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Welcome to this December 2011/January 2012 edition of *The Visionary*. May the Lord richly bless you this Christmas and New Year season.

In this issue

1. A year in review
2. Seminar with Drs Ken and Denis in February
3. A Word from Ken
4. Missions
5. A Moment with Alison
6. Student Honour Roll

Looking back on 2011, I cannot help but wonder where it went. So much happened to so many of us this last year that our incident books are full. Ken had a broken hip, and had cataracts removed; Alison had a severe fall and injured herself; I had to go to hospital for prostate surgery and a double hernia. A couple of years ago I had been diagnosed with prostate cancer and, Praise God! the cancer is gone, Rosalind had two visits to hospital – one for a severely infected finger (she almost lost it); and then for a hip replacement. Steve and Trish’s grandson was hospitalised and came close to death.

Ken is back on his feet and fully recovered. In November he handed his church over to another pastor and is again on itinerant ministry, with seminars and preaching, and is better than ever. Last March I was in the Philippines with our mission college in Pagadian, conducting two seminars and ministering in churches; then in October, off to South Africa for three seminars, two crusades, and other meetings, helping to set up the college there.

We have collected several thousand books for South Africa and raised the funds to get the books into the country.

Our church has continued to grow and we have seen major modifications started and completed during this year.

While a record number of students have graduated, we have seen a record number of students enrol, and we have extended the trainee program to W.A. and started negotiations in Qld and South Australia.

We have conducted three seminars through our Sydney office that have proven to be a great success, a graduation service in Perth, and all in all, not a bad year.

**A Word From Ken
The Christmas Star**

“When the Magi saw the star, they went wild with excitement!” (Mt 2:9-10)

The most-translated poem in the world was written in 1806 by a young English woman, Jane Taylor, who was only 23 at the time. It is *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*, which actually has 5 stanzas. The last one reads –

*As your bright and tiny spark
Lights the traveller in the dark,
Tho’ I know not what you are,
Twinkle, twinkle, little star!*



One of the special boons of childhood is a sense of wonder – and a chief bane of adult life is a loss of wonder, when we become grown-up, blasé and cynical.

We Christians should never lose our sense of wonder, especially at this time of the year, for what is more wondrous than the story of the Saviour’s coming into this world? Yet among the many astonishing things that happened, nothing surpasses the miracle of the Star that blazed in the heavens,

guiding the Magi to the Child. Was it a real star, a supernatural phenomenon, a meteor, a comet, a super nova? Was it seen by others, or only by the Magi? We cannot say, but two things do shine clearly –

The Wonder Of God's Control

The world this year seems to be madder than usual. But despite appearances, the Star shows that God has always been and still is in control! We need the perspective of the psalmist (Ps 2:1-6), so that we learn how to laugh with God, for he knows what he is doing!

I watched the TV programme *Stephen Hawking's Universe*, which demonstrated the exquisite balance that exists in the universe. At precisely one minute after the Big Bang, the rate of acceleration of the expanding matter had to be accurate to the 15th decimal place — 0.000000000000000. One point higher, and the expansion would have been too quick to allow the galaxies to form. One point slower, and the exploding gas would have fallen back onto itself before the universe could coalesce out of it!

Tyrants may scheme, empires may fall, but our God reigns!

The Wonder Of God's Care

See how God was willing to disturb even the panoply of heaven simply to give a sign to three seekers! And what a wonderful sign it was, for the Star does seem to have been a supernatural phenomenon. It was not actually seen “*in the east*” by the Magi, but rather, “*in its rising*” (which was an astrological term), after which it vanished for two years (cp. vs. 11), then suddenly appeared again and miraculously travelled before the Magi from **north to south!** (vs. 9), which was against nature.

We may learn two things here –

- Usually we are expected to live by faith, without visible signs (note how the Magi journeyed for two years with no supernatural aid).
- But sometimes God does send us a “*Star*” to provide guidance and direction!

