



Lively Stones | PETER 2:5

Holding forth the word of life

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Chinese New Year



Chinese New Year (CNY) or Lunar New Year is just a couple of days away. What are your thoughts dwelling on? Spring cleaning, new clothes, good food served during New Year's Eve or the red packets you'll be receiving? In this issue of Lively Stones, the editorial team has chosen to adapt from our pastors' writings on CNY, may you read it and be greatly blessed.



Tips for Celebrating Chinese New Year

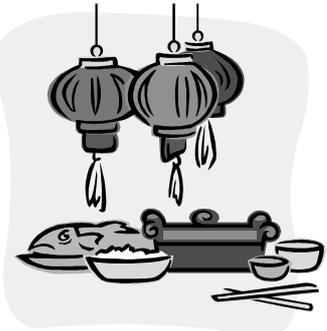
by Rev Colin Wong

Of all the traditional Chinese festivals, the New Year is perhaps the most elaborate, colourful and important. This is a time for the Chinese to congratulate each other and themselves on having passed through another year, a time to finish out the old, and to welcome in the New Year. Common expressions heard at this time are: GUONIAN to have made it through the old year, and BAINIAN to congratulate the New Year.

A part of the tradition on Chinese New Year (CNY) Day is that children are given *hongbaos* (i.e. gifts of money in red envelopes). Every child looks forward to this. Everyone puts on new clothes and would put on his or her best behaviour. And it will be considered improper to tell a lie, raise one's voice, use indecent language, or break anything on the first day of the year.

CNY is celebrated on the first day of the First Moon of the *Lunar Calendar*. CNY, like the Western New Year, signifies turning over a new leaf. Socially, it is a time for family reunions and for visiting friends and relatives. This holiday, more than any other Chinese holiday, stresses the importance of family ties.

The CNY's Eve dinner gathering is among the most important family occasions of the year. All members of the family will gather for this important family meal. Even if a family member cannot attend, an



empty seat will be kept to symbolize that person's presence at the banquet.

However, as Christians, what would you like the reunion dinner to be? Would you like to do it differently? I would like to suggest a number of things whereby you can have an edifying and profitable family reunion dinner. (For those of us who do not come from a Christian family, you can still apply some of the suggestions privately).

Thanksgiving

CNY is a time of thanksgiving. As the family gathers around the table for the reunion dinner, why not begin the dinner with a hymn of thanksgiving. You may choose "*Count Your*

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Blessings" or **"Great is Thy Faithfulness."** There is much to give thanks to God for in the past year. After singing a hymn, the head of the family will open with a word of prayer thanking God for all His benefits in the past year. As you enjoy your meal, I think it will be good to share with one another God's richest blessings. Every member of the family should count their blessings and name them one by one before the Lord (Psalm 40:5).

Asking for Forgiveness

CNY is a time of confession. Since it signifies turning over a new leaf, it will be good to make confession to one another. Firstly, confess your sins to God. John reminds us that if we confess our sins to God, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness by the precious blood of Jesus Christ (1 John 1:9). How wonderful it is to begin the New Year with a clean slate of life! Secondly, ask for forgiveness from your parents or siblings whom you have offended or wronged (James 5:16a). Thirdly, pray for one another for healing of relationships (James 5:16b). And finally, the promise of a good relationship is the power of prayer that accomplishes much (James 5:16c). Won't you agree with me that this is a wonderful way to begin the New Year?

Reflection

CNY is a time of reflection on past year and striving to be more Christ-like in the year ahead (Philippians 3:12-14).

Reflection is a personal matter. Therefore, it would be good to do it after the reunion dinner. Before you go to bed, come before God and take time to examine your lives and look for ways to change certain departments of your lives that need improvement. Paul said, *"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?"* (2 Corinthians 13:5)

One of the reasons why you and I need to spend time on reflection is that oftentimes we

take our salvation for granted. Why are there so little changes in us since we trusted Christ for salvation? (2 Corinthians 5:17) And we wonder why. Let us not take the grace of God for granted (2 Corinthians 6:1) but spend some private time to ask God to try us (Psalm 139:23, 24) lest we come under His wrath.

Resolutions

CNY is a good time for making resolutions, if you have not done so already.

Sharing Christ

CNY is a time of sharing God's love with loved ones, relatives and friends. In normal circumstances, we seldom visit each other. We only see each other on special occasions. So as you go visiting, ask God to give you somebody to share with. CNY is a good opportunity to pay the Gospel debt. Nobody will scold you even though he or she may not like what you share.

