice Skidmore, 9 Moorfoot Place

*October 9th*

William Brown, Mount Lothian Farm

*November 22nd*

John Fraser, 19 Woodside Drive

#### **Next Newsletter**

Copy for next newsletter should be with the editors on or before 13th January for publication on 3rd February. Copy can be sent as a Microsoft Word attachment to either email address or hard copy (preferably typescript) can be handed to either editor

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Please visit us at our Church Web Site:

www.pnk.org.uk

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