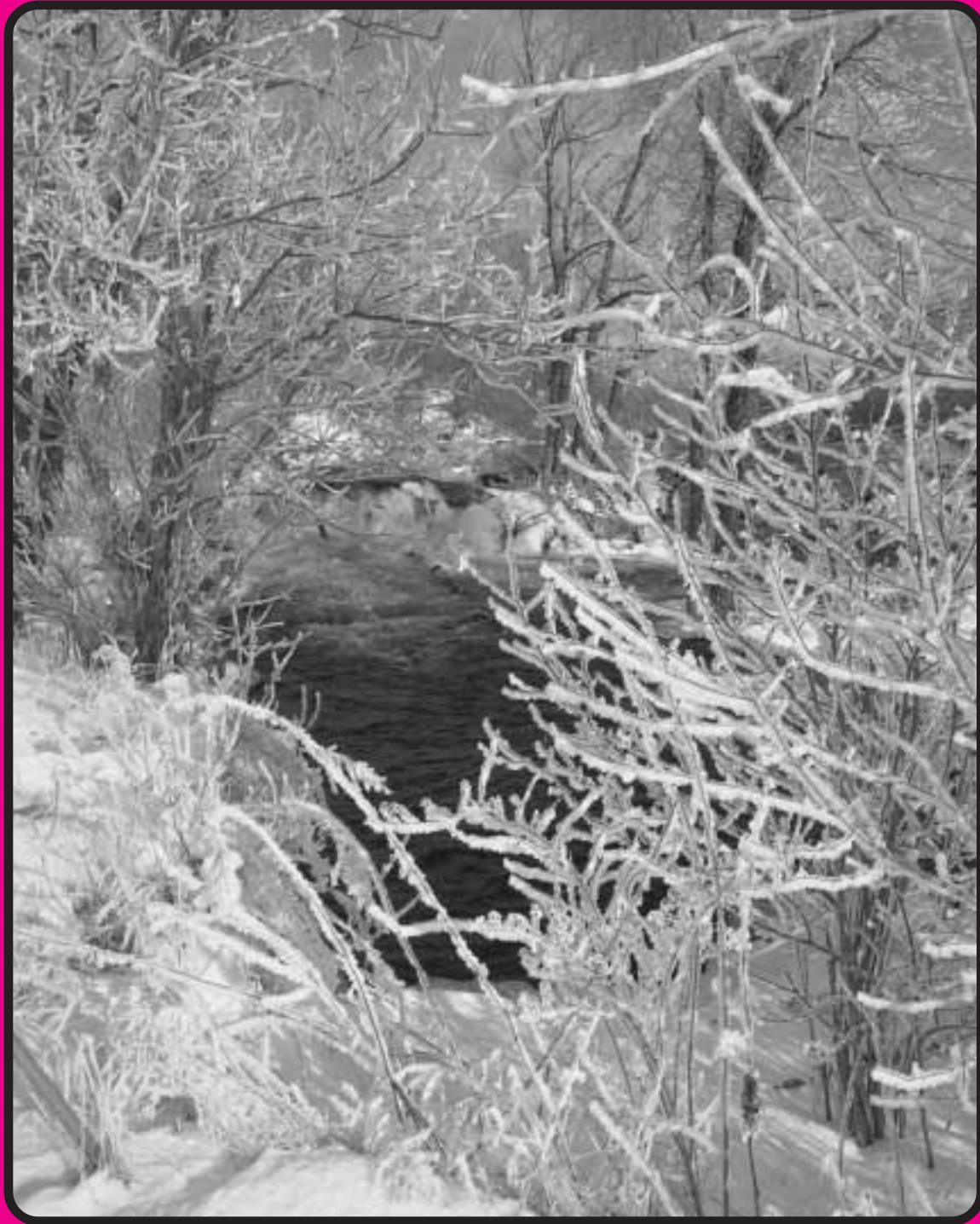


EVANGEL

The Good News of Jesus Christ



True Christmas

“In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled.”

