**DECEMBER PEW SHEETS**

**An infectious time**

By Geoff Serpell

We were locked down for months in Victoria, excluded from visiting our brothers and sisters in some other states of Australia. Cranking up face to face among family, friends and neighbours is still heavily restricted, but the hope is for freedom to be soon celebrating with extended families again. Eating out and visiting tourist spots is still heavily restricted and activity outdoors is evidently much safer than indoors.

The annual tradition of sharing Christmas with family and friends around a large table or BBQ will be much sought after during the coming festive season as something we will not just take for granted again. Celebrating being alive to enjoy once more such a time is of course really something to be incredibly grateful for.

Time we are pleased to spend in prayer giving thanks and asking for blessings on those less fortunate. Let us continue our prayers for others after the lockdown, and we look forward to when we may all attend a church service and sing along in safety. You could imagine that a lot will be going on this December, and it is also in a sense very infectious.

There is a story about a group of primary school children walking in pairs from school to

church for their Christmas service. Holding hands was not enough, two started to sing: “Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer”. It soon spread. Soon the whole school and some parents and teachers had joined in. Who knows who they infected after that?

**Reflection**

Christmas spirit. There will be a lot of it about at this time of the year, 2020. And IT’S very infectious!

**Christmas pudding**

By Bill Pugh

We prepare ours in October. An old recipe, tried and tested. Suet, dried fruit and brandy. All take a turn at stirring. Then it is poured into a large pudding basin, a piece of calico, tied round the top and. put into a pot of water and boiled for some time on the stove. It smells inviting. Last, our Christmas pudding is placed in a top kitchen cupboard, till Christmas Day, when it is again slowly boiled till it is served with brandy sauce, custard, cream, ice cream, any, or all of the above.

In the good old days, the cook laced the pudding with silver threepences, which had been collected and sterilised. Sometimes tiny trinkets were there also. Everyone hoped for a slice with a threepence and a surprise. Not possible since decimal currency. The new coins are not suitable.

On Christmas Day there was an empty bowl in the middle of the table. After everyone had finished Dad mentioned the Christmas Bowl Appeal at Church. “We have had a great Christmas, lots will be hungry. Let’s all put our money into the empty bowl, count it and I will double it and we will take it to Church on Sunday, and give it to the Appeal.” Not all the kids were happy about this. They had something to think about.

**Reflection**

Lord it’s a bit early for Christmas, but it’s in the shops already. It is never too early to think about what we can do for others at Christmas. As we give our thank offering today, please remind us that we are blessed with so much in Australia, and challenge us to make Christmas happen for those who have little means, or reason for celebration.

**Christmas thanks**

By Bill Pugh

Thank God or 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 flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Thanks be to God!

**Feet on the ground**

By Bill Pugh

In early days cities had a watchtower and a watchman at the gates of the city, to look out for those who came to the city, to look out for enemies and to announce important news. The prophets also were watchmen, holy men, called to deliver the judgment and messages from the Lord, the word of God to the people.

The prophet Isaiah expresses the coming of the Messiah thus:

How beautiful upon the Mountains,

Are the feet of the messenger,

Who announces peace,

Who brings good news,

Who announces salvation,

Who says to Zion, “your God reigns.” (Isaiah: 52:7)

His prophecy was fulfilled in the arrival of a tiny baby in Bethlehem, who would be God’s presence on the earth He would bring peace and he would spread the good news, God’s word of salvation as he lived amongst them. Isaiah also prophesied this coming one as the suffering servant, an innocent one, who would suffer and die for the sins of the world (Isaiah: 53). John announced his arrival thus: And the Word became flesh and lived amongst us and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s son, full of grace and truth (John 1:14)

The wonderful news is that in Jesus, God speaks the good news of salvation. From him we hear God’s word. No longer a distant God, but actually present on earth. A forgiving and loving Father

“He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (Matthew 11:15).