



First Dromara
Presbyterian Church

The Link

December 2021



'For unto us a child is born' Isaiah 9:6

Dear Friends,

As Christmas approaches, the images of the first Christmas will be all around us. Nativity scenes on mantelpieces, choirs and carols mentioning the angels and the shepherds and festive food reminding us that this is a time to feast and celebrate.

Matthew is the only Gospel writer that mentions the wise men. Read **Matthew 2:1-12**, and look with me now at the different reactions around the first Christmas, and how these attitudes have not changed.

The Curious (v1-2)

The wise men came from the East to Jerusalem. We don't know how many of them there were. We're not told if there were three, we're only told they brought three gifts (gold, frankincense and myrrh). Some early church historians believed there could have been as many as fourteen wise men. In fact, we're not even told they are kings (sorry to anyone who's favourite carol is 'We Three Kings'). A more appropriate word to describe them is Magi. We get our English word 'magic' from this word, for these men were star gazers, magicians, fortune-telling pagans who knew nothing of God's ways or God's people.

As a new star appeared in the sky, they discerned this was the arrival of the King of the Jews, and so they set off from Persia on a really, really, really long journey, probably in the region of around one thousand miles. Of course, there was no air conditioning for the hot daytime, or no four wheel drive for rough terrain - their mode of transport was probably a camel or the humble donkey. As they traversed terrible terrain, no doubt they were also anxious that their precious gifts would not fall prey to the hands of bandits or roadside thieves. As they arrive to Jerusalem, they expect to hear news of this King's birth. They ask repeatedly, "Where is He who is born King?" Over and over again they ask, "Where?"

Foreign travellers, with a caravan of expensive gifts, tired after months of meandering, longing to see the King. They are searching, full of questions, full of wonder, longing to see the King. Perhaps you know someone like this, or you are a searcher this Christmas? You have a gold shaped hole in your life and you're searching to fill that hole only God can fill? Maybe you know someone full of questions? Is there a God? Who is Christ? As Christians, we welcome this type of questioning and we want to answer your questions. We want to point you to the same place the Magi found the answer to all their questions - the manger. For that is where Christ is. He is who you need. He is the answer to all your questions. The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah (29:13) says this, "You will seek



me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart."

The Cross (v3-4)

Another attitude still alive and well is the exact opposite to the last we looked at, the furious! This is Herod the King. Strangers arrive and begin asking about the arrival and announcement of a new King. Perhaps they expected to find jubilation and celebration as they ask, "Where is He that is born King?"

However, as they walk around Jerusalem asking their question, they find people don't have a clue what they're talking about. The question they ask (v2) creates trouble. After all, when we think about the monarchical royal families of Europe, heirs to throne are born *to be* King, however, the Magi ask, "Where is He *that is* born King?" The Magi are right! Christ was born already King, rather than someone who would have to wait to inherit the title. This is what troubles Herod. Herod at this point in history is around seventy years old, he is a jealous ruler, suspicious of all around him. He felt threatened so many times that he killed off most of his political rivals, never mind three brothers-in-law, a wife, a mother-in-law and three sons. All in order to protect his position. This tyrant loved to rule, and the prospect of being dethroned by another terrified him. In fact, he is furious!

Isn't this another attitude we see today? This is the agenda of many this Christmas. They want Christmas, but are enraged when someone mentions the Christ of Christmas. There is an anger in the world concerning Christ. We see it in the media as 'Christmas' is more and more replaced with 'Yuletide', as the nativity scene is more and more replaced with Santa's grotto, as many carol services replace 'silent night' with 'baby, it's cold outside and 'Santa Claus is coming to town.' (Not that any of these things are wrong, but we live in a day and age where many don't just prefer the latter, but actually are enraged by the former.) We live in an anti-Christian world that hates Christ is the

King of it. Herod would do much to try and exterminate, eliminate and obliterate this King, just like many tried thirty three years later at Calvary. Some try to do it today, some do it through physical persecution like we see in countries like North Korea and Afghanistan, some do it more subtly, but we all know people (perhaps in our own families) who hate Christ. They hate his name mentioned and they hate everything to do with him, perhaps even you. Matthew tells us later on in his Gospel, "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake." Matthew 24:9. There are the furious.

