



When a baby is born, it is usually the cause of wild celebration. Dad wants the whole world to know. Grandparents beam with joy. Well-wishers shower the parents with gifts, balloons and cards ~ an explosion of teddy bears. Everyone wants a cuddle and a photo opportunity. Mum probably just wants pain-killers and a decent sleep.

I've received some strange birth announcements in my time—from rather gory and explicit photos of a caesarian section in progress to a blunt text from a friend that just said, “09.43am. 3.6kg. m. Dan.” He's an engineer.

But new babies bring with them a whole host of puzzling and challenging questions that can quickly turn family joy into confusion. How should we raise children, educate them, teach them, feed them? What values should

we give them about life and love and commitment and work? What opportunities for life should we give them? And given the limitations of time and money, how can we choose between fishing and football, piano and painting, watching a movie or walking in the fresh air?

Children are a bundle of possibilities and opportunities. The need to give the right space and conditions for their flourishing can weigh heavily on parents. And if we place unrealistic hopes and expectations on them, we can easily crush them. A new baby may be a gift to us, but it is a gift that comes with responsibilities.

The joyful gift of life

We all instinctively know that life is a gift, and we are grateful for it. Christians believe that the source of that gift is the God who delights to give life, love and all good things. One ancient song from the Bible puts it like this:

Lord ... you are the giver of life. Your light lets us enjoy life.

Psalm 36 v 9

Many people think of God in the opposite way. They feel, perhaps because they have had a bad experience of church or Christians, that God is just there to make us feel guilty and bad about ourselves; that the Bible is a book that is repressive and closes down our opportunities and potential; that Christianity sucks the fun and joy out of life. And yet the God revealed in the Bible is totally different. He is revealed to be a good God who pours out gifts and blessing on each and every one of us moment by moment.

And supremely he is a God who is filled with love. He created life. He sustains life. He makes the sun shine, the rain fall and the fields produce food. Whether we recognise him or not, the God who made us is the author and sustainer of life ~ and he loves the world he made.

But this God is not a distant, remote God. He is close

to each of us. More than that, if we want to see God most clearly, the Bible urges us to look at Jesus, who, as the Son of God, shows us what God is really like: loving, compassionate and life-affirming. Why did Jesus come into the world? He says:

"I came to give life ~ life in all its fullness." John 10 v 10

The puzzle of life

But life has a puzzle attached to it. With all the possibilities that a new life represents, there is plenty of room for hope, but also for disappointment. And if we are honest, each of us would recognise that we spectacularly fail. We are all a mixture of the good, the bad and, sometimes, the downright ugly.

We see the capability for enormous good in ourselves and humanity in general. On a daily basis, most

of us receive love, kindness and generosity from others ~ family, friends and colleagues. On the whole the world is good place.

But none of us ever truly feel that we have reached our potential. We are held back by lack of abilities, or frustrated by injustice or lack of resources. We spoil relationships as well as make them ~ cruel words and thoughtless actions destroy love and trust so easily.

Sometimes the bad we do can be traced to the bad that has happened to us. But too often it is not connected. It is simply ugly self-serving.

We see this not just in ourselves but in whole communities, nations and movements. There are fine charities promoting health and opportunity. But there are also disgraceful institutions that corruptly use their wealth to please themselves.

We see amazing peace efforts made by leaders and international agencies. But we also see destructive power-

hungry governments that stir up hatred and war for their own ends, which leads to misery and pain for millions. *Why is our world like this? Why are we like this?*

The answer Jesus gives to this puzzle is both profound and disturbing:

“The things that come out of people are the things that make them unclean. All these evil things begin inside people, in the mind: evil thoughts, sexual sins, stealing, murder, adultery, greed, evil actions, lying, doing sinful things, jealousy, speaking evil of others, pride, and foolish living. All these evil things come from inside and make people unclean.”

Mark 7 v 20-23

Jesus directly addresses the enigma at the heart of humanity. Although we were made good by a good and loving God, the story of humanity is that we reject God, and prefer to live without reference to him. We have pushed him

out of his rightful place in our lives. And if we eject the ultimate source of love and life from our hearts, we should not be surprised when death and hurt and selfishness fill the space left behind.

