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Location: Taiwan

My call: To serve, share, and support the ministry of the Church in Taiwan.

My role: Working with the Taiwan Episcopal Church, based at St John's University, Taipei, I am supporting the church, chaplaincy and kindergarten ministry of the Diocese of Taiwan.

New Year greetings from Taiwan!

"Don't tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass" said Anton Chekov (1860-1904), world famous author of short stories. Applying the same principle to link letters, I will not therefore merely tell you that today is the last day of term for all state schools in Taiwan. I will let you imagine the delight in the children's eyes as they rush out of the school gates, heading for the bright lights and celebrations of the Chinese New Year month-long holiday. Yee-Ha! And for their teachers, there is even more delight – ah, at last a break after five long months of school. Happy teachers, happy kids!

Not so sure though about the poor parents, however, who are now faced with providing child care until the official Chinese New Year holiday starts on February 15. They're the ones having to get the house cleaned, all debts paid off, new clothes bought for the whole family, red envelopes stuffed full of money for the grandparents and children, food bought and prepared, and all in the middle of a cold and damp winter. For most parents, there is no end in sight until they finish spring-cleaning

their homes, work-places, cars, and worst of all (for me, anyway!) the windows. But then, on Chinese New Year's Eve, the whole country takes a break for six days of non-stop New Year celebrations (February 15-20), welcoming in the Year of the Dog.

Many will travel to visit relatives, arriving on New Year's Eve to spend the main celebration evening meal with the father's side of the family, and leaving on the second day of New Year to visit the mother's side of the family. But times are changing, and these days many will also take advantage of the break and go off on an overseas holiday; others will have their family reunions in a restaurant or resort, escaping from the endless food preparations for ancestor worship and meals.

Many women tell me it's actually a break to go back to work after it's all over!



Photos top and above: The English classes' Christmas party: Musical statues!



Top left: The English classes' Christmas party

Top right: A diocesan trip to the mountains of central Taiwan included visiting the Taoshan Waterfall!



In my last letter, written in September, I described events around my father's death on Transfiguration Sunday (August 6), and our trip to the top of Taiwan's highest mountain, Yushan, which had taken place only days before. Thank you to all who responded so positively. The "glint of light on broken glass" was God's grace in the way everything seemed to fit together, linking all to the Transfiguration, the experience that the disciples had on the mountain top when they saw God's glory fully revealed in Christ.

Now I find myself thinking again about the Transfiguration. Every second Sunday of the month, I am responsible for the sermon at St James' English service, Taichung, the church where I was based for seven years when I first came to Taiwan. It's a 200-mile round trip and my next sermon there will be the Sunday before Chinese New Year, February 11, officially the "Last Sunday of Epiphany". Every year, the gospel reading for this particular Sunday is of the Transfiguration. And every year, the US-based Episcopal Church, of which Taiwan is a part, celebrates this Sunday as World Mission Sunday.

So what to say? I guess our challenge is to take the light of

Christ, revealed to the disciples on that mountain top, and to step out into the world to share that light with all cultures and all peoples, to bring reconciliation, transformation and healing to all. But how to say it? The challenge for me in preparing my sermon is that Chekov's words apply equally also to those who preach. We all know a dry boring sermon from one that comes alive, a sermon that challenges people to reflect, to pray, to act and to go out and make a difference in the world.

Many in our congregations might see themselves as that "broken glass" desperate for a "glint of light" to penetrate and illuminate the darkest corners of their hearts, and an inspiring sermon can make all the difference, especially if the English language and, in particular, the liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer in English is a challenge. St James' English service has been going for a long time, and in recent years has seen much growth. This is not least because of the involvement of the Chinese congregation in helping to evangelise in Chinese (through cell groups) who bring local people to the service, mainly to learn English.