Luke 2:1

In our troubled and crazy world, Christmas is the day of peace. It is the time for families and friends to put troubles aside and be together. Even on the larger scale, in wars and conflicts between nations and peoples, “a Christmas peace” is often arranged. The guns fall silent between peoples and nations for the Christmas day. Indeed Christmas is to be the time for peace in the world.

It is also at Christmas that people say: if only the peace of this one day would be everyday. So many people are searching for peace in their homes, in their marriages, in their communities and in the world. And so they say: Christmas day is the day we may have some of that peace. If only it would be Christmas all day and every day.

For besides the great conflicts in the world of today between nations and peoples there are many other smaller but no less serious and terrible conflicts and troubles. People have so much conflict and troubles within themselves, in their marriages, in their families, at their work place and on the streets. Just think of all the depressed and unhappy people, of all those who turn to drugs and alcohol, because

they find no reason to live. Think of all the broken marriages and families brought about by people who are selfish. Think of all the violence and vandalism in our communities. Property is wrecked and people are assaulted and police are taunted. Think of all the strikes and demonstrations that happen as people feel themselves to be cheated and ripped off by either employer or government.

And so many are looking for relief. They are looking for peace. But to whom do they look?

Well today so many turn to government for help. Government, the state, is seen as the solution to their lives problems . . . If only the government would make the divorce laws less easy . . . if the government would give more money with the family allowance cheques . . . if only the government would have more police officers on the beat and more laws to deal with delinquent youths, then we would have peace. But is this where the true peace comes from? Does true peace in our hearts and lives come from the efforts of human government?

Roman peace

Let us reflect upon the opening words to the story about the entry into this world of the true Prince of peace.

There in the New Testament in the gospel of Luke we read “And it came to pass in those days that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled.” But what do these dry historical facts of a Roman Caesar and his decree have to do with the Christmas peace?

Well, these facts help reveal the true meaning of Christmas peace. For who was this Roman Emperor,

Caesar Augustus, who could order that all the world should be enrolled on his taxation lists? Who was this man who by his decree had Mary and Joseph come to the little town of Bethlehem, where their son Jesus would be born?

Actually many people who lived in the ancient Roman world of Caesar Augustus did not consider him to be just a man. He was a god for them. For Caesar Augustus was brilliant. He was a wise ruler and great organizer. By his shrewdness Caesar Augustus delivered the Roman world from the terrible civil wars which had raged within the empire for many years. He established the “Pax Romana” or the “Roman Peace” from one side of the great empire to the other side with the help of the powerful Roman armies. And the Roman Empire did enjoy unprecedented peace and material prosperity during his reign. For not only did Caesar Augustus bring peace on the streets and on the borders but he also tried to bring peace into the lives of his citizens. He saw the family as important for the life of the empire and so he even promoted pro family laws and legislation.

No wonder many were in awe of him. Here was a genius who ruled a peaceful empire that spanned three continents. His empire was so great, that it was called by the people of the time as “the empire of the whole earth.” No wonder that he as Caesar received the name Augustus that means the one worthy of divine honour. And he was worshipped as a god and a Saviour. Temples were made for him and as one Roman historian commented: worship of Augustus became so extensive that the worship of other gods became non-existent. Caesar Augustus was called and adored with ancient titles

Peace



no less than, “the heavenly Father, the Saviour of the world, the Prince of peace, the great King, the Redeemer.”

Hmm . . . does this sound a lot like the words of Handel’s Messiah? Does this not sound a lot like the Old Testament passage of Isaiah 9:6? There in the prophecy of Isaiah we read: For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace of the increase of His government and of peace there will be no end.”

The real Prince of Peace

Just when one prince of peace had decreed that all the world should be enrolled for taxation, another “Prince of Peace” arrives in this world. This Prince of Peace was born there in Bethlehem in the stable

because there was no room for his parents, Joseph and Mary, in the inn. This Prince of Peace who was born there was far greater than any other prince or ruler. This Prince was more than just a man like Caesar Augustus. This Prince is both man and God. He is the True Prince of peace. He is the almighty God. He is the Everlasting one. And of the extent of His government and of His peace there will be no end.

