

A photograph of a stone church building with a large Gothic-style window and a cross on the roof. In the foreground, there are branches of a tree with white and pink blossoms.

## Weekly Newsletter: 17<sup>th</sup> December 2024

### Reflection: Should Christians Celebrate Christmas?

By Joe Barnard

The cheap wristwatches that I buy do one thing: measure time. A lot of people think that calendars are similar. We are all aware that one of the functions of a calendar is to divide time neatly into units of years, months, weeks and days, and many of us think that this is *all* that calendars do. This is shortsighted. The truth is that every calendar performs a secondary, more significant function. *They tell us who we are.*

This may sound strange, but it's true. Every calendar identifies its adherent in at least three ways. First, part of how we participate in a society is by sharing a calendar. I am an American. One of the ways I am regularly reminded of this fact is that November never passes for me without a hankering for a plate full of turkey and a dish of sweet-potatoes that (believe it or not) have marshmallows on top. (It's weird; I know.) Celebrating Thanksgiving is part of how I remember that I'm American. The day is an annual reminder of who I am.

Second, a calendar always reveals what a given society values. I think it was Luther who first noted that people worship what they always make time for. This is true not just on the level of individuals, but of societies. A quick glance at the annual holidays on a British calendar will show the degree to which our society worships money (bank holidays), intimacy (Valentines, anniversaries), family (Father's Day, Mother's Day, birthdays), and consumption (the real agenda behind much of Halloween, Christmas, and so-called Black Friday). One of the myths of modern society is that the public square is areligious. This is not the case. The society we inhabit is always training us to worship. One of the most effective techniques for doing so is a common calendar.

Third, a calendar reminds a society of the past events that it has an ethical duty to remember. Remembrance Sunday is the obvious example here. We all feel a moral obligation to use a day to honour the past. This impulse is deeply human. It is yet another way that calendars answer the question, "Who am I?"

### The Wisdom of Israel's Calendar

It's interesting that under the Old Covenant God gave Israel a calendar that would do just what has been outlined above: reinforce a unique identity. We lose sight of the degree to which Israel's calendar was distinct from the peoples around her. Take, for example, Israel's seven day week. No one around Israel followed such a pattern. Being a Jew in Rome living by a seven-day week was just as odd as a Scot attempting to live by a 10-day week. Israel's time was as distinct as her food-laws.

Second, Israel's calendar was a constant reminder of her distinct values. All of her holidays were focused around the significance of her covenant with Yahweh. What this taught the ordinary Israelite was that God – and the giving of time to worship God – was more important than anything else, including work and leisure.

Third, the calendar of Israel was dependent upon the covenant history of Israel. Early on in Israel's religious development, Passover became identified with the Exodus, Pentecost with the giving of the Law at Sinai, and Tabernacles with the wilderness journey. In this way the religious calendar of Israel was an annual reminder of those sacred memories that God's people had an ethical duty to remember.

Now, every once in a while, you bump into a Christian who says that believers should not celebrate special days like Christmas and Easter. Typically, they argue that the Lord's Day (i.e. Sunday) is sufficient to provide a distinctive, Christian calendar. My own opinion is that this perspective is naïve. Although the Lord's Day does indeed provide us with (a) a calendar that sets us apart from other peoples; (b) one that reinforces the primacy of worship in our scale of values; and (c) a weekly reminder of gospel history, still there is another side from which to view things. Personally, I'm bothered by the fact that, when Christians limit their religious calendar to the Lord's Day, inevitably they end up being more secular than they realise. It's not that they stop honouring additional special days. It's just that the world begins to dictate which days they honour. Their calendar, in other words, does not become areligious; it just becomes secular. The world decides which values to celebrate, not the church. And – felt or unfelt – this almost always marks a slow shift in the identity and worship of those people who accept the calendar given to them.

### **The Blessing of Using the Gospel to Mark Time**

One of the benefits of a Christian calendar – and by this I mean a calendar that transposes time into a celebration of Christ – is that it is a wonderful tool for sanctifying the imagination of God's people. This happens first as Christians learn to reinterpret the whole of Israel's history according to the person and work of Jesus. But it continues as Christians learn to read the annual rhythms of nature as reminders of unchanging, spiritual truth.

What do I mean by this? Think about Christmas. How wonderful that we celebrate the birth of Christ at the hinge of the year when growing darkness turns to growing light. Think of the deep symbolism of this. How black was the night prior to the advent of Jesus? How frigid were the hearts of men? And yet God spoke light into the darkness and warmth into the cold by sending His Son as our saviour. No wonder our forefathers chose to mark the birth of Christ just after the winter solstice. Here the calendar is using nature to reiterate gospel truth. The very timing of Christmas reminds us that "the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:4). Once Christ is born into the world, a new process has begun that will not cease until the glory of the Son of Righteousness towers like the summer sun enlivening the whole of creation.

## **This Wednesday – Prayer Meeting**

A reminder that we're meeting to pray this Wednesday at 7pm (with refreshments from 6.45pm). We're meeting in the hall downstairs as Mannafields Christian School are using the main part of the church for their Nativity play.