But this year, the Last Sunday of Epiphany is not just World Mission Sunday. In Taiwan, the Sunday before Chinese New Year is also celebrated by using the Ancestor Memorial Liturgy as part of the main service. Christians in Taiwan honour their ancestors through prayer, thanksgiving and by lighting

candles during the service. It is very moving for those who take part, showing that they can pay their respects to their ancestors in a liturgical setting without compromising their Christian faith.

But of course, in-between the Last Sunday of Epiphany on February 11 and Chinese New Year's Eve on February 15, we will have also celebrated Ash Wednesday on February 14 (and don't forget to get your red roses ready for Valentine's Day too!) This year, Chinese New Year, the biggest festival of the whole year for Chinese people the world over, actually takes place right at the beginning of Lent. Half the world is supposedly fasting, the other half are feasting. Surprising really, considering both Lent and Chinese New Year are determined by the same lunar calendar, but it happens often.

A clash of cultures or an opportunity for witness? The challenge for Chinese Christians is to bridge this gap, to bring the transfiguring, transforming light of Christ from their mountain top experiences in church and fellowship groups back into their homes, and Chinese New Year is the one time of the year when Chinese Christians have that chance. It may be the only time in the year when the whole family is gathered together and it can be a make or break situation for many Chinese Christians.

It's one thing to be a Christian 51 weeks of the year far away in



Above: At the CMS conference in Cambodia with CMS executive leader, Philip Mounstephen (left), and former CMS Asia regional manager, Raj Patel (right)

the big city, but going home at Chinese New Year and facing decisions about joining in ancestor worship or family trips to the temple, helping parents with preparation of food offerings for the household idols and deities, all these require a strong faith – or at least understanding parents. Actions speak louder than words, and a focus on showing rather than telling means that Chekov's words can also be very relevant to sharing our faith in whatever situation we find ourselves in.

I've run out of word space, so I have no more room here to tell you that yes, I'm sure the moon is shining or that Chinese New Year is coming. All that is left for me to do is to share with you in this link letter some photos of events of the past few months: our wonderful CMS conference in Cambodia in October when we also said goodbye to our lovely regional manager, Raj Patel; a memorable diocesan trip to see the beautiful autumn scenery in the central mountains of Taiwan

in November; a very happy and fun Christmas party for my adult English classes, and finally on Christmas Eve when my good friend Jasmine Yu brought 12 of her family (only one of whom is a Christian) to witness her baptism here at Advent Church. Her

decision to become a Christian, made last summer, and then subsequently to be baptised at Christmas with all the family there, was and is a real way of showing that her new faith has transformed her life, and that "glint of light on broken glass". We all face the same challenge, to share Christ's light with others and give the world a glimpse of God's glory.

Thank you for all your Christmas cards, messages, prayers and support, as always really valued! But please don't send any Christmas cards by post this coming year, as I am due for UK home leave in September for six months; looking forward to seeing y'all then!

Please note my new blog address is: <https://catherinelee234.com>

With love and best wishes,

Catherine

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PRAYER AND PRAISE

- Pray for all Christians celebrating Chinese New Year, for their lives of faith and witness to family and friends.
- Give thanks for Jasmine Yu and all those who have been baptised in recent months; pray that they may grow strong in their faith and be a mighty witness in their families.
- Give thanks for St James' Church, Taichung, for rector Rev Lily L. L. Chang, for the English and Chinese congregations, kindergarten, community service centre and counselling ministry, and pray for their witness within that community.
- Pray for all the churches in the Taiwan Episcopal Church, for those who are tasked with preaching each week, for their sermons to be challenging, inspiring and effective.
- Pray for us all as we share our faith, not just in words, but as we show that "glint of light on broken glass", that glimpse of Christ, to our families, neighbours and friends.
- **STOP PRESS:** Please finally pray for eastern Taiwan after a big earthquake overnight. There was lots of deaths, damage and injuries. It's exactly two years to the day since the last previous major earthquake, and that one in southern Taiwan also killed dozens.



Left: Jasmine Yu and family after her baptism on Christmas Eve, taken at Advent Church