



NEW LIFE

BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

44 Salusbury Road, London NW6 6NN

Charity No. 1060655

Tel: 020 7328 0869 (Manse)

Email: newlifeplondon@yahoo.co.uk

Website: www.newlifebpc.org.uk

Preacher & Church Administrator: Mok Chee Cheong 07921 929515

“For the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:9)

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Chinese New Year — A Christian Perspective

The symbols, traditions and festivals of the Chinese New Year are deeply rooted in more than 5,000 years of human civilisation, culture, mores and beliefs. The Chinese New Year lasts for 15 days and most Chinese households will observe traditional celebrations and practices.

Unfortunately, some of our Chinese New Year celebrations focus too much on our temporal earthly life and tangible success. Chinese Christians, much as they value their culture, must seek to understand its symbolism and be careful to avoid religious elements that do not accord with Holy Scripture.

We must put God first, before our culture, while at the same time honouring God in the enjoyment of our cultural heritage. We must not contaminate our celebration with materialistic or religious beliefs and practices that are unedifying or displeasing to God.

Let us consider a few of the pitfalls.

Chinese lunar calendar

The Chinese generally have adopted the Western calendar since 1911, but the lunar calendar, based on astrology and the cycles of the moon, is still used for festive occasions such as the Chinese New Year.

Astrology is one of China’s most ancient philosophies — perhaps more than 3,000 years old. It claims to predict what will happen to people, countries, economic trends, conflicts and much more.

Traditionally, Chinese dating methods were cyclical — as in the method of recording years by the twelve animal signs. Every year is assigned an animal name or ‘sign’ according to a repeating cycle — Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Sheep, Monkey, Rooster, Dog, and Boar — so that the same animal ‘sign’ reappears every twelve years.

Astrology

One Chinese legend attributes the animal signs to the semi-mythical Yellow Emperor in 2637 BC. According to another legend, Buddha summoned all the animals before he departed from Earth but only twelve came to bid him farewell. As a reward, he named a year after each one in the order that they arrived.

There is a superstitious belief that the animal ruling a person’s birth year exercises a profound influence on his or her life. Horoscopes have developed around the animal signs, much like monthly horoscopes in the West relating to astronomical signs. For example, a Chinese horoscope might predict that a person born in the Year of the Horse would be ‘cheerful, popular, and love to compliment others’.

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These religious horoscopes, though popular, are dangerous superstitions. The practice of astrology is condemned in the Bible — Isaiah 47:12-13 reads, 'Stand now with thine enchantments, and with the multitude of thy sorceries ... Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee'.

The occultic use of charts, or the worship of celestial bodies like the moon, sun and stars to predict behaviour, businesses, relationships or the future, is strictly forbidden in the Bible (2 Kings 23:5-7). And that include consulting a geomancer or *feng shui* master, *bomoh* or *shaman* as well (Deuteronomy 18:10-13).

As Christians, let us be careful not to propagate, in the name of culture, superstitious practices that are clearly disallowed or even condemned in the Word of God (Leviticus 19:26-31).

Greetings and *Ang Pows*

In wishing one another a blessed new year, *ang pows* — red packets containing money — are given to children, parents, grandparents or others. It is good to show love and filial piety, and giving *ang pows* is acceptable as long as we understand them as gestures of love and appreciation rather than symbols of an unhealthy preoccupation with wealth.

The colour 'red', that to many people represents gold, is indifferent for Christians — who should not be enamoured with materialistic prosperity, wealth and worldly success. In our Chinese New Year greetings, it is not appropriate for Christians to wish people *Gong Xi Fa Cai* which refers to tangible or financial wealth for that person. Wishes for peace in the new year, or eternal joy from God, are more appropriate.

We have reason to be joyful because we are blessed of God by his saving mercies and pardoning grace. We have Christ as Lord and Saviour of our lives — who died for us, redeemed us and rose from the dead, having destroyed sin and death, and brought us everlasting life. For the Christian, only Christ is the basis of our hopes in the new year.

Some hang paper pineapples in their homes because in Chinese the pineapple is called *ong lai*, meaning 'prosperity comes to our homes'. Others put the Chinese word for prosperity upside down on the wall 'to bring in the prosperity'.

During Chinese New Year also, some older folks resort to gambling with cards or mahjong, while pictures of gold bars are displayed to symbolise prosperity and wealth. All such practices should be avoided by Christian families because they reflect an ungodly covetous spirit (Exodus 20:17; 1 Timothy 6:6-10).

Rather, as Deuteronomy 8:18 says, we should 'remember the LORD [our] God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day'.

House spring cleaning

On the first day of Chinese New Year, one superstition demands that we should not sweep the house. Some even hide their brushes because brooms and sweeping are all 'bad luck'— they will sweep out the 'prosperity' and the 'good luck for the year'.

Conversely, spring cleaning may signify a new beginning, the false idea of getting rid of the 'bad luck' of the previous year — an idea which Christians cannot accept.

Some also say that we also should only speak sweet words and eat *nian gao* (sweet cakes, fried with eggs and flour). These are supposed to sweeten the mouth of the 'kitchen god' who returns to heaven at the New Year — according to popular folklore.

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Other superstitious Chinese take care not to break anything on the first day of the New Year because it will bring 'bad luck' for the rest of the year.

All such superstitions are meaningless and yet dangerous, and should be completely avoided by Christians.