The Couldn't care less (V5-6)

Herod gathers all the religious leaders together. These are educated and learned men, who know the Old Testament off by heart. He asks them where the Christ is to be born. These men remember from the prophet Micah that He is to be born in Bethlehem. When we consider the geographical distance the Magi have just travelled, the distance between Jerusalem and Bethlehem is just over five miles. Rather than a few months, a few hours would take you there by foot. These leaders have been waiting and anticipating the arrival and announcement of the Messiah for centuries and they've just heard he is born. What would you expect of them? Surely, they would drop everything and make haste to Bethlehem? Surely an earthquake, a volcanic eruption, a solar eclipse wouldn't stop these leaders from seeing the prophesied and foretold Messiah? What do they do? Absolutely nothing! It's the pagan Magi who journey to Bethlehem, not the religious leaders.

Such a small journey and they do nothing! Just like so many today. So many will step into our church buildings and attend Christmas events, such as our Sunday Nativity (12th December), our Carol Service and Candlelight (19th December) and Christmas Morning Service (25th December) and it will not have any impact on them. Jeremiah, when he wrote Lamentations 1:12 said, "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?" The truth is, you're not curious or cross, you're just not bothered. Perhaps you know lots, you can quote John 3:16, John 14:6, Romans 3:23, but you're not going out of your way for Christ. You're indifferent! You can't do this with Christ, because He doesn't do it with you. Outside of Christ you face wrath, by seeking relationship and forgiveness with Him, He showers you with love. There cannot be indifference.

The Counterfeits (v7-8)

Herod then has a reconnaissance rendezvous with the Magi and sends them to Bethlehem. He implores them to visit the baby, then return to him and give him a report on

what they've seen and where it has all taken place. Herod tells them his plan is to then follow after them and worship this King. What utter nonsense! Herod thinks he has hoodwinked the Magi. He pretends to be an adoring fan, when really, he's not.

I wonder how many of us are great pretenders this Christmas? We are two different people; we have our Sunday façade and our regular weekday look. We do Christian things at Christmas time, but forget the rest of the year. The word the bible uses to describe such behaviour is hypocrite. This word was used in the bible to describe actors who wore different masks to play different character roles in the theatre. There are those who say they're a Christian, when really they are not. I hope that's not you. 1 Peter 1:2 says similar, "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction." You can do the Christian things, but continue in unrepentant sin. Remember, God knows your heart if you wear a pretender's mask.

The Christ Worshippers (v9-12)

Verse nine tells us the Magi set off. They follow the moving star, and the only way we can understand this phenomenon is that God was behind it. We're told in verse ten how full of excitement the Magi are to reach the manger. This is unspeakable, unexplainable, unimaginable thrill and joy. They find the King! Their body language shows their adoration, for they fall down and worship Him. Grown men, especially foreign men in this culture don't naturally do this, unless it's truly a King. They pay homage and they worship. They worship by giving in verse eleven. These gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh are signs of their worship.

Don't ever think that our giving to God is a trivial thing. At Christmas time we give gifts to the people we love. As I sit and write this, I've still one last present to buy, and that's me all sorted for Christmas. Often, we enjoy giving as much as receiving. Let's not overlook this lavish giving to Christ. This is surely an attitude we should emulate, not just a financial giving to Christ, but also of our time, energy and talents. Give Him your heart and worship Him this Christmas.

What's your attitude towards Him this Christmas?

May I take this opportunity in wishing you, your friends and your family, a very happy and Christ filled Christmas and a blessed New Year as we enter 2022.

