

Greetings to my sponsoring churches! In my last letter, I told you I'd been invited to the very first ever capping ceremony at the hospital in Padhar. Well, I got there after 12 hours of a variety of travel methods. I was very honored to be the Chief Guest and speak at the ceremony. There were 40 future nurses in the class which was about the size of my graduating class from nursing school. There were six men in this class - my class had three. In the evening I preached at the English worship service. My sermon was about Mary and other unlikely candidates chosen by God. It was a week before Christmas so there was carol singing and I learned that carols were introduced by Saint Francis Assisi. And that carols were actually banned by some of the early Protestants but rescued by King Charles II in 1660. After some consulting, networking, meetings, and Bible studies, I did the car to train to plane thing and went home to Vellore.

Back in Vellore I did some Christmas shopping and got ready for the Christmas service. I actually preached one of my best sermons - it was on the John 1:1-14 text. I preached on the meaning of "the Word." The Word being the creative voice of God, Jesus in the flesh, and scripture coming to us in a living manner. The same scripture can give a different message to different people and even a different message to the same person over the course of years. I said that a literal understanding - one that says there is only one interpretation - was actually arrogant.

That says, "I know what this means, and I won't allow God to say it differently."

After the service I had brunch with friends and had my favorite - ghee roast masala dosai. After an hour and a half at home, I went to have Christmas dinner with friends Joe and Denny. Denny had a wondrous meal and the company was excellent. All in all, a great day.

The day after the day after Christmas is the feast day of St. John the Apostle which makes it my feast day too. The Sisters from the hospice decorated my door - a tradition - and I had very special treatment at breakfast. There was singing and flowers and two cakes and even a multicolored shawl. It was very nice.

I've been recruiting people to go to Malaysia in June and do a workshop with me. It's great to be able to do Skype phone calls with them as otherwise, international phone calls can be very expensive, and also, we can see each other as long as we both have web cams.

I was thrilled to be asked to participate in the wedding of two very special young people on December 30th. The bride is from India and the groom from Nigeria. He's a dentist and she's a psychologist and so of course I made a pitch for both of them to volunteer! I had them choose the text from three options and preached on a text I'd never used at a wedding - Colossians 3:12-17, "clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience... Above all, clothe yourselves with love..." Minu was a lovely bride and Emeka a handsome groom.

We had a small crowd for the New Year's Eve midnight service and I was home by 12:45 a.m. which was good because I was the one who insisted that we have a New Year's Day Sunday service. On New Year's Day I roasted the raw cashews Sister Rosemund brought me from Kerala. They were so good! I had a hard time not gobbling them all up but I wanted to bring some to the office to share.

I met with the Project-in-Charge for a school for children with cerebral palsy and arranged with her to have the Music Therapy group come. Then I went to Mother Teresa's house and got them on board too. I realized while I was there that I should schedule the music people for just a half day at Mother Teresa and give them the afternoon off. I forget the emotional/heart impact of children with such handicaps. I know that these folks have worked with mentally and physically handicapped children, but not a 100 at a time! So I'm rethinking and re-planning. I remember how I was first affected - some of my palliative colleagues too.

On January 10th, I left for Mizoram which is a state in north-east India. I was there to do a workshop on palliative care, a couple of Bible studies, and a talk on Stephen Ministry. That's where I am as I write this. I appreciate your prayers - they provide me with the fuel I need to travel and work here. Please keep them coming! Peace, John