Lion dance and firecrackers

Another Chinese New Year tradition is the lion and dragon dance — considered to bring good luck because the prancing lions and dancing dragons chase away the 'bad omen' in businesses or shops. Most, if not all, such practices have their origins in Buddhist temples and martial arts groups which are religious in nature.

The use of noisy fire crackers — which by tradition is intended to ward off the evil monster *nian* — is a thing of the past for Singapore, but is still widely practised in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and elsewhere.

It is banned in Singapore because firecrackers have caused accidents and even fatal fires. But even without these safety considerations the practice has unchristian origins and Christians should avoid it.

Family visitation

However, we should maintain good Chinese New Year traditions — visiting families and relatives; exchanging oranges and greetings; giving *ang pows* for the children; and wishing God's blessings and peace to our friends and neighbours. These are meaningful social and family encounters and part of our Chinese culture.

When we wish somebody a 'blessed or peaceful Chinese New Year', we need to pray for them and seek God's help to live in a manner worthy of our calling as Christians.

For us, it is a seasonal celebration of the deeper meaning of *Xin Nian* (new year), representing as it does a year of new opportunities to serve and glorify God. The God of the Bible is our Redeemer, the reason and foundation of our confidence and joy for the new year — for 'if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new' (2 Corinthians 5:17).

More Bible texts

There are many other relevant Scriptures we can contemplate at this season. For example, Paul advises: 'Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God' (1 Corinthians 10:31). Let us rejoice and offer praise, 'giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ' (Ephesians 5:20).

Consider also 1 Thessalonians 5:22: 'Abstain from all appearance of evil'. Let us avoid worshipping idols by burning incense, visiting temples, worshipping ancestors, or any other form of religious or moral compromise.

However, 'Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way' (Romans 14:13). 'For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another' (Galatians 5:13). We are to remember our accountability to God and to show genuine love and concern for one another during the festive season.

May our gracious Lord grant us true joy, peace, grace and hope in this Chinese New Year season, as we pray and witness for Christ to our relatives and friends with the gospel of salvation.

*Rev Jack Sin, Maranatha B-P Church, S'pore
(adapted from Maranatha Messenger 10 February 2008)*

WELCOME TO NEW LIFE B-P CHURCH LONDON
CHURCH THEME: WORK OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION WITH FEAR
AND TREMBLING. (Philippians 2:12)

Our worship services begin promptly at **11.00 am and 4.00 pm.**

Please stay back for Bible Study and fellowship lunch after the morning worship and for tea after the evening service. Do invite your friends to come to Church.

Worship Services			WELCOME
Morning	<i>Today: 10/02/2008</i>	<i>Next Week: 17/02/2008</i>	We extend a warm welcome to all worshippers this Lord's Day.
<i>Chairman:</i>	Pr Mark Chen	John Poh	
<i>Preacher:</i>	Rev Alan Macgregor	Pr Mark Chen	
<i>Message:</i>	The Hidden Ones of the Lord	Biblical Molting	NEWS/ANNOUNCEMENTS
<i>Text:</i>	Psalms 83:3	Colossians 3:5-11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome: We would like to welcome Rev Alan Macgregor, our speaker for this Lord's Day. Rev Macgregor is the pastor of Wickford Reformed Baptist Church. • Pray for those recovering from illness: Especially for Maria and Eld Ford who are both recuperating from knee surgery. Also, pray for Rev Kenneth Harris. Rev Harris was scheduled to be the speaker for the next Lord's Day but he was recently stricken down with food poisoning and was hospitalised. • Church Easter Camp – 21 to 24 Mar: The speaker will be Ps Jeff O'Neil. More details will be made available later. If you would like to assist with the logistics of the camp, please inform Anthony. • DHW Bible Study: DHW will reconvene next week, 17 Feb. For those requiring the notes, please see Jonathan. • Carry-In Lunch: A special thank you to those who have contributed to the carry-in lunch.
<i>Organist:</i>	Yanning	Anthony	
Evening			
<i>Chairman:</i>	John Poh	Jonathan Kim	
<i>Preacher:</i>	Rev Alan Macgregor	Pr Mark Chen	
<i>Message:</i>	The Ground of Our Hope	Biblical Mummification	
<i>Text:</i>	Matthew 11:27	Colossians 5:12-17	
<i>Pianist:</i>	Anthony	Hubert	
Other Duties			
	<i>Today: 10/02/2008</i>	<i>Next Week: 17/02/2008</i>	
<i>Ushers</i>	Jee/Yetta	Daniel/Esmeralda	
<i>Sunday Sch:</i>	Yanning	Hui Min	
<i>Lunch:</i>	CNY Carry-In Lunch	Maureen	
<i>Washing-up:</i>	Volunteers	Volunteers	
<i>Bible Study:</i>	No DHW Class	DHW Class	
Appointments of the Week			
Fri 08 Feb	7:30pm	Young Adults Fellowship: Led by Pr Mark Chen	
Sat 09 Feb	4.00 pm	Prayer Meeting & Bible Study: Led by Pr Mark Chen	
Last Week's Worship Service Collections			
Offering: £419.60		Lunch: £26.62	
<u>Memory Verse</u>			
<i>Last Week (Feb 08 Wk 1): Psalm 1:3</i>			
And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.			
<i>This Week (Feb 08 Wk 2): Psalm 1:4</i>			
The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.			
<p style="text-align: right;">The Task Force wishes our Chinese members and worshippers a very Happy Chinese New Year.</p>			