Every blessing,

Scott

Ask the elder

NAME: Norman Biggerstaff

AGE: 67

OCCUPATION: Storeman (part time)

FAMILY: Youngest of three. Both of my parents had passed away by the time I was 16.

I started Artana Primary on my 5th birthday. I then went to Dromore Intermediate Secondary School followed by one year at Lisburn Technical College for one year after which I worked for the government who were paying me the £3 per week for almost three months until I got a full time job in Lisburn in September 1970. I am still employed by the same firm two days a week.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN COMING TO FIRST DROMARA?: I have been coming to First Dromara since I was four or five years old.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN AN ELDER?: I have been an elder since November 1984.

WHEN AND HOW DID YOU COME TO FAITH?: I became a Christian on the 5th November 1980 whilst attending a Gospel Mission in Waringsford Orange Hall conducted by the late Mr Noel Grant and the late Mr Matt Boland. That night Mr Boland preached on the text, "I must increase but thou must decrease." That night I decided to accept Jesus as my own and personal Saviour.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DID IT MAKE TO YOUR LIFE?: The change it made in my life was that I had no desire to go to places that Christians should not be or use bad language etc. It also made me take more of an interest in church life.

HAVE YOU ANY WORDS OF WISDOM?: Honour God in all things and He will honour you.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE HYMNS AND WHY?: My favourite hymns are 'What a friend we have in Jesus' and 'When I survey the wondrous cross'. Those two hymns reminds us that we take everything to God in prayer and of the suffering and price that was paid



by our Saviour on the cross.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE VERSE OR PASSAGE?: A favourite verse of mine is found in Joshua Chapter 1 verse 9: 'Have I not commanded thee? Be strong and of good courage; be not afraid,

neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee, whithersoever thou goest.'

CAN YOU TELL US SOMETHING THAT WE DO NOT KNOW ABOUT YOU?: During the years I have been involved in a number of incidents. I will just mention two bomb attacks at my work on the 30th March 1972 in which I escaped without injury.

Although not a Christian at the time, the place where I work was a timber yard and bottles of gas were stored there. In between was a driveway the width of two vehicles. Unknown to myself or anyone else there was a car parked across the door of the timber yard containing a bomb estimated to be 80-100lbs of explosives.

Still unaware that the bomb was in the car, it was decided to clear the yard and move the car out to the road. I got in to the car and switched the ignition on. Someone called me to do something else and another person reversed out and parked on the road. Approximately ten minutes later the bomb exploded causing serious injury to some of my work colleagues who I had been working with before the bomb exploded, as well as substantial damage to property. I was less than 50ft from the car when the bomb exploded.

The second bomb attack was when a no warning bomb went off. Again I was in the building and escaped injury whilst many work colleagues were injured.

Weddings @1st Dromara



Zara Greer, daughter of John and Caroline Greer, Springmount Road, married Paul Jess, son of Raymond and Shirley Jess, Church Road, Dromara, at their home on Saturday, 4th September



Alan Wilson and Felicity Towell who were married on Friday 1st October 2021 in Banbridge Road Presbyterian Church, Dromore. Alan is the son of Cecil and Elsie Wilson, Carnew, while Felicity is the daughter of Angela Towell and the late Alan Towell, Dromore. The reception was held in Altahammond House, Whitehead and a truly fantastic day was had by all!



The marriage of Claire Hanna, daughter of Avril and Malcolm Hanna, and Mark Sewell, son of Ruth and Gary Sewell took place at First Dromara Presbyterian Church on July 1st, 2021.





Ambassadors Football proves a massive hit

Around 60 children attended a football camp organised during the summer in conjunction with First Dromara Presbyterian Church and Ambassadors Football. The children gathered each night at the football pitch in Kinallen to learn football drills, enjoy matches and learn more about God's love for them, through a message by Football Ambassa-

dor's Derek Livingstone. The camp finished with a very energetic world cup competition. The organisers would like to thank all the parents who sent along the children, the young people themselves, and anyone who helped in any way to make the event such a success.