There will also be an online option for those not able to join in person. Contact [Liz@holyroodevangelical.org](mailto:Liz@holyroodevangelical.org) for the Zoom codes if you don't already receive them.

## Gift Aid Form

By Nick Archer

Can anyone who has completed a Gift Aid Form for their giving to Holyrood Evangelical Church and have recently, in the last 2 years, moved house please request a new blank Gift Aid form from me so that you can cover your new address and postcode? Thank you

## Christmas Holidays

Liz (our administrator) will be on holiday over the Christmas period so there will be no newsletters on 24<sup>th</sup> or 31<sup>st</sup> December. Normal service will resume at the beginning of January!

## Hogmanay Ceilidh

This year we're planning to have a Hogmanay Ceilidh as a church family on **31<sup>st</sup> December from 7-10pm**. Serenna and friends will be providing the music and it's a chance to get together at the end of the year and enjoy time together. Keep the date free!

## Prayer Meetings and Home Groups

In the new year, we'll return to our rhythm of meeting to pray on the 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> (if there is one) Wednesdays of the month with Home Groups meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesdays. Please note there will be no prayer meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> January.

We're planning to have a meal together before the prayer meeting on the first Wednesday or prayer meeting of the month in January, February and March. Please save the following dates –

- Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> January
- Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> February
- Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> March

## Christmas Appeal 2024

After receiving suggestions from the church family, the elders have chosen the following projects for the Christmas Appeal this year.

- Onesimus Fund – Cornhill Scotland. Helping to train useful gospel workers for Scotland and Beyond
- Delhi Bible Institute – supporting DBI's 'Loving The Poorest' appeal
- Merchant City Church Plant – supporting Neil Longwe and David Trimble as they plant a church in the Merchant City in Glasgow
- Bethany Christian Trust – supporting their Buy-a-Bed campaign
- Friends International – to help provide trips for international students in 2025
- Sparkle Sisters – a Christian led charity born out of the desire to share the love of Jesus and enhance the lives of women, of all faiths or none, who have in some way been affected by homelessness and/or abuse. See their website for more details - <https://sparkle-sisters.org/>

**holyrood** evangelical church *Details in the newsletter* **Christmas Appeal 2024**

**Merchant City Church Plant**  
Neil Longwe and David Trimble  
church plant in Glasgow

**Cornhill SIMUS Fund**  
helping to train gospel workers for Scotland and Beyond

**Delhi Bible Institute dbi**  
'Loving The Poorest' appeal

**Bethany Buy-a-bed Campaign**  
Edinburgh Welcome Centre  
emergency accommodation

**Sparkle Sisters**  
share the love of Jesus & enhance the lives of traumatised women

**Friends International**  
to help provide trips for international students in 2025

**Contributions by bank transfer, offering box or cheque - all marked 'Christmas Appeal'**

Cornhill Scotland and Delhi Bible Institute with each receive 30% of the total raised. The remaining 40% will be split equally between the other projects.

The Christmas Appeal will be open throughout December and as usual people can transfer money directly into the church bank account <https://holyroodevangelical.org/giving/> or place donations into the offering box marked Christmas Appeal. Thank you!

## Bethany Christian Trust Rapid Re-accommodation Welcome Centre

As well as fighting hard against the causes of homelessness, Bethany Christian Trust also meet people in immediate need of food and accommodation. One of their crisis services is the Rapid Re-accommodation Welcome Centre, where anyone who would otherwise be rough sleeping in Edinburgh, is provided with safe, welcoming accommodation and warm meals. Find out more here: <https://www.bethanychristiantrust.com/crisis-intervention/>

HEC have supported this work for many years, both financially and practically - Bethany's Buy a Bed scheme is one of the projects we are supporting in our Christmas 2024 Appeal. This season we again have a team cooking and serving food at the Welcome Centre on Hogmanay, then in February and April.

The Crisis Intervention team at the centre have made us aware of the need for toiletries, warm socks and underwear for their guests. If you are able, please consider purchasing one or more of the following items. There will be a labelled box in the church foyer for these items. They will be taken to the Welcome Centre on Hogmanay, and then in February.

Please note that the vast majority of guests at the centre are men. Items needed:

- New toiletries - shower gel, toothpaste, toothbrushes, face wash, moisturiser, lip balm, deodorant (full and travel size are needed)
- Socks- new warm socks, all adult sizes needed
- Underwear- new men's cotton boxer shorts and briefs, all sizes needed.

If you have any questions or need more information, speak to Hannah Rankin.

## Church Calendar

For your info and prayers:

- Wednesday: Prayer Meeting at 7pm (with refreshments from 6.45pm)
- Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>:
  - Morning service at 10.30am – Joe Barnard preaching (live streamed)
  - Evening service at 6pm – Joe Barnard preaching (live streamed)

(Note: there will be no service on Christmas Day)



[www.holyroodevangelical.org](http://www.holyroodevangelical.org)

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