Let us preach the Gospel in season and out of season (2 Timothy 4:2). This is our business in season and out of season. We are to be ready to share the message of life all the time whether the opportunity seems ripe or not.

How should you celebrate the Lunar New Year? Will you do it differently in 2006? A blessed and joyous Chinese Lunar New Year to you! Amen.





Can Christians join in celebrations of Chinese festivals?

By Rev Charles Seet



With the Lunar New Year only just days away, it would be good for us to reflect on the real blessings that God has bestowed upon us – not the material blessings, which are only transient, but spiritual, intangible blessings which money cannot buy. This is a time also to consider the real value in eternity, of all our present pursuits in life, including the lively pursuit of wealth, posterity and longevity.

During the Lunar New Year celebrations, it is customary for people to wish one another “*Gong Xi Fa Cai*” which means, “*May your wealth increase.*” Firecrackers, twisted bamboo, pussy willow, and *hong baos* are all symbols of good fortune. Everywhere you will see the red banners or the Chinese word “*Fu*” placed upside down, supposedly to usher in good luck. The two or four oranges that are exchanged during visitation are supposed to bring wealth because the word for *gold* and *orange* sounds alike in Cantonese. Food with auspicious names is eaten. On the seventh day, raw lettuce and fresh fish (*yu sheng*) is eaten, because the word for *fresh* or *raw* also means *life* or *grow*. Eating groundnuts is also supposed to bring long life, while eating melon seeds is supposed to bring more children.

Many greeting cards depict the *Fu Lu Shou*, the three stars that epitomise happiness, success and longevity. This typifies the philosophy of life that dominates that life of many people today. Their philosophy of attempting to pursue one’s happiness is in the things of this life. But if this is all that people live for, their whole world will be shattered when they are unable to have these things, or when they lose these things. The fact is neither wealth nor posterity nor longevity can bring the real happiness or blessedness that we need in life. King Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, concluded, “*All is vanity and vexation of spirit*” (Ecclesiastes 1:14; 2:17).

In Ecclesiastes 6:11,12 Solomon concludes: “*Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, what is man the better? For who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the*

days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?” The many things here refer to all that has been stated before: the pursuit of wealth, having many children, trying to live longer, and pursuing what this world calls “success.” None of these things that commonly pursued by man can provide the true blessedness that man is seeking. All they do is to increase vanity. Whatever man seeks to do in life, he cannot escape from the final outcome, which is vanity.

Here now is the dilemma: Man has no choice but to live for a time in this world, and therefore he should make good use of his life. That is the only way to have a truly blessed life. But then on the other hand, whatever he does with his life leads to vanity! He cannot escape from it. So what is he to do?

The solution to this dilemma is to be found in God. God alone knows what is good for man in this life, because He created man. And God alone can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun, because He knows, and in fact, He determines the final outcome of all things. God Himself says this in Isaiah 46:10 – “*Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure...*”

And in the light of what God has already revealed to us in the Scriptures we can learn what is good for us to do with our lives. Micah 6:8 – “*He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*” According to this verse, what is good, what is truly worthwhile for us to do, that will ensure a blessed life for us, and not vanity, consists of three things:

Firstly, to do justly – this implies putting away our personal sins and living according to the commandments of God. Secondly, to love mercy – this implies loving our fellow men as God has loved us and shown mercy to us. And the third thing is to walk

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humbly with the Lord – this implies maintaining an intimate personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

As we celebrate the Lunar New Year this week, let us be thinking about this. While everyone around us is celebrating the pursuit of

wealth, success and longevity, we will seek instead for three other things which we know are good, according to God's Word – to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.



MY PRAYER

by Helen Steiner Rice

*Bless me Heavenly Father~
Forgive my erring ways.
Grant me strength to serve Thee,
Put purpose in my days.*

*Give me understanding,
Enough to make me kind,
So I may judge all people
With my heart and not my mind.*

*Teach me to be patient
In everything I do,
Content to trust Your wisdom
And to follow after you.*

*Help me when I falter
And hear me when I pray,
And receive me in Thy Kingdom
To dwell with thee someday.*

出入平安

花開富貴



Announcements

- The Adults' Sunday School class in the sanctuary will start on a new study on the book of Joshua taught by Eld Ng Beng Kiong starting 05 Feb 2006."
- The Editorial team welcomes contribution from the congregation. Please send contributions to kohjulia@starhub.net.sg. The editorial team reserves the right to edit any articles to be published.