**BEGINNING A FAITH JOURNEY**

By Bill Pugh

As a boy I went on holidays with my family to a small seaside place. I loved exploring. Just off the beach was an old broken down jetty. We loved to climb on it and walk along, spotting fish and crabs beneath. One day it was very windy and the waves were rising. We should have stayed safely on the beach. But no, we wanted to enjoy the crashing waves close up. Suddenly a huge one hit the pylon, engulfed me and took me with it. And, as if guided by an unseen hand, deposited me further down the old structure, dripping wet, scared but safe. I have never forgotten that.

I have never forgotten my early experience of the power of the sea. Do miracles happen? Some years ago I had the privilege of reading the biography of a local doctor. He was in the British Navy during WWII. Not once, but twice, his vessel was torpedoed and each time he was rescued from the sea. After the war he studied medicine and came to Australia and set up a practice. He was recognised as a doctor with special skill in seeing women safely through childbirth.

In the Bible there is a story about Jesus and his friends in a boat at sea. Jesus is asleep. A huge storm threatens them and he sleeps on. Terrified, they wake him. “Don’t you care that we are perishing?” they say. And he calmed their fears, rebuked the wind and waves, and said, “Peace be still.” And there was calm.

Do miracles happen?

As a teacher, in every experience at sport, or camping, I was cautious about the safety and wellbeing of students in my care, while allowing a certain measure of risk taking and challenges to be part of their learning experience.

Do miracles happen?

Each day we face the adventures of living. Caution, care, safety first, are learning processes. And such experiences, lived, reflected upon, and understood are keys to the growth and development of human character.

Do miracles happen? Surely the gift of life is one.

**A REASON FOR THE SEASON**

By Bill Pugh

What makes Christmas?

For weeks the shops have been telling us. Shelves loaded with presents, toys for the children of every age. So much choice. “Not like that in my day” says Grandpa, “we were lucky to get anything in those days of the Depression and the war, kids don’t know how lucky they are. Do they really appreciate it?”

Father Christmas look-a-likes galore. Puddings for sale, drinks. ‘Order seafood now’ says the sign. Carols and Christmas songs try to send their message over noisy shoppers. Breakups and parties at kinder, school and work.

In churches, choirs practise, ministers prepare sermons, maybe a Christmas tree for gifts for the needy. Christmas lights in windows of homes and streets feature colourful and creative displays. Plans to visit the Myer window with the children, and join the long queue to follow the story for this year. Children prepare a list to prompt Santa to leave them their much wanted present.

Secret family discussions and whispers. What will I give so and so? And so it goes on.

But in all the busyness we must not lose sight of the reason for the season. It is so simple, yet profound. At that first Christmas long ago, the scene was a stable in an inn. Outside was a bright star, shepherds in the fields, angels singing in the heavens, three kings on their way to visit a baby so special, a promised king. So guided, there he was inside, warm and safe, with Mary and Joseph. They were a family, a very special family.

Christmas is above all family, ours, and the world family. Let us not forget this Christmas, those who have no home, food, warmth, shelter and means to celebrate Christmas as we do. How blessed we are.

**Reflection:**

Put a bowl on the table at Christmas dinner for the Christmas Bowl Appeal, as a reminder for each to add a thankyou gift for the blessings of Christmas. And remember, holding hands, to say Grace, and praise God for sending his special gift of Jesus. For He is the reason for the season.

**CHRISTMAS THANKS**

By Bill Pugh

Thank God for the prophets of the Old Testament who foretold the coming of the Lord. The wonderful news to Mary. His birth in the little town of Bethlehem. The inn keeper who gave Mary and Joseph safe and secure lodging in a stable, because there was no other room. For the warmth and company of the stable animals. The shepherds in the fields watching their flocks summoned by an angel to welcome the new-born royal baby. The angels who filled the heavens with glorious singing and praise to God at the news. The presence of the bright star over the place where he lay, guiding the Magi to bring him gifts, fit for a king. The warning in a dream for the little family to return to Nazareth by another way, to be safe from Herod’s terrible jealousy. For our Christmas where we are free to joyfully sing carols of praise and celebrate God’s wonderful gift to each of us, and to the world of Jesus.

**Reflection:**

One way to remember the Christmas story is to place a bowl on the table for the Christmas Bowl Appeal.

“The word became a human being and, full of grace and truth, lived among us. We saw His glory, the glory which He received as the Father’s only Son.” (John 1:14)

Thanks be to God.

**CHRISTMAS CELEBRATED**

By Bill Pugh

In spite of a difficult year because of COVID-19 we celebrated Christmas. More than now there is the need to keep the Christmas message alive. We need the Christmas spirit. Giving and receiving kindnesses, singing the good news in worship. Joining with the angels down here who serve the needy. Out in the fields of life with the shepherds witnessing to and doing our share in feeding the flock.

Glorying in the twinkling stars and the blue skies above. Listening to the sounds of nature around us. On holidays, resting and refreshing our bodies, reading, and in meditation, prayer and worship, feeding our souls with the word of life. The message of Christmas is for every day. The key note is joy. More than gifts and celebrations it is the truth that God is with us. Jesus walks with us every day.

Paul summed it up thus: Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near, do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God. And the peace of God which passes all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:4)

The joy of Christmas is evident every day of the year. It is in living, and celebrating the fact, that in Jesus, God is on the stage of human history and with us every day and always.