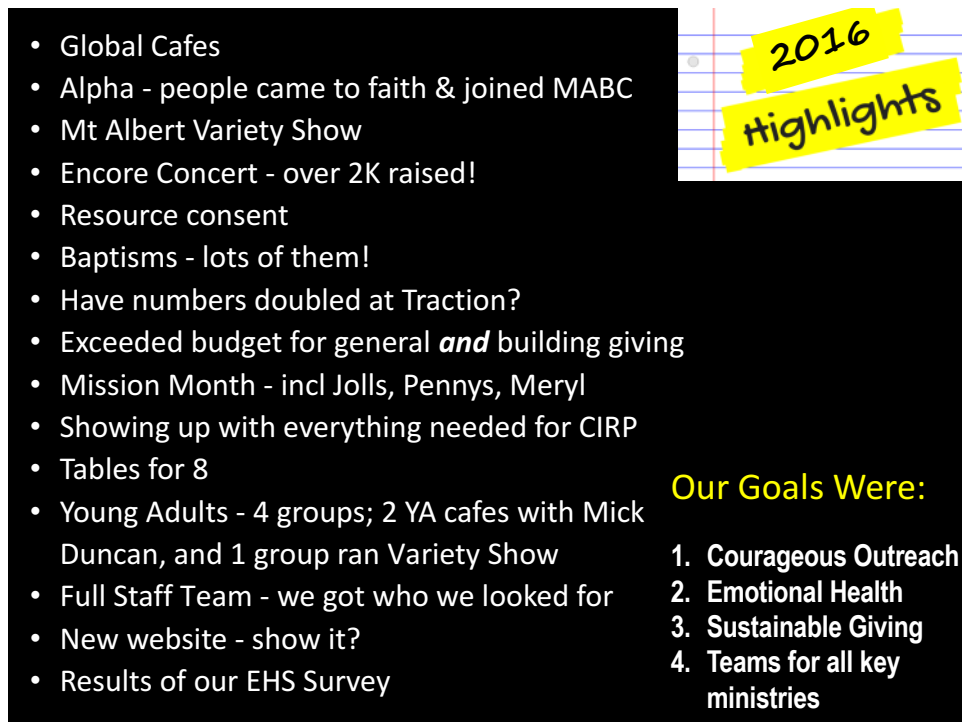


Celebrating the last year:

2016 was a year when we...



- Global Cafes
- Alpha - people came to faith & joined MABC
- Mt Albert Variety Show
- Encore Concert - over 2K raised!
- Resource consent
- Baptisms - lots of them!
- Have numbers doubled at Traction?
- Exceeded budget for general **and** building giving
- Mission Month - incl Jolls, Pennys, Meryl
- Showing up with everything needed for CIRP
- Tables for 8
- Young Adults - 4 groups; 2 YA cafes with Mick Duncan, and 1 group ran Variety Show
- Full Staff Team - we got who we looked for
- New website - show it?
- Results of our EHS Survey

Our Goals Were:

1. Courageous Outreach
2. Emotional Health
3. Sustainable Giving
4. Teams for all key ministries

- Cards collected from you suggested that concepts like identifying **King Lies** and **Unbearable Feelings** were particularly helpful
- Many had taken on the challenge of **Sabbath**
- Understanding **The Wall** - powerlessness there; accepting our limitations, you said were important

Also:

- The Thailand mission trip; the amazing work they did and great video they took and showed us
- Having well attended Careforce courses - including a men's group - that had never happened before

Thanks so much to all who volunteered in all the different ways in the last year

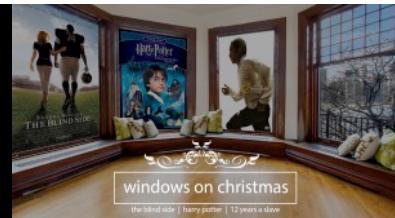
- Comments on the Wall that jumped out at me were:

We did this Wall instead of the Awards we normally give out

- But I'm told that one particular award is very special and important to this church: The Ian Laird Award
 - Ian Laird was a special long term devoted kind of volunteer who passed away a few years back
 - Let's think of this award as an encouragement of volunteerism generally
 - ◆ This year it goes to the Heavey family

Sermon Script: Windows on Christmas 3: 12 Years A Slave

Windows on Christmas Series:



Week 1 - The Blind Side

To live out the Christmas story, leave your own world and really enter into the world of people in need, just as God did

Week 2 - Harry Potter

The difference with the Christmas story is that it is true: God really did come to earth, & all history and our own destinies changed as a result

Week 3 - 12 Years a Slave

We use the word 'hope' quite a lot

- We say things like:
 - I hope the Black Caps win on Boxing Day
 - I hope the weather will be good for our cafe in the car park
 - I hope I get an awesome present for Christmas

Much of the time, hope lacks a sense of certainty

- It's more like a wish—something that we want to happen but have no way of knowing that it ultimately will
 - It's like crossing our fingers
 - When life is disappointing, we start to wonder if there's anything in which we can confidently hope

Yet hope is incredibly important to us

- We almost can't live without it

And a great way to understand that is to consider how life looks when there is no hope