For where is Caesar Augustus today? Where is his Roman peace? They are gone. They are but names and ideas remembered and studied in high school and college history courses. For Caesar Augustus could not overcome sin. He could not conquer death. And the peace he brought to the world of his day was not perfect: it eventually crumbled into a heap of ruins.

But where is Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace today? He has gone from Bethlehem’s stable to be

enthroned in heaven above. He is the Prince who brings true peace into the hearts of all those who believe in Him. He is the one who can remove the cause of all turmoil, pain, heartbreak and hardship in human life. He alone is the one who can remove sin and guilt, that is within us human beings. With Jesus Christ the King all our sins, our terrible wrongs and wicked thoughts are forgiven. With Jesus Christ’s suffering and death on the cross, our relation is made right and whole again with God. There is reconciliation between us human beings and God. There is peace for us in our hearts. Jesus Christ the Prince of Peace brings a true peace, an indestructible peace, a peace that lives within us. And it is this peace of Christ that will radiate from our hearts into our everyday life. With this peace of God in our hearts, we can be at peace with ourselves. We can also have then peace in our marriages, in our families, in our communities, in our nation and between nations.

But there are many counterfeit peaces offered to you today in this world. And they come at a heavy price to you. You must pay your taxes, or you must buy the drugs and alcohol, or you must vote for a particular political party. But the peace of Jesus Christ which is yours is a gift. Indeed the greatest gift of Christmas is our Lord Jesus Christ who came into this world in those days of Caesar Augustus’ enrollment. God in His grace has given peace to us freely in Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. And this gift of peace is yours for everyday and forever, by faith in Him.

J. Louwerse

In all things God is

A little while ago, someone I knew was involved in a serious traffic accident. A car failed to yield the right of way causing him to hit this car broadside with his motorcycle. The result: a broken jaw, various lacerations and bruises and a lot of pain and discomfort.

At a time like this, the question about God's power can arise in your mind. Where was God during this accident? Is what you believe about God really true? And if it is, how do you harmonize your belief during a time of discomfort and pain?

I'm sure most of us have asked these type of questions at one time or another. For there simply is a lot of pain and hurt in the life of every child of God. Some of you may have been abused in one way or another when you were young. Where was God when this abuse was being perpetrated? Some of you may be struggling with chronic health problems for many years already. And you wonder whether you are ever going to get better. Some of you may have had financial difficulties for many years. And the question that is on your mind is, "Is God ever going to give you some financial breathing room?" Some of you may have a lot of stress and tension in your home. And you wonder, "Why is God doing this to you? If He is so good and powerful, why does He not bring a change in your domestic situation?"

Yes, why? We all have our *why* questions about God. So much so that we sometimes have difficulty believing what we confess together about the almighty and faithfulness of our heavenly God and Father.

At a time like this, it is good to go to the Scriptures and ask the Lord to enlighten our minds and encourage our hearts. We would like to do this by having a brief look at Romans 8:28. There we read, "*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.*"

Blessed assurance

Romans 8:28 begins with the words *we know*. That is a profound statement of assurance. There are many things the author of this text, the apostle Paul, does not know. He does not know exactly why God does what He does. He does not know the precise goal God has with everything that happens in his life. He does not know what will await him when he wakes up the next day. But he does know that in all things God is working for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. And this knowledge is a source of great and blessed assurance in his life and our lives as well.

All-inclusive

It is easy to believe this statement when we limit it to so-called good things. When we receive good health from the Lord, we easily think this is working for our good. When we receive financial success from the Lord, we tend to think the same. When things go the way we would like them to go, we have no difficulty in believing in God as our

Father. A Father who is good to us. A Father who cares for us. A Father who is able to provide for all our bodily and spiritual needs.

And yet, Paul's statement cannot be limited to these so-called good things in our lives. For Paul is clearly speaking about *all* things. The accident we spoke about is included. The abuse as well. Likewise, the chronic health problems, the financial problems and the domestic stress. In all these and other trying things, God is working for the good of those who live in Him and are called according to His purpose.