FEUER: The Fellowship of Evangelists in the Universities of Europe



Lorna Moore tells us about her recent trip to Greece for the FEUER conference



Associated with IFES (International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, the university Christian Union organisation), we are a network of Christians across Europe who are committed to the public proclamation of the gospel in the universities of our continent. FEUER is one of the IFES Europe projects that I work on, as part of my role as Executive Administrator for the European region.

Behind the 'main stage' of FEUER, I put on my events planner hat and I was in charge of all the logistics for the conference, including liaising with the venue, arranging transportation, registration, dealing with all the finances, arranging bedrooms, meals and ensuring everyone got home safely. A tricky job with COVID in the mix!

FEUER is also the German word for fire. Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones, The first chairman of IFES, described preaching as 'logic on fire'. Through preaching we pray that hearts will be set on fire with love for Christ.

We have our annual conference for current and potential evangelists to be able to communicate the Gospel publicly in universities across Europe. The 3-fold goal of our conference is:

1. To provide models of fresh evangelistic talks
2. To share inspirational stories and creative ideas for evangelists and student ministries
3. To convey across Europe to provide information about activities and resources available for the coming year.

After two years apart it was a tremendous joy that 60 members of the FEUER network (meaning on average, one participant representing each country in Europe) were able to gather together in Greece at the end of October. We had three hopes and prayers for our time together:

- To reconnect. One delegate commented that FEUER is more than a fellowship - it feels like a family. The



common vision (the public proclamation of the gospel in the Universities of Europe) brings a tremendous sense of camaraderie. Much of what FEUER has accomplished in the last thirteen years has been born out of the organic friendships that have developed in such gatherings. To facilitate this further we kept the program lighter than usual and also enjoyed a day trip together to Philippi. It was particularly poignant to visit the spot where the Gospel first came to Europe. Being smaller in number also gave the opportunity for more time and deeper connection between those who came.

- To reflect. A key part of every FEUER gathering is hearing reports from around Europe of different evangelistic initiatives. COVID has made the last two years especially challenging for many. For example - in one country half of the student groups have ceased to exist and the other half have halved in size.

Other countries have faced different challenges such as the political crackdowns in Belarus and the ongoing war in Ukraine. However, despite this, it was wonderful to hear of how students have creatively found ways to proclaim the gospel. Not just through online events, but also in others ways. Albania found churches were closed but were able to use hotels and then sport as a means for proclaiming the gospel. The Czech Republic live streamed street evangelism on campus. Belarus continued to hold missions and camps despite many students being arrested. Above all, it was a joy to hear of students professing faith in

Christ.

- To relaunch. Many current students will have no living memory of an 'in person' mission week. So a key focus will be helping student groups relearn good models of public evangelism in their context. While many groups are starting from a point of weakness, the potential opportunity of the coming year could be unprecedented. Many in Europe have experienced a time of upheaval greater than at any other point in living memory. There was a sense that this could precipitate an unusual openness to the gospel that we need to make the most of in the year ahead.

A personal highlight was a day trip to Philippi, and we had the opportunity to walk in Paul's shoes from the book of Acts. It was very special to gather at Lydia's River (Acts 16), worship God together and pray for revival and mission opportunities across Europe. What a joy to visit these places with brothers and sisters involved in sharing the Gospel with students every day. I enjoyed meeting participants from across Europe and making new friends. Hopefully FEUER 2022 will be back to normal and it'll be good to return to Greece.

Rev Kenny Hanna takes up new role as PCI's first Rural Chaplain

Former Second Dromara Minister, the Rev Kenny Hanna has started work as the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's (PCI) first Rural Chaplain.

Rev Hanna was commissioned and inducted into this new pioneering role at a special service held on Sunday evening, 7 November in Mourne Presbyterian Church, Kilkeel, the County Down church where he grew up.