We cry out for justice when we see harm done to others, or are wounded ourselves. So it is good news that God, who loves life and justice, has promised that he will one day judge all those who cause pain and destroy love and life. But this means that all of us will face the righteous anger of God. Our rejection of God makes each of us, as Jesus said, “unclean”.

Jesus shows us, in a rather uncomfortable way, that our problems are more than just our background or lack of opportunities. They are not something that can be fixed by education, or a better environment. The heart of the problem is the human heart.

And as innocent as new babies are, we know that they too will inevitably follow the same path. You don't need to

teach children to be selfish; it comes as naturally to them as it did to us.

So is there no hope for life? Are we all doomed to follow the same pathway? *Far from it.*

The good news of the Christian message is that through God's Son, Jesus, we can all receive new life.

The hope we can have

We have already heard Jesus' promise:

"I came to give life ~ life in all its fullness." John 10 v 10

Jesus wants us to live and to flourish. More than that, he wants us to experience life in all its fullness. A life rich towards others and towards God. A life that lasts beyond death and into eternity.

But the key to understanding how that can happen for us is in the words Jesus speaks next:

*"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life
for the sheep."* John 10 v 11

Jesus died so that we could live. He paid the price for the bad things we have done. Through his death he offers to wipe away the ugliness in our souls and make us clean before God through his sacrifice on the cross.

But the story does not end on the first Good Friday when Jesus died. Three days later, on the first Easter Day, God raised Jesus from death, and he is alive for ever ~ reigning as King over the world God made. His resurrection is not just a "nice story"; it is an historical fact. His friends met with him, ate with him, talked with him and spent time with him. As many as 500 people at one time saw him. And those who were witnesses to his resurrection were prepared to suffer torture and die, rather than say what their persecutors wanted to hear: that it was a lie.

Jesus is alive today and is pleased to give new life to

anyone who comes to him. The new life Jesus gives is a life where we know we are forgiven by God for the past. It is a life with a sure hope for the future. It is a life as part of a new family. It is a life in which we can know God for ourselves and receive guidance for the future from Jesus our good shepherd, and strength and encouragement from his Holy Spirit. It truly is life in all its fullness.

How can I receive new life?

The new life of the child you are celebrating today is a gift from God. In the same way forgiveness and new life is offered to you as a gift from God. It is not something we deserve. It is not something we can earn. It is something we have to receive from God's hands.

God's gift comes to us as we recognise that we need it ~ when we see that we are "unclean" in God's eyes and that we cannot do anything to save ourselves.

God's gift comes to us when we see that our only hope is to come to Jesus, who died for us, so that we can be cleansed and find forgiveness through the cross.

God's gift comes to us when we recognise that going our own way will only ever lead to death and separation from God for ever, and so, with his help we resolve to turn away from serving ourselves, and to follow him.

God's gift comes to us when we put our trust in Jesus Christ for our future and give ourselves over to him.

Many people have found that saying a simple prayer to God is the start of a new life. The words of the prayer on the next page are not magic words that put you right with God. But if they represent the desire of your heart, then saying them quietly and humbly to God is one way you can express your trust in Christ and your desire to receive the gift of life he freely offers to you.

Why not take the time to read these words now. You can make them your own as you speak to the God who can become your Heavenly Father:

*Father God, thank you for the new life we are
celebrating today.
Please bless both parents and children, and help
them to grow and enjoy life in all its fullness.
Thank you for your love for the world.
I'm sorry that I've not loved you as I should.
I'm sorry that I've made myself your enemy.
But I thank you that you carried on loving me.
Thank you for sending your Son, Jesus Christ.
Thank you that he died in my place.
Thank you for his resurrection and the promise of
the gift of life in all its fullness.
Help me to turn from my selfish ways and follow
Jesus.
Help me to trust in him and to receive your gift of
new life now. Amen.*



What now?

You may have many questions about what it means to be a Christian. Ask the person who gave you this booklet for help. Or you could visit **www.christianityexplored.org** to discover more about what it means to follow Jesus.

God answers our prayers, and he promises to come close to those who come close to him. As you trust Jesus, God will come to live in you by his Holy Spirit, and help you to live as one of God's children.

The local church is the place where you will meet other members of God's family. Christian faith is personal, but it is never private. It is as a member of a local church that you will be encouraged and helped to grow as a Christian. We all need help and encouragement ~ that's why God has given us each other.