The great Watchmaker

That is, as we have said, sometimes very hard to believe. How can accidents and abuse ever work for your good? How can health, financial and domestic problems do the same?

Well, the answer to this question lies in the little word *faith*. To use the words of Hebrews 11:1, we have to celebrate in the present already the reality of the blessings of our hope and the proof of events as yet unseen. God has promised that in all things He is working for our good. Through faith we have to pull the reality and proof of this promise into the present and celebrate it right in the midst of our hurts and pains.

In order to help us do this, someone once came to our aid with the following example. He began by stating that the text for our meditation appeared to contain a contradictory statement. Good things seem to be working in one direction; bad things in an opposite. How can we say that the things that appear to be working in opposite directions are working for our good? He then said, "Take your watch and open it. What

working for our good



do you see? You see that one wheel is turning in an anti-clockwise direction, but it is attached to another wheel that is working in a clockwise direction. You look at this machinery and you say, 'This is mad, this is quite ridiculous; here are wheels turning in opposite directions; the man who made the watch must have been a madman.' But he wasn't. He has so arranged this watch and put in a main-spring to govern all the wheels, that when it is wound up, though one wheel turns this way, and another that way, they are all working together to move the hands round the face of the watch. They appear to be in contradiction, but they are all working together to the same end." The man then drew the conclusion for our lives. And he advised us in the seemingly contradictory things in life to look at the great Watchmaker and not to jump to premature conclusions. If we look with a spiritual eye we will soon

begin to see that God knows what He is doing.

The good of Christlikeness

"What is this good God is working for?" you ask. Is it being protected from an accident? Is it being spared abuse? Is it being freed from difficulties, be they physical, financial or domestic? Not necessarily so. We may think this would be for our good. Our heavenly Father may have other ideas about what is good for us. As a matter of fact, we can even say that sometimes these things and more may not even be good for us at all. For just imagine if our health was always good. Just imagine if we went through life without any emotional scars or difficulties. Do you really think this would be good for us? Do you really think this would keep us close to God? Keep us dependent upon Him? Help us live for His glory alone?

I'm sure you know the answer. All these so-called good things and more have a tendency to weaken our bond with our Father. They have a tendency to make us feel self-sufficient and independent. On the other hand, what we may call bad can be used by God to draw us closer to Him. To make us more dependent upon Him. To help us live more for His honour and glory alone.

Knowing this also helps us understand what this good in Romans 8:28 is all about. It is nothing less than learning to love God more and more, learning to live for God more and more, learning to look like God more and more. In short, it is nothing less than being conformed to the image of our Lord Jesus Christ more and more. As Paul also confirms when he says in the following verse, "For those God foreknew He also predestined *to be conformed to the likeness of His Son*, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers."

How do we know?

How do we know whether this is all true? Personally know that this is true? Well, if we love God, we will know. If we have been called by God, we will also know. This calling by God refers to our being brought to faith and repentance by the Holy Spirit. This loving God refers to our living in communion with God by submitting our lives to His holy Word. When that is the case, we will know for sure that in all things God is working for our good. To be sure, there will be the struggle of faith. But in faith, we will be able to trust God and experience the blessed assurance of Romans 8:28.

Dick Moes

Man and demon listen to the new teacher

Bible Story

Based on Mark 1:16-20
and Luke 5:1-11

The boy Jesus grew up in Nazareth, a town in the Northern part of Israel, not far from the lake. He liked helping His father in the carpenter's shop, and He enjoyed roaming the fields with His brothers and friends. But He was special. That was most clearly noticed on the Sabbath, the Day of Rest. On that day Jesus went to the Place of Meeting with His parents, brothers and sisters. He loved doing that the most! As the elders read from the Holy Books, Jesus listened very intently. These were Words from His Father in Heaven. More than any other boy He understood what they meant. Without difficulty He was able to learn these holy Words by heart. Often He talked about them with Joseph and Mary, His parents, and with His clever teachers. It was obvious to all that Jesus grew in wisdom and standing at a remarkable rate as the years went by.

The day came that Jesus turned thirty years old. At that age young men were considered to be on their own. From then on they must provide for themselves. And as grown men they are allowed to participate in grown-up activities.