- I couldn't think of a better illustration of that than in this movie clip from the recent film, "Twelve Years a Slave"
- This is a true story from the memoirs of a slave called Solomon Northup
- Take a look

12 Years a Slave clip

It's that kind of despair - lack of hope - that sits in the background to the Christmas story

- Today I'm going to tell you the forgotten first half of the Christmas story
- What do I mean by that?
 - Well every time you hear the Christmas story, it starts half way through
 - ◆ Every children's version of the Christmas story
 - ◆ Every christmas drama you ever see

- ◆ Even that movie that came out a few years back with Keisha Castle Hughes called, The Nativity Story

- All these start half way through
- And because it starts half way through it lacks emotional depth
- It lacks the human element

The guts of the story is in the first half

- It's in the aching of the Jewish people
- And it has plenty in common with that movie clip you just saw

See if you can answer these, as we frame the first half of the story:

Framing the first half of the story:

- **What does 'Messiah' mean?**
Anointed One; Deliverer
- **Where in the Old Testament is the Messiah mentioned?**
44 places! Isaiah, Psalms, Micah, Hosea...
- **For how long were the Jewish people crying out for a Messiah?**
800 years!

Messiah:

- Anointed One - Prophets, Priests and Kings were anointed
- Jesus - all three
- Deliverer - ushers in a messianic age when life will be better

- A leader like David; from his tribe; a Son of God, a Son of Man...
- 'Christ' is Greek for 'Messiah'; so Jesus Christ = Jesus Messiah
- When the Christians went round saying Jesus is the Christ - it was a massive statement politically

Where in OT?

- 44 places; notably Isaiah, Psalms

Does anyone know how long the Jewish people waited for a Messiah to come?

- 800 years!
 - That's a long time to feel hopeless and desperate
- So when you read in the Old Testament about the Messiah - in Isaiah and Psalms
 - ... where people are desperate for this great Deliverer to come
- The first of these is 800 years before Jesus came

A lot of you came to our series called The Bible in Five Weeks

- So hopefully you remember about Israel's Golden Age
 - The time of Solomon
 - Soon after 1000BC
 - Things were never again as good and the Jews cried out for one like David to come and free them from their enemies

One writer says...

'Palestine is the most fought over country in the world and Jerusalem is the most captured city in all history. It has been pillaged, ravished, burned and destroyed more than 27 times in its history.' (R. Stedman)

- Most of that happened during that 800 years

Here's how it looked:

- 🏰 Assyrian Empire – thumped and deported the Northern tribes of Israel
- 🏰 Babylonian Empire – wipe out the Assyrian Empire; thumped and deported the southern tribes of Israel
- 🏰 Persian Empire – wipe out the Babylonian Empire; they allow the Jews to return to Israel, but they remain under Persian control
- 🏰 Greek Empire (Alexander the Great) – wipes out the Persian Empire
- 🏰 Then of course, in their wake comes the Roman Empire
 - In some of these phases life for the Jews was every bit as horrifying as the scenes in 12 Years a Slave

Pretty much all that time...

... the Jews lived as subjugated people

- Constantly under the thumb of someone else
 - ◆ Their cities and temple decimated, then becoming just a shadow of what they had been
- Apparently the Jerusalem Temple was destroyed and rebuilt about 6 more times in the 400 years before Christ

The Jews are unable to have a King ...

... because they have to submit to the ruling power;

... and they're unable to defend themselves

- At times they were not even permitted to practice their religion
 - They were swamped by other cultures that constantly challenged the passing on of Jewish culture

There are songs that pick some of this up:

Come O Long Expected Jesus - we sang it just before

O Come O Come Immanuel...

Can you see already, how much bigger the Christmas story is ...

... as an answer to 800 years of desperation?

- How much better would a movie like the Nativity story be if it showed some flashbacks to the Jewish Exiles

... or the destruction of the Temple,

... the things that created the need and the longing for a Messiah

But let's finish the story before we bring this into today's world...

... what do we know about what happened between the two testaments?

- Why is there nothing for 400 years?
 - Malachi is the last book in the Old Testament
- Here's what happened in the 400 years after that:

1. Alexander the Great

[by the age of thirty he had created one of the largest empires of the ancient world, stretching from Greece to northwestern India.]

According to the historian Josephus :

- Alexander was planning to lay siege to Jerusalem (around 335BC)
 - While he was on his way, the high priest dressed in white priestly robes, took some of the writings of Daniel to meet Alexander
 - Meanwhile Alexander had had a dream the night before of a man dressed in white robes who would show him something of great significance

So when they met...

... the High Priest read the prophecies of Daniel to Alexander

- The prophecy talks about one coming from the West to smash the power of the Persian Empire and conquer the world
- Of course, immediately Alexander could see that this prophecy was about him
- He was so taken by this prophecy that he promised not to attack Jerusalem – so goes the story as told by Josephus

But meanwhile Greek culture spread ...

... throughout the region as the Greeks became the new world power

- The Sadducees wanted to embrace more of Greek culture;
- the Pharisees wanted to cling to Jewish culture

2. Bad Guy – Antiochus Epiphanes

Now comes the second bad guy...