The new Rural Chaplain will operate in four of PCI's nineteen regional presbyteries - the Presbyteries of Armagh, Down, Iveagh and Newry - which means that Mr Hanna's focus will be on farmers and farming families who work and live in all of County Armagh and most of County Down.

The main function of the new role is to provide a chaplaincy service to the rural

and farming communities prioritising the pastoral and spiritual needs that are associated with geographical and social isolation of those working in the rural and agri-food sectors.

This pioneering new role has been developed by the Church's Council for Mission in Ireland (CMI) and is part of the Rural Chaplaincy Pilot Scheme, which will be for an initial three-year period, subject to review. The Council provides operational management and support to a range of missional activities on the island of Ireland, including the provision of chaplaincy services in universities and colleges, the healthcare system, the prison service and the armed forces.

The Commissioning Service was held by the Presbytery of Newry and was conducted by its Moderator, Rev Robert



Pictured at the commissioning and induction service of Rev Kenny Hanna as the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's (PCI) first Rural Chaplain at Mourne Presbyterian Church, Kilkeel, are (left to right) PCI's Chaplaincy Secretary, Rev Robert Bell, Acting Secretary to the Council for Mission in Ireland, Rev Jim Stothers, PCI Moderator, Rt Rev Dr David Bruce, Rural Chaplain, Rev Kenny Hanna, with Moderator of the Presbytery of Newry, Rev Robert McClure, and Rev Gareth McFadden, convenor of PCI's Rural Chaplaincy Task Group.



Pictured at the commissioning and induction service of Rev Kenny Hanna as the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's first Rural Chaplain at Mourne Presbyterian Church, Kilkeel, are (left to right) daughter Rebekah, her father Kenny, his wife Freda and son Matthew with Kenny's father Hugh Hanna.

McClure, minister of Newtownhamilton and Freeduff.

Speaking after his commissioning to the 500 or so members of Mourne Presbyterian, friends and family, along with representatives from various agri-food and rural agencies, farming organisations and sectoral bodies, Mr Hanna, said that he had been "so humbled and encouraged by everyone who has come, especially the key players in the rural sector... I believe that we have a common goal and our common goal is to care for farmers and farming families..."

Mr Hanna, who grew up on the family dairy and sheep farm in the Kingdom of Mourne, had been in parish ministry since 2001, serving for the last 10 years as minister of Second Dromara Presbyterian Church.

"If anything is to be done of eternal value through this post, Kenny Hanna will not do it, God will do it, and God will do that if we pray... This post is about Jesus, all about Him, centred on farmers and farming families. It is important work because it is about

farmers and farming families and they are massively important to me. I also want to make it clear that I am here for any farmer and any farming family from any background," Mr Hanna said.

PCI's rural chaplaincy will cover an area that reaches from Comber in the north, along the western shores of Strangford Lough, and down the coast to Ardglass and on to Warrenpoint. It also takes in the towns and villages as far west as Benburb, reaching up once more to the southern shores of Lough Neagh.

As part of the service Rev Gareth McFadden convener of CMI's Rural Chaplaincy Task Group, which undertook the work to establish the role, explained the reasoning behind it. The minister of Kilbride Presbyterian Church near Ballyclare in County Antrim said, "It is a very important role and the vision has been to create this fulltime position to work in the four presbyteries... and is being made in the prayer that what is sown in this pioneering ministry will be blessed by God with a long-term harvest of effectiveness."

Have you ever considered Gift Aid?



Gift Aid is a very important contributor to the income of the Church. When you get your Financial Report, you probably do not look at the amount, but it is the biggest contributor to Church funds.

The Government refunds income tax paid by all who have signed Gift Aid Declarations and in the listed years below tax refunds were as follows:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Total Income</u>	<u>Income Tax Refund</u>
2018	£80,520	£14,145
2019	£85,415	£14,415
2020	£84,865	£14,895

This means that approximately 17.5% of the Church income is derived from the refund of Income Tax on your Gift Aided contributions. If all the yearly income was Gift Aided, approximately another £2,000 could be obtained. Not everyone pays income tax but unfortunately most have to.