One such activity is reading and explaining the Holy Books in the House of Meeting. No one is really surprised when one Sabbath Jesus walks up to the front in order to talk to the people. They know Him as the young man who was eager to learn about God. Now that He is old enough to teach, they more or less expect Him to do that. They are kind of curious what He will say. How would He explain the Holy Words to them?

It is not long before their curiosity turns into amazement. This young man sure knows how to speak. And He certainly understands the Holy Words like no one else before Him. But more can be said about the way He speaks. He does not just read a part of the Book and explain it. No. With force and conviction He tells the people how these Words must live in their lives. He demands that His listeners must live as holy children of



God. They must feel sorry for what they do wrong. Above all, they must love the Lord their God with all their mind and might.

Jesus understands the power of the Word more than anyone else. He also knows that people must again learn to listen. Many have turned away from a God-fearing way of life, because their teachers often talk more about man-made rules than about the living Words of God. Jesus wants to open people's eyes and ears, so they become ready to believe that He, Jesus, is the Son of God, who has come from Heaven. He will fulfil the Holy Words of Promise. He will destroy the dark powers of sin. In that way He will save His people.

But Satan, the Prince of Darkness, has recognized Jesus. He knows that Jesus has come to destroy him. Already once his sly attacks were defeated by Jesus's Words. But he will not give up. With his many helpers, called demons, he must stop Jesus as soon as possible.

That is the reason why many demons are present in that Hall of Meeting where Jesus is teaching for the first time. To let their presence be felt, they enter a man. They make this man act very strange. He forgets all his proper manners. The man stands up, waves his arms wildly and starts shouting at the top of his voice! Jesus' words are drowned out by the cries of this man. But the demons know that just muffling Jesus's words is not enough. They must block them. They do not want Jesus to talk to His people

about God's grace. They want all men to stay in the grip of darkness.

"Why have you come to bother us?" they make the man call out to Jesus. "You, Jesus of Nazareth. We know. You have come to destroy us. You, the Holy One of Israel!"

Immediately Jesus recognizes His enemies, though they are hiding in that poor man. Without delay He addresses them. It is true that He is the Holy One of Israel. But the demons do not say this to help the people. They say it, because they want to confuse them. They do not want anyone to listen to Jesus. By making a mad man say that Jesus is holy, they in fact make a mockery of the holiness of Jesus.

All the people in the Hall of Meeting look at Jesus. How would the new teacher deal with this horrible interruption? Jesus uses the most powerful weapon He has: His Words! "Demons, be silent. And come out of the man. Right now!" The demons listen at once. They cannot resist Jesus' words. Though they make the man yell and thrash madly yet, they leave.

The news about Jesus, the new teacher, travels fast throughout the whole area. Jesus can make both man and demon listen to His powerful Words! Today we must still listen to Jesus' Words. We can read them in the Bible. If we hear Jesus' Words and obey them, the Prince of Darkness will have no more power over us. We will be saved, forever.

Jane

Activity Page

Find the 17 words, related to Christmas, that are hidden vertically, horizontally, right to left, left to right, top to bottom and bottom to top.

Copy the 2nd letter of each word. Unscramble these 17 letters in order to compose a phrase from Luke 2.

G	Z	S	D	E	R	E	W	S	N	A	B
Q	A	P	P	E	A	R	E	D	B	N	F
M	A	R	Y	X	T	F	F	R	E	G	R
L	J	E	S	U	S	I	U	E	T	E	O
J	O	S	E	P	H	W	D	H	N	L	I
T	W	E	O	E	C	A	E	P	L	S	V
K	M	N	D	Q	L	N	Z	E	E	J	A
O	S	T	O	R	Y	O	A	H	H	B	S
N	E	V	A	E	H	E	M	S	E	U	P
S	M	U	A	C	C	L	A	I	M	E	D

Hugo



An Anchor for the soul – Hope for 1998

Hebrews 6:19-20 – We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek. (NIV)

The passage of Scripture quoted above says that the hope that believers have in Jesus Christ is an anchor for the soul. You could even say that Jesus Christ is the Anchor – the anchor for one's soul.

