

## Christmas Events & Services at Old Mill Hall

Sunday 22nd December

Community Family Christmas Party — 4.30-6.15pm

Carol Service — 6.30pm

Christmas Day — Presents and Praise Celebration — 10.30am

# Hopeunlimited

Good news for the people of Grove

Issue 8 Christmas 2013

In this issue: The best of times ... What Christmas means to me ... Home for Good



**You are welcome to our  
Sunday meeting**

**10.30am**

**at Old Mill Hall**

includes a  
Children's club & Youth group.

Contact Paul John on  
(01235) 210037  
www.gfec.org.uk

Sermons available on website



Tel: 01235 772280  
Savile Way, Grove, OX12 0PT

Open for drinks & cakes all day.  
Sandwiches & hot food prepared  
to order till 2.30pm.

Mon-Fri 9.30am-4pm, Sat 10am-4pm

Churches working together  
serving the Community  
Charity No 1048923

## Home for Good

The first time I met any children who were being cared for away from their parents was when I visited an orphanage in Romania when I was in my 20s. Staying with those little boys who all lived together made a lasting impression on me and led to me thinking about adoption.

Fast forward a good few years, I found myself happily married with a small child and wanting to enlarge our family. After many attempts to grow our family through the usual route, we started exploring adoption. We were nervous about quite a few things and wondered if we would be the sort of people that Social Services would be looking for.



We started our journey with a visit to an Oxfordshire County Council adoption open evening, which was very welcoming and informative. We had to wait a few months and then we had our first meeting with a social worker in our own home.

The next stage was a half-day workshop on loss awareness, to explore some of the things that we might have 'lost' in choosing to opt for adoption. This was quickly followed by an excellent 3-day preparation course, which prepared us to know if we could go on to actually apply to adopt – we felt we could!

Next came the home study, which lasted several months and included a safety check on our home. Finally, we went to panel and were approved to adopt! Now the hardest part of all, waiting for a match. It has been a real rollercoaster so far but definitely worth it and a time of real excitement. We can't wait until we can welcome our new little one home for good.

*A Grove couple*

## Unwanted Christmas Gifts

This festive time has been cynically summed up by a seasoned observer who said that "Christmas is a time when we exchange a whole lot of gifts we really like for a whole load we don't really want!"

Some of us may have difficulty deciding what to say when we open our Christmas gifts. In fact, what we say isn't always what we mean as we don't want to hurt other people's feelings!

"It's very nice" really means  
"I can't think of anything good  
to say about it"

"It's the thought that counts"  
actually means "What on earth  
were you thinking when you bought me this?"

"It's a really interesting colour" prompts us to  
ask "Is there a receipt and will they exchange  
it at the shop?"

Back at that first Christmas the Wise Men  
brought gifts – well actually they arrived 2  
years after the birth.

The account in *Matthew 2:11* says 'On coming  
to the house, they saw the child with his  
mother Mary, and they bowed down and wor-  
shipped him. Then they opened their treasures  
and presented him with gifts of gold and of  
incense and of myrrh'.

They recognised that this was no ordinary  
baby and presented their gifts of Gold – the  
best that they could bring to honour His  
Kingship. Frankincense – a symbol of prayer to  
show their desire to communicate with God  
and Myrrh – a symbol of death and burial, to  
acknowledge that Jesus had come to live, but  
also to die on our behalf.



This is the mystifying core of  
Christmas – an awesome  
reality that God's Son  
became truly human, sharing  
our nature and yet at the  
same time was truly God.

He descended so that we might ascend.  
He became poor that we might become rich.  
He was born that we might be born again.  
He had no home that we might have a home  
in heaven. He died that we might be forgiven.  
He rose again that we might have eternal life.

Jesus is God's perfect gift to each of us. In the  
Bible, Paul describes Him as an 'incredible  
gift' or as one version puts it - 'a gift too  
wonderful for words'. Whatever you may think  
about the gifts you receive, do take time to  
thank God for His gift.

Wishing you a Christmas full of joy & peace.

Pastor Paul John

Hopeunlimited is published by Grove Free Evangelical Church (Registered Charity 283079).

If you have any comments to make or do not wish to receive further editions,  
please contact us on (01235) 210037 or email hope@gfec.org.uk



**All Aboard** — Roll up, roll up, all aboard. We set sail in July for our fun-filled Adventure Cruise Holiday Bible Club. Over 40 children and a band of dedicated helpers, from Grove Free Evangelical Church and beyond, cruised the high seas at North Drive C of E School for a week. The children earned team points playing crazy golf, football and 'boat' races across the playing fields. We enjoyed fantastic drama, great craft, lively songs and Bible stories. On the Friday parents joined us to find out what the children had been up to and then we all enjoyed a picnic together. On the following Sunday we held a brunch service with bacon butties. Many parents and children joined us to hear and see what the children had been doing during the week. We have several events planned for the future including our regular monthly Friday Funday Club and a Christmas party on 22nd December. Please do get in touch to find out what is on offer for children at GFEC. *Helen Harwood - children's ministry leader*

*The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen — Luke 2:20*

## What Christmas means to me

"Christmas to me is a gathering of close friends and family to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ and Christmas dinners are great too!"  
Josh Kerr; local Actor and Singer

"To me, Christmas has always been about food, spending time with family and special friends, eating, telly, presents and food!"  
Abi Kerr; student

"Family!" - Bryony; Co-op Employee

"For us, Christmas is a time of giving, remembering that God GAVE His only Son to live and die for us - and for us to GIVE shoeboxes to the people of Eastern Europe to demonstrate that love."  
John & Margaret Willemsen; Romanian Shoebox Appeal Organisers and Distributors

"Getting together as a large family group is how we celebrate Christmas, although over the years Christmas has become increasingly 'commercialised' and 'too expensive'! I keep up the tradition of going to church at Christmas time with my daughter."  
Jack Gutteridge; retired Police Officer

"For me, Christmas is about advent and the sense of preparation and excitement. It was the happiest family time ... now it's more about trying to squeeze too much into a short time, and wondering what it was all about!"  
Mary Cowdry; Cornerstone Coffee and Book Shop Manager

## It was the best of times — it was the worst of times

If you read the first paragraph of "A Tale of Two Cities" by Charles Dickens, you'll find it sums up not only the times leading up to the French Revolution but coincidentally attitudes towards Christmas!

You may already be busy present buying, looking forward to a few days off work spending quality time with family and friends. For you, the festive season will be a delight. Jesus' birth may feature in your celebrations or not, but for you it is the best of times.

But it can be a time to dread for many reasons - sadness because a loved one is absent, pressure because money is tight yet children's expectations run high, stressful due to pain or ill health, loneliness because everyone else seems to have someone. There are 101 reasons why Christmas can feel the worst of times.



Our church family are a regular cross section of this community. We're not a religious clique hiding away, living out our religious fantasies, untouched by tragedy and heartache. We are widows, widowers, parents, children and young people - neighbours of yours. We experience disability, ill health, job insecurity, you name it. A mixture of folk who understand Christmas from the best and worst perspectives, but we've found that coming alongside together helps.

We want to share the best news ever with you that the birth of Jesus Christ represents the start of God's rescue plan for everyone, everywhere, for all time. Whether Christmas is the best or worst of times for you, we'd love to see you this Christmas. For more information, see [www.gfec.org.uk](http://www.gfec.org.uk).

*Fiona Massie - church leader*