Do you pay tax and have not yet signed a Gift Aid Declaration, why not? it does not incur any additional cost to you and the church benefits by 20% of your contributions. There may be more than one taxpayer in a family who makes separate contributions and has not yet signed a declaration

Gift Aid is calculated on all contributions, Free Will Offering, Building Fund, United Appeal and Harvest through the envelopes and if you do not yet have envelopes you can request them from Norman Biggerstaff, our Treasurer, who also has the Gift Aid Declaration Forms.

In these challenging times with the Covid regulations attendances are down although income is still close to normal. The church needs your support more.

You only have to sign once and this will continue until you advise the Treasurer that you no longer are a taxpayer.

Thanks is extended to all who have already signed Gift Aid Declaration Forms.



Operation Christmas Child Shoebox Appeal 2021

Thank you to each and every person who has contributed to this year's Christmas Shoebox Appeal.

64 shoebox gifts, packed lovingly and prayerfully by our church family, are currently on their way to their destination where they will serve as a tangible expression of God's love for the boys and girls who receive them.

Of course, the packing of the shoeboxes was just the beginning of their journey. After they left 1st Dromara, the shoeboxes were taken to their local sorting centre where volunteers will have checked each shoebox to make sure that they were suitable for the children who would receive them. The shoeboxes will then have been shipped to their

destination where local church volunteers eagerly await their arrival.

Christians from the local church are trained by Samaritan's Purse to not only distribute the shoebox gifts but also to present the Gospel to the children who will receive them.

As children across the world receive these shoebox gifts this Christmas, as well as the opportunity to learn about the Lord Jesus through the "Greatest Journey" Bible lesson course, let's commit to praying that God would lead many of them to put their trust in Jesus as their Saviour, and by doing so receive the far greater gift of eternal life in Him.



Rebekah Beatty tells us about activities in Stirling CU.

Stirling CU has held many great events over the last few weeks since the restrictions have eased off a little.

At the start of term, they held a 'freshers fortnight' which was a series of various outreach events which took place more or less daily for new students to come and meet new people as well as learning a little bit about Christianity. This involved a lot of coffee meetings, a Scottish culture night, a tour of the city as well as a hike up our campus' mountain Dumyat, a frisbee match and my personal favourite, 'feed a fresher night' which involved a three-course meal with testimonies from the committee in between courses. (Yes, the main was pasta in keeping with the stereotypical student diet!)

Each Sunday at the start of term, CU also held a 'church search' which was an opportunity for freshers to find a church to settle into as it can be overwhelming at times to get settled into a new routine. Our committee members are all tied to many different churches which made it easy for us to find a church in Stirling.

Since then, the CU have been meeting regularly each Thursday night for what we call 'Equip' as well as hosting regular prayer meetings throughout the week. Equip is a series that we have been making our way through, in which the primary aim is to equip us students so we can go and be a witness to our community. We have been emphasizing on how crucial university years can be for this as its unlikely that in the future



Freshers fortnight.



we will ever meet so many new people from all over the world again at once!

With term one ending, CU has hosted a few more events before the holidays. They had a 'don't hold back' Q&A night where students could ask the panel anything about Christianity and some interesting questions were definitely raised. Following that, we had the famous Winter Ceilidh where we enjoyed some traditional Scottish dances and music as well as hearing from a local minister about the birth of Jesus, following with a trip up to the Wallace Monument which overlooks the entire city before finishing with our carol service.