Is He your hope – your hope for 1998?

You know what an anchor is. An anchor is a heavy object, often made out of cast iron, which is let down overboard a ship in order to keep the ship from drifting. Once the anchor has been let down and settles upon or digs into the sea bottom, the tides may rise or fall, the wind may blow and the sea may rage, but the boat remains firm and secure.

The Lord Jesus Christ is such an anchor. That He is an anchor is found especially in that He is a priest – a high priest.

The Old Testament part of the Bible teaches us about the work of a high priest. For there were many high priests before Jesus Christ. The high priest, e.g., Aaron, had to do three things: he had to bring sacrifices for the forgiveness of the sins of God's people. Every day he had to bring sacrifices. However, there was one day per year that he had to bring a special sacrifice. That was on a day called the "Day of Atonement." Upon that day he had to enter into a special room in the back of the tabernacle (later the temple). This room was called "the most holy place." In that room was a piece of furniture called "the ark of the covenant." It was the place where God dwelt in the midst of His people." On that one special day of the year, the high priest would enter it with the blood of a goat and of a bull. He would sprinkle the blood on the ark of the covenant for the forgiveness of the people's sins.

The other two things which the high priest had to do was to pray for

the people and to bless them in the name of God.

These are the three things the Lord Jesus did and does for those who believe in Him. He brought a sacrifice for sin. It was not the blood of a bull or goat which He offered up as a sacrifice; it was His own blood. He died on the cross. On the cross His blood was shed for the forgiveness of sins. But He did not stay dead. On the third day He arose from the dead. He ascended to heaven and entered the heavenly most holy place of which the earthly one in the tabernacle was but a vague shadow. He entered into the very presence of God and there, in a manner of speaking, He presented His blood to God the Father. This blood appeased the wrath of God against sin.

This passage of Scripture says that Jesus entered on behalf of believers and as a forerunner. All those who believe in Him will follow Him, into heaven, into the most holy place, into the very presence of God.

In the meantime, as believers await the return of Christ who will take them to the heavenly most holy place, He does for them the other two things a high priest did: He prays for His believers, and He blesses them.

And so He is an Anchor for the soul. He is the only Anchor. You need to hold on to Him. As you hold on to Him, your life is firmly anchored in heaven, where Jesus is, in the presence of God the Father.

Most anchors are let down from the ship into the sea. The anchor goes down, down, down, to the bottom of the sea. This other Anchor

which is Jesus Christ goes up, up, up, into heaven. But just like every anchor makes a ship firm and secure, so Jesus Christ makes life firm and secure.

There are many things in this life which make us insecure. We are worried about what the future holds. Soon a new year, 1998, will begin. What will that year hold? We are worried about health, relationships, income – many things which concern us. Well listen! There's an Anchor. An Anchor who gives security. I am not suggesting that if you believe in Christ every problem in your life will go away. Rather, I am saying that if you believe in Christ, you have the forgiveness of all your sins, and you will have someone, someone great – the Son of God – praying for you and blessing you. Your life will be firm. You will have security knowing that you belong to God for the sake of Jesus Christ.

This gives hope. Hope for this life, hope for 1998, hope for the future. Hold on to the Anchor. If people on a ship were to cut themselves loose from the anchor, they would drift away. Hold on to Jesus Christ and you will not drift aimlessly through life. Pray to the Father on the basis of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. Confess your sins and ask for the free forgiveness of your sins. Then know that the high priest will pray for you too, and you will live under His blessing. Then you will have hope – a hope firm and secure. Hope for 1998 and beyond.

George van Popta

EVANGEL

Volume 15 No. 2

Editor — Dick Moes; Layout & Printing — Premier Printing Ltd. Illustrations — Cover: winter scene; p.6 by Jane DeGlint; p.7 by Hugo VanderHoek. *Evangel* is published 4 times per year by **Reformed Evangelism Taskforce**. All correspondence & subscriptions to: **R.E.T., 21804-52 Avenue, Langley, B.C. V3A 4R1.**

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