- This is a **later Greek ruler** who was much less generous toward the Jews
- Antiochus Epiphanes is remembered as one of the **most vicious persecutors of Jews ever known**
- Referred to by some as '**the Antichrist of the Old Testament**', because he fulfils some of the prophecies of an evil King in Daniel

Here's what he does...

He starts by deposing the High Priest in Jerusalem

... ending the line of Priests that went all the way back to Aaron.

- He sells the priesthood to one of his Greek mates
- And all the golden vessels from the Temple are sold off to pay tribute money
- ◆ So all the religious rituals and practices of the Jews began to deteriorate

The Jews got all excited when they thought Antiochus was dead...

... they thought he'd died in a battle in Egypt

- But he wasn't dead, and when he heard about their merrymaking he ...

... came and killed 40,000 Jews in 3 days

- He then forced his way into the Holy of Holies – the inner sanctum of the Temple

... and destroyed the scrolls of the Law

... and sacrificed a pig on the altar

He then made a broth from the flesh of this unclean animal

... and sprinkled it over everything in the Temple – thus defiling everything in the Temple

- ◆ It's hard to imagine anything more offensive to the Jewish people

In the gospels Jesus refers to this act as ...

... the 'desolating sacrilege' which Daniel had predicted, and which foreshadows the real Antichrist

- Daniel also predicted that the sanctuary would be polluted for 2300 days (6 and a half years), until ...

3. Judas Maccabeus

Judas Maccabeus united the Jews and revolted against the Greeks

... in a series of battles where they were constantly outnumbered

- He retook Jerusalem for the Jewish people, cleansed the temple and reinstated the priesthood
- The Jews constantly had to fight off attacks during this time,

... but under the Maccabeans they survived by their own rule for four generations

This was the only time in the 800 years where the Jews threw off foreign domination

- One mistake the Maccabeans made was...

... in order to keep themselves safe they **made an alliance** against the Greeks, **with Rome**

- ◆ They no doubt would've regretted that when ...

4. Pompey (63BC)

... in 63BC Pompey – one of the military leaders under Julius Caesar

... marched into Jerusalem and claimed the city for Rome

- From that point on Israel was under the power of the Roman Empire
 - Pompey appointed the Herods and so it goes into New Testament times

Now the question is raised...

- Why was God silent for those 400 years?
 - Why doesn't the OT record any of this?

The answer could well be this:

- With all of these world powers coming and going,
 - ... God was allowing the teachings of the Old Testament to spread throughout the world

Galatians 4 says : 'When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son'

- Palestine itself is situated as a gateway to the continents
 - Roman roads were now spreading to every part of the known world
 - It's at that point in history that God chooses to come in the form of that baby

When you know the whole story...

- You know that the biggest thing to come with the birth of that baby is hope
 - And it's not the wishful, crossing your fingers-type hope

No - this kind is a concrete kind of hope

- It's a hope you can rely on
- Someone is here who's mere presence changes everything

It's a bit like when the team believes...

... they can win the World Cup because Richie McCaw is on the field [even if he's on one leg and can hardly do anything]

- It's the kind of hope that an AIDS patient would feel when Princess Diana came to visit
- It even happens in 12 Years a Slave
 - Because a man shows up who knows who Solomon Northup really is
- And he's filled with that solid, realistic hope, even long before he's set free

So also the very presence of this baby in the manger

... after 800 years of crying out for a Messiah, changes everything

All of heaven lights up with the news that the time has finally come

- The Shepherds hear it from an angel
- Simeon heard it from the Holy Spirit
- Herod hears it from the Teachers of the Law

- Anna speaks it in prophecy
- The Wise Men see it in the stars

Shepherds:	'I bring you good news of great joy ... a Saviour has been born. He is the Messiah' - Luke 2:10-11
Simeon:	Took Jesus in his arms and said, Here is the salvation God promised - Luke 2:28-29
Herod:	'Where will the Messiah be born?'. 'In Bethlehem', replied the teachers of the Law - Matt 2:4-5
Anna:	'she gave thanks to God & spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Israel' - Luke 2:38
The Wise Men:	'Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews? We saw his star in the East...' - Matt 2:2

So now as we think about today...

- And as you named before, the thing you hope for most of all this Christmas
 - a relationship to be healed
 - a life to turn around
 - health to be restored
 - ... whatever it is
- The Christmas story comes not as a platitude
 - Not as a vain or wishful crossing of the fingers
 - The Christmas story is a concrete reminder that God hears the cries of His people
 - That He came here to help us in our need
 - ◆ *And that the mere presence of Jesus with us, the Messiah, the one who is more than just a*

man, changes everything

Whatever is it that you hope for this Christmas season

- Place your trust again in the Messiah, the restorer of hope
... attested to by Scripture, angels and the heavens themselves
- Who changes everything by his mere presence
- The baby born in a manger
- Jesus

PRAYER

The once proud nation was now a puppet state of the pagan Roman Empire. The common person lived under the defeating burden of the exaggerated requirements of the religious establishment.

I love the honesty of the psalmist who said, "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?" We've all been there. But let's not stop there. Keep reading! "Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God" (Psalm 42:50).