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*Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship Him – — presented Him with gifts of gold frankincense and myrrh – Matt 2: 1,2,11*



Dear

We bring **Christmas Greetings** with joy and love

Our prayer is that your heart will always find the greatest happiness in Him

And that Christmas is filled with happy moments and special memories which continue long into the New Year.

Our faith is in our Saviour, Jesus Christ to whom we look to bring good out of all the happenings we experience. This faith has been tested during the year, drawing us a little closer to His image, we trust. – Rom 8:28&29

**Harvest 10/11** was downgraded as the grain was rain-affected by 'monsoon type' rains. The **good** from that disappointment was that the paddocks received sub-soil moisture which stood the emerging crops in good stead as there was low rain in the winter. At the start of cropping, mice in plague proportions caused damage to the early crops. However, crops that got away are yielding well. The canola is harvested now with good results. As we write, the harvest is 'stop/go' with rain causing a challenging situation but the wheat is as yet is undamaged.

**The Flood-** The soaking four inches of rain we received in December paved the way for the 11 inches that fell during the week ending 16<sup>th</sup> January to run. The water had nowhere to go but down the water courses spreading out to flood the low lying areas. Our home survived by 8 inches – the water was right under the house and stopped rising within 8 inches of the floor boards. We had built above the flood line but 'a once in a hundred year flood or was it a once in 200 year flood?' challenged the records. The **good** from that deluge is the washing of salt from the river, the river flats and our garden!!!



**The Shop** – After receiving notice that we would have to vacate the premises that the Look First Opportunity Shop traded from, the challenge was where to? We (Ian and Alison) decided to buy an 1884

bank building. It is situated in the middle of town. Following renovations to open a wall to enlarge the ground floor trading area, the contents of the shop were moved in February into their new home. The shop is popular with the locals and visitors alike. The **good** from the concern, stress and strain of moving is that through the proceeds, the Ukraine Aid and Education Fund is continuing to support shipping containers to Ukraine. The 6<sup>th</sup> cont. left in March and has been distributed and the 7<sup>th</sup> is ready to go. Local organizations are appreciating financial support as well as university students in Ukraine. A firebug disturbed the peace during the year and our interests were threatened twice by fire. Fortunately, the flood did not reach the property, either. We renovated upstairs and have been able to rent the unit to a family. The shop was of great value to the evacuees from Charlton as 80% of the homes there were flooded

and a number of people arrived wet through or with very few personal effects.

**The Trip** – We were invited to a wedding in Lebanon in August. We travelled with friends, Ian and Prue Fisher from Quambatook to attend the wedding of Mariya Filipaska to Pascal Lahoud in Beirut. The wedding



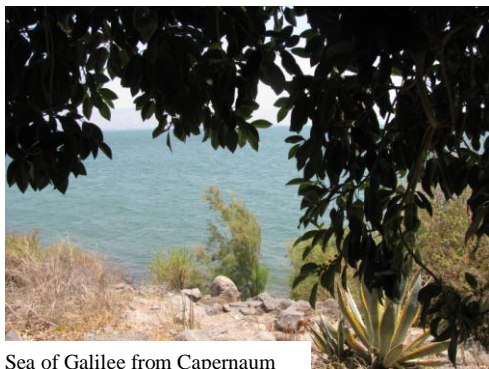
was culturally different although not too different from our own weddings. Mariya appreciated us being there. Mariya or Masha (Ukrainian name) was supported by the Fund for a short time to enable her to study for her Masters in Christian Education in Prague. She met Pascal there. The day of the wedding started in similar fashion to our own, the girls had their hair, nails and make up done. But at about 11.30AM, the bridegroom and groomsmen came to accompany the bride and attendants to the public gardens for photos. During the afternoon, the bride's family and friends visit



her while the bridegroom's family visit him in a different home and at 4.00PM, the bridegroom's family visited the bride and many more photos were taken and finally the service was at 6.00PM. Masha has employment in a school for children with disabilities and challenging behaviours in Beirut. Her personal challenge now is to learn Arabic. No doubt as with

her mastery of English she will be speaking fluently in the months to come. The **good** in the wedding was that the bride did not have family attending – we were her ‘family’ along with a few friends. We were glad to be there.

The trip included sightseeing in Lebanon and Israel. Sightseeing in **Lebanon** was of great interest, seeing Sidon, - remains of Roman/Crusader structures, market in the Moslem sector, soap factory, 18<sup>th</sup> century Moslem home, onto Tyre and the famous Roman ruins including the Arch of Triumph and hippodrome. Travelling north to see the famous Cedars of Lebanon and local homes set on stony terraces, meeting immigrants building their own home.



