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Dear Friends,

Greetings from Sabah! We trust that our newsletter finds you well.

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Matthew in just two verses states succinctly the wonder of the Christmas boy-child. He is to be called 'Jesus' (Mat 1:21) and known as 'Immanuel' (v 23).

The name Jesus means saviour or rescuer and is a reminder that the innocent child was born to deal with the problem of mankind's sin and active rebellion against God. Amidst all the gaiety of Christmas the problem of sin and estrangement from God may be temporarily hidden but its effects and reality is ever present. Jesus came to open the pathway back to God.

Immanuel, as Matthew explains, is a Hebrew word meaning 'God is with us'. As Christians we understand that this phrase is more than just an encouragement, or promise that God is on our side, it is also a literal statement of truth that in Jesus God steps into his creation to be with his creatures – we included.

Since Jesus' birth at Bethlehem we know, as the disciples learnt, that God so loved the world (you and me) that he sent Jesus to be with us, to die on our behalf and lead us back to our Heavenly Father from whom we have strayed.

This Christmas time may the babe of Bethlehem lead you back to God's presence to know His peace and His joy.

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This year I am writing to you from Namas. As I write it is evening, it is dark, and it is raining hard – the raindrops ringing on the uninsulated metal roof of my office at the rural Bible College (MTS).

The year began with my time focussed on teaching at STS, the city Bible College, and with fortnightly excursions to teach at MTS. Then came the end of our three year contract and a three month break in the UK for rest, holiday and some deputation work.

The break was good we very much enjoyed being with our family – the highlight of the 3 months being our

son Daniel's wedding to Lucy in Newcastle.



This was a great occasion thoroughly enjoyed by all. We also enjoyed visiting churches and Christian conferences (including the Keswick Bible Convention) and had many opportunities to share about our ministry.

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We returned to Sabah at the end of August and then at the beginning of September I took up a new appointment as *Development Coordinator* at MTS. Before my feet were securely under the desk the role was changed to include *Acting Head*. (This in turn later expanded to include responsibility for not only the Bible College, but an Evangelist training centre and a Leadership Institute. The three centres being remote from each other!)

Having just completed my first 3 months in the job by God's grace and much encouragement and support from Rhona I still have my head above water! (And just two days ago our feet in water – when

the surround of our house was flooded.)

Practically it means that I spend four days a week at Namas (128km/ nearly 3 hours from Kota Kinabalu). I leave Monday morning at 5 am to enjoy the cool of the early dawn and then return on Friday at 4am to avoid the traffic in the city.

Occasionally I visit the other two centres to check on what is happening and try and help with development plans and oversee problems.



MTS – Rural Bible College

Typically I am involved in teaching, staff-training, landscaping, building design, curriculum development, fund raising, writing staff manuals, chairing meetings, preaching, encouraging, challenging, praying. At times it is all rather overwhelming but we believe that this is what God has called us to for this specific time.

The most important thing is to build a team and work myself out of a job!

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The above is my MTS job. On Friday and at weekends I am back in Kota Kinabalu. At the moment I still teach one course a week at STS but am also the editor for the College newsletter and responsible for production of Malay language publications. This year we have published three new books: A book on 'Church Administration'; an introduction to 'Ecclesiastes'; and a translation of F F Bruce the *Hard Sayings of Jesus*.

The books are well received and selling well. Several earlier books are now sold out and await reprinting. The major difficulty we face is that the books are printed in Kuala Lumpur (lower cost) and then shipped to Kota Kinabalu. Unfortunately the last two printings have been detained by the religious department and only released after restrictions on distribution.

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Meanwhile back at the ranch (I mean STS) Rhona enters her third year of official retirement as busy as ever. Not only is she a prayer warrior for my work in the rural Bible College but also has a thriving work here with the Family Ministry – working amongst

the wives and children of students studying here at STS. I will move over on the keyboard and allow her to tell her own story.

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Our House at MTS

At the moment it is the long Holiday so I am spending some of the time at Namas, where as well as doing preparation for next year I am helping one of the lecturers upgrade her English so she can begin postgraduate studies.

The programme with the women and children has been very time-consuming since returning from England. I have been holding an English Tuition class 4 mornings a week for the children who go to school in the afternoon. These activities have given me great pleasure.

Dianne (a colleague here) and I have had two afternoon sessions with the women. Tuesday we continued our sewing and handicraft session and on Wednesday afternoon we continued the Business Project – making beadwork and jewelry. During the second semester we were very busy and were really encouraged by orders for our jewelry from overseas and locally. The women were really encouraged by the fact that people from overseas appreciate their work. The Business Project, Project Tabita, enables the women to support their



families as well as learn business skills.

Recently, I have been helping two students transfer their children to schools in Kota Kinabalu and through this I have made some very good contacts in the local schools and also in the Education Department.

A further aspect of the Family ministry project that is quite time-consuming is the preparation and distribution of Malay language publications. So far 3 books have been published one of which has nearly sold out three printings. Most recently a book on creative ideas for Sunday School teaching is in preparation. This year I also plan to begin compiling some Sunday School materials in Malay with the help of the Students.

Please pray for this work as it is really needed and often neglected.

Pray also for the families who have graduated from STS this year who will be moving to new work and schools in January.

Pray for new families who will be coming to STS on 1st January.

Pray for me for strength and wisdom to do this work with sensitivity and joy.

Pray for every increasing fluency in Malay. Especially to pray in Malay.

Thank you for your continuing prayer support and encouragement, especially those who keep in touch

through letters or e-mail. We are always pleased to hear your personal news. Please continue to pray for:

New Students – The numbers at the rural College are growing well. Thank God for this and pray that the Lord will continue to call new students for the coming year.

Work Permits – We are thankful to God for valid permits until mid-January. Please continue to pray that new visas will be approved.

Personal lives – Thank God for continuing good health. Pray that we might continue to grow closer to God and know more clearly His leading and enjoy His peace amidst a full schedule.

May God bless you richly at this Christmastime.

David and Rhona Burfield

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