Pre-Covid19, the CU was closely tied with Navigators UK, which is a student ministry aiming to advance the gospel of Jesus and His kingdom. Stirling Navigators are again meeting weekly in small Bible study groups, focusing on the 'I am' series of John's gospel. Each week we share a dinner graciously prepared for us by our group leader before discussing what we learnt from our study throughout the past week and flesh out any questions that we had about scripture. Stirling Navigators also had its first weekend away this year in East Ayrshire which I had the pleasure of attending. The weekend served as a retreat where we could carve out time from our busy schedules to focus ourselves upon God and what He wants to say to us.

Both CU and Navigators have been a great encouragement to me during my time away from home. I've definitely found a great Christian community in Stirling which encourages me every day.



Above and below: Equip



Navigator's weekend.





Jonathan Rodgers helped out at the CEF Lagan Valley Inters Camp for teenagers during the summer

The nerves of the first day, the buzz and excitement of young people enjoying freedom from parents, the tiredness resulting from an action-packed schedule and the smell of coffee to combat that fatigue!

These are just some of the things many of us missed during 2020 as we spent the summer months in lockdown, isolated from others and unable to be involved in the youth ministry we looked forward to throughout the year. Which is why Monday 19th July came as such a relief, when I had the opportunity to serve God at Lagan Valley Inters Camp.

Admittedly, things weren't quite the same. For starters, the format was vastly different from previous years (for obvious reasons). What was normally a residential camp became a day camp (although I'm certainly not complaining



about the extra sleep!). Chairs had to be spaced out across the hall where we held our meetings to accommodate social distancing. Masks had to be worn, hands sanitised... you get the point, Inters camp 2021 didn't escape the pandemic unscathed.

However, the most important things, the things which make camp camp, remained intact. It was a blessing to be surrounded by a team of leaders who had a sincere love for God, and a burning desire to see Him work in the hearts of young people. We had young people who came with hearts eager to hear from God and to learn from His word. And above all, we had God Himself present with us as we studied His word, sang praise to His name and sought His face in prayer. If that wasn't enough, the summer sun shone all week long too.

Each day the camp followed the same routine. The young people would arrive and enjoy the lovely weather through a team game outside. We had our morning meeting where we heard from God's word through the book of Nehemiah and after a small group discussion focused on that day's lesson we enjoyed lunch together outside.

In the afternoon we would have our main activity which entailed things like swimming, inflatables courses, water fights and a church break-in (of the legal, planned variety).



Teaching a lesson at a CEF Christmas Club in Ballynahinch.

Throughout the camp, despite the occasional Covid scare which thankfully amounted to nothing, God was abundantly gracious to us collectively as He kept us safe and allowed His work to go on through the camp.

You might draw parallels with the story of Nehemiah which we thought about during the week. As Nehemiah sought to round up troops and to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, he faced great opposition. Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem were determined to hinder God's work by doing anything possible to distract, hinder or even harm Nehemiah. But by God's grace the work continued steadfast until completion. In the same way, God protected Inters camp from the opposition posed by restrictions and Covid outbreaks, and His work through us was finished.

I experienced God's grace to me in a personal way too. On the Thursday I was given the responsibility of bringing both the Bible lesson from Nehemiah in the morning as well as my testimony in the afternoon. I had never taught a bible lesson at a CEF camp, nor had I ever taught

for more than 15 minutes before. But by God's grace, He guarded my heart and mind with His peace and brought to my remembrance the words I had prepared to say. It was a joy to be used by God to open up His word to the young people.

All in all, we had a fantastic week at camp, but the best was yet to come. On the Saturday evening following the camp we received news that a boy who had been at camp throughout the week had trusted in Jesus as his Saviour. This boy continues to go to his local JYC regularly in addition to a local church which his family attend where he is being disciplined and is growing in his faith in God. Praise God for how even today, He is at work building His Kingdom in our local area, especially among children and young people. Thank God for the ministry and work of CEF in Ireland, and for all He is doing through faithful workers in that organisation. Pray for young people in our area, and especially those in our own church family that God would call them to Himself and make them into faithful and fruitful disciples of Jesus Christ.