Sea of Galilee from Capernaum

**Israel** was so special as we are so familiar with the Bible names and places but to actually see some of them and imagine the Lord walking in those places such as the shores of the Sea of Galilee, streets of Jerusalem, Nazareth and the carpenter’s shop and many other places was so special. Bathing in The Dead Sea and visiting Masada was a day never to be forgotten. A highlight that will be remembered always was walking through King Hezekiah’s aqueduct in Jerusalem – nearly 3000 years old, the same as it was the day the workman left it - we walked in the water running through it. It was built to divert the water from the Gihon Spring (outside the walls) into the city to withstand a siege. (2Chronicles 32:30) The **good** in Israel was that Alison was not well and she really appreciated the kindness of Prue and Ian during that time.

Two weeks in **Ukraine** enabled us to meet all the people who are touched by the donations from the Fund. Although, these days were very full, the **good** during this time was hearing the expression of appreciation for the support given to families. It was encouraging for the team here in Donald who make it possible, to receive the report of the effectiveness of the Fund.

**Family happenings take keeping up with these days.** **Debbie** is continuing to work, in the Charlton Medical Clinic as the Practice Nurse. The Clinic facilities were flooded along with the hospital and weeks later DHS developed 3 portables as a clinic. Deb is also working one weekend a month in the Goodwin Village Aged Care Hostel. The Fusion Youth Group continues to meet once a week. Deb has a marvelous rapport with the young people. **Bill** and **Steph G** are still in Mackay, enjoying fishing and camping on the beaches on their days off. **Steph B** who celebrated her 21<sup>st</sup> in April has completed 2 years with Fusion and is trusting she will obtain a placement in RMIT’s Social Worker’s course. **Olivia** is still studying at Longernong Ag College, presently enjoying a trip in Europe. **Rebekah** has completed Year 12 and hopes to do nursing. **Levi** goes into Year 11, next year and plans to achieve an electrician apprenticeship ( school based). Levi’s highlight was his football team winning the Under 16 Grandfinal. It was his first year of football, previously he had played hockey.



**James** and **Grace**, **Hamish** and **Renee** have had a ‘sea change’. James is General Manager of Innovative Hydraulics here in Donald. They make large machinery for the mining industry as well as the many other applications for hydraulics. Grace has taken over the pigeon enterprise as well as working 3 days per week at the Birchip supermarket. **Hamish** is doing 2<sup>nd</sup> year Steel Fabrications in Ballarat. This year as seen him take up Super Cross Motorcycle racing – he is currently in the top 20, nationally. **Renee** enjoys school as well as riding ‘Elle’ in competition show jumping. **Rob** and **Marianne** are busy in their work. Marianne currently, while maintaining her normal work tasks is project manager of the building of a new staff room at Forest Hill Secondary College with volunteer labour – large undertaking!!!!!! **Cassandra** was challenged with a trip to Thailand in Sept. where the group undertook building an orphanage. – sightseeing was also included. We are so proud of Cassandra’s interest in Social Justice issues. **Georgie** and **Harrison** add netball and basketball to their full week. **Karin** has enjoyed her Heathdale Christian School in Hoppers Crossing. The change of pace has been appreciated. Karin contributes to her small group with friendship and fun and in many other ways.



Renee enjoying Fashions on the Field – Donald Cup

Although, we miss James on the farm, the **good** from this move is that his talents are fully utilized with his management of staff and the extensive projects. He relates so well to people and they appreciate his friendly manner and leadership. We have been fortunate to have Chris Sellick working with us. **Chris** and **Robyn** returned from the West – Chris was one of the drivers of the huge trucks that cart the iron ore from the mine to the coast. However, he was ready for a change of pace and is invaluable to Ian in all the farm tasks. The **good** from this move is that Robyn’s health is so much better than when she arrived. Chris has maintained his home next-door to us on the farm. A special family happening was enjoying **Glenda** and **Clyde Ragland’s** visit from Washington DC, in November. Glenda was our student exchange ‘daughter’ in 1982 and has visited each 10 years since. They enjoyed the Great Ocean Road, Grampians and the wildlife – koalas, kangaroos and a staring performance by a goanna on the farm.

We trust you are well and look forward to hearing your news,

For we know that all things work together for good, to them that love God to them who are called according to His purpose --- to be conformed to the image of His son --- Roms 8: 28,29