Yet with or without a sign, we should ever remind ourselves that the Father never stops loving us! The *Christmas Star* still shines for those who have the eyes to see it.

A Seminar With Dr Ken And Dr Denis

On **Saturday the 18th of February 2012** we have the pleasure of hosting Drs Ken and Denis for the first seminar of the year. Our subject will be, “*The Power of Pentecost for Today*” – which is just a working title, and we will be referring to Ken’s books *Clothed with power* and *Equipped to Serve*. Keep watching our emails for final details, February is a long way off yet, but will be here soon enough!

Students are encouraged to take advantage of these seminar opportunities. Your attendance at the seminar is the equivalent of one assignment, and so recognised students gain full credit by attending and accredited students will only need to complete the multiple choice assignment. Costs: non-student, \$65.00; students who want study credits pay their regular subject fee; morning and afternoon tea is included. Lunch is \$10.00 per person. Call 9603 2077 to register.

A Moment With Alison

THE BLESSED CHRISTMAS FAMILY



The Christmas family story begins with Elisabeth (wife of Zechariah), whom we are told was a relative of Mary the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:36). Then there are indications that James and John, disciples of Jesus, may have been his cousins, as Salome, their mother, is thought to be the sister of Mary. There are two reasons for this. First, Salome asked for her sons to sit, one of them on each side of Jesus when he came into his kingdom, showing that she thought there was some reason for this to be granted (Matthew 20:20-28). Jesus did not deny this was a possibility but said it was not his place to give such a promise. He merely asked them were they prepared to drink the same cup (suffer and die) as he was prepared to suffer and die. Secondly, Salome was with Mary, supporting her at the cross, and it was her son John whom Jesus asked to take care of his mother.

Then some ancient manuscripts call Cleopas (or Alpheus) the brother of Joseph (husband of Mary), so his sons, James and Jude (also named James and Thaddeus in Matthew 10:2-4), were also cousins of Jesus. It was not until after the resurrection that Jesus’ own brothers recognised him as the Messiah. Then they too became believers and

Jesus' brothers James and Jude later wrote letters to Christians which are included in the New Testament. So here we see many people, counting their spouses and families, related in various ways to Jesus. If we can rely on the ancient manuscripts and the scholars who have researched all this information, and I believe we can, then what a blessed family this was, to be chosen to play their various parts to help complete the story of Christmas, the coming into this world of Jesus the Messiah. (See also *Cameos of Christ*; pgs. 23 and 180-181).

Missions

The College in South Africa

Our appeal for books has been a spectacular success with books still coming in from around the country. The biggest donation has been from *New Creation Ministry* in South Australia who have sent 5,000 books. None-the-less, to those who have donated a single (many did) book to those who have sent box-loads, bag-loads, or pallets, we offer you our warmest appreciation, and just as importantly to those who have sent money to send the books – to all of you a big thank you!. May God enrich you for your generosity. The process of accreditation in South Africa continues, and we look forward to a good outcome within this year. We thank the *Bible Society*, and *Open Doors* for their help in getting books together, and also Joe Difiano of the transport company *Canberra Overnight* for delivering books to us.

India

We have walked through our open door in India with the fledgling college.. David Jones has been working there to see what God will do. It is still early days but we are looking forward to very good results

Student Honour Roll

Since our last newsletter the following students have graduated from NSW, Tas. Vic, W.A. and Texas, USA. We know how hard you worked for your results. In the past we have been able to list all of the graduates for the year but sadly I do not have sufficient space. So below I have listed those who graduated in October/November, as I have done with all students who graduate with each Newsletter. **Well done one and all.**

October and November

Katie	Batson	Award in Biblical Studies	Keysborough	VIC
Michelle	Ruemmler	Award in Biblical Studies	Keysborough	VIC
Belenda	Watson	Award in Biblical Studies	Keysborough	VIC
Karen	Lucas	Award in Biblical Studies	Molesworth	TAS
Isobel	Challender	Certificate in Biblical Studies	Keysborough	VIC
Brian	Hart	Certificate of Attendance	Keysborough	VIC
Margaret	Hart	Certificate of Attendance	Keysborough	VIC
Kathy	Kolle	Certificate in Biblical Studies	Keysborough	VIC
Helen	Nicolos	Certificate of Attendance	Keysborough	VIC
Vicki	Nicolos	Certificate of Attendance	Keysborough	VIC
Margaret	Rudland	Certificate in Biblical Studies	Keysborough	VIC
Lorna	Neale	Diploma of Ministry	Bowral	NSW
Sammy	Watts	Bachelor of Theology	Perth	WA
John	Delgado	Grad. Diploma of Christian Ministry and Theology	Texas	USA

Australian Student Body

Resource Centre

I would like to take a moment to thank those of you who are running Resource Centres. We are so aware of the effort you put into your ministry and the cost to you in time and effort. For us it is a privilege to work with you and we are so aware that so much of our success rests on your efforts. We are honoured to be working with so many men and women of God who are committed to the task of teaching and training others for the life and work of the Kingdom.

Distance Education students

Our student body now consists of 109 new VCC students, 56 VIC, 13 IBC students added to the current student body. During the year 2011, a total of 72 awards have been issued, not including the Professional Development

Awards from our seminars. We now have Students in every Australian state and territory except Northern Territory, however we do have applications pending for a Resource Centre in Alice Springs .

Overseas

We have full fee paying students from Japan, South Africa, USA, New Zealand, Malaysia, California, Canada, and in addition to this we have a stream of mission students not listed in the totals above. Worldwide the total number of students working with one of the several branches of *Vision* numbers around 120,000.

MAKING A FRESH START

"Put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts. Be renewed in the spirit of your mind. Put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."—Ephesians 4:22-24 ... "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ."—Romans 13:14.

It is a new year on the horizon and 2012 looms ahead of us. My! how 2011 flew by; the years seem shorter as I get older and more fulfilled. It does seem to me, especially as we come closer to the new year with its traditions of making resolutions and new beginnings, that in God's good grace we can always start afresh and that now is not a bad time to consider it.

I think there are at least three reasons to "Start again". We look forward to the new –

First, we automatically know if we have not been the man or woman of God we should have been, whatever the reasons. Be they disappointments, trials, sins, distresses, misunderstandings or hurts, we can still choose to put them behind us. My old pastor was a firm believer in the Gospel of the second chance. Don't let the past stop a good present and a brilliant future.

Second, there are times when we become aware of a major shift in what God is doing in our life. New opportunities, never before considered, may be opening up. Perhaps a direction in our life that we have, deep down, been aware of is being presented. Sometimes there is a spiritual "sea change" taking place, but to embrace the new means I have to let go of the present.

Third, I need to grow. As simple as that – I need to grow in Christ and to be fashioned into his image and my old ideas, concepts, habits, are preventing the needed growth in me. Not really sin as such (or is it?). I am often amazed at the attitude that so many hold, "I am good enough for God as I am." Well yes you are good enough to receive his love and grace, his passion and power, but the intent is to change us dramatically into his image, not justify staying as we are!

For you there may be other reasons....

Consider for a moment that it takes only a decision and a moment for a beggar to take off his rags and instead put on a new suit of clothes, and it need not take a moment longer to put away habits, thoughts, and ways of speech and put on Christ for the new year, the new life, the new opportunities, that God has given us.

Korn Korner

A friend of mine told me of his friends in Scotland, a happily married couple who could not conceive a child so they decided to learn Chinese! Pleased with their progress, after a few weeks their teacher asked them – why are you learning Chinese? Do you have business there? Are you going to live in China? "Oh not at all" the couple replied, "we have decided to adopt a Chinese baby as we are unable to have children and we want to be sure then when he learns to talk we will be able to understand him!"



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