

December 2023 Australia, Iran, Latvia, North America

AUSTRALIA

In total contrast to all the news from frozen Latvia, we're delighted to share with you the joy of the Hawkins family in the baptism of BRADLEY by brother Mark, in the sweltering heat of Perth WA. This is sister Grace's daughter. Nothing better to see a family united together in the Lord Jesus. The video of the baptism service and subsequent breaking of bread meeting is at <https://youtu.be/X4dLwTGg41M>

Here's Brad being congratulated by his aunty and grandmother, sister Connie. What a great work of the Lord Jesus in the lives of Brad and his relatives:



IRAN

The blocking of our sites and app in Iran and Afghanistan has greatly reduced our contact there with folks. Only those adept at using VPN are able to get access. But one such is AZIM and we were delighted to baptize him online this week.

LATVIA

Apart from the Gospel, about the kindest Christmas present you can give homeless, poor people in Latvia who are squatting in Summer house sheds... is firewood. Warmth. Simple as that. So we set off to where we knew some such brethren live. Temperatures have been below zero and many roads aren't cleared of ice due to the dire state of the economy and public services. We had a scary time out with the boys in the small rental car, with ice mounded up in the middle of the track, ditches on both sides of us. We got stuck a few times and in the end had to use David's beloved, re-found toboggan to take the firewood the last little way.

There aren't many daylight hours around the Winter solstice, so we went after dark on very slippery, snow and ice covered, potholed roads. It was an area of small lock up summer sheds. The homeless squat in them, so some of them are protected by chained dogs. Some of those dogs have escaped and are feral, wandering around seeking what they may devour. There are also bears known in the area. We had a very small rental car and soon ran into difficulties on the road; it had huge potholes anyway, and we kept losing traction and getting stuck in the snow. We got to a point where we could go no further, although so nearly at one of our destinations.

So we stopped the car and took the firewood by hand and on young David's beloved, re-found toboggan. The feral dogs were howling and all around. We had the video going most of the time and you can hear the boys alone deciding they want to go out and do the work rather than just sit in the car watching dad. So they did their runs- loading the toboggan and then dropping the firewood at the arranged pick up points. You may or may not find it fascinating to hear David, Daniel and Duncan chatting about grace, about whether to turn back or go forward, who should risk facing the dogs, praying spontaneously when we got stuck in the snow or lost traction on the ice, or when we couldn't go forward but there seemed no path back. Great conversations. That night, and the Spirit of it, will surely remain in those young minds. So the recording is at https://youtu.be/f_U-iKqkN4 and we hope you find some inspiration in it.



The economy is truly suffering here with inflation highest in Europe, and basic food now two to three times the price of food in the UK. We saw women with children hanging around outside the bins where used clothing can be donating, waiting to beg any donors for the clothes, and for money. Requests for food are frequent. So many Russians, including wealthy ones, have now left. Whole shopping malls have closed down and are empty. There is Russophobia everywhere, even "language police" ensuring native Russians don't use Russian with each other in the workplace. There are various schemes for ethnic Russians to be able to go to Russia and many have taken them up. Including our dear brother Vladimir, who was speaking of doing this last time we visited. As he is blind, we warned him against it. But he has gone, and we've lost contact with him. We just hope and pray he is OK and will end his days with the Lord in peace. We had a great breaking of bread meeting and church meal in Riga with about 26 in attendance.



Sister Nina travelled for 2 hours on various forms of transport to be with us:



And as ever there was news of those who have fallen asleep in the Lord, or had strokes or now with dementia, some in very poorly resourced care homes:



Here are some file photos of sisters who fell asleep, from the time when we were unable to meet in the hall and were just giving food packages and warm soup in cups:



And dear sister Tatyana, here with her soup and food packet from us:



In a June 2020 Carelink message, we wrote about Tatyana:

"Sister Tatyana, who has been with us many years and in her old age lives in great poverty, quite pathetic really. She loves to re-tell her stories from the years of the underground church in the USSR. She tells the folks lining up for food how she got free Bibles from us. And how that contrasts with her experience as a young Soviet woman who came to Christ in the years of

religious oppression and enforced atheism.

She loves to tell the story of how she met with a group of believers who met for worship deep in a forest. One Sunday, a man approached them carrying a bag. They all feared that 'this is it', they had been busted by the authorities. But he came up to them and assured them he had only one aim- he had some Russian Bibles, and he wanted to sell them to the believers. He only had a few, and so he as it were auctioned them to the highest bidders. But Tatyana didn't have enough money to bid high enough, so she didn't get one, and walked through the forest back home in tears.

And then, all these years later, she came to the Lord in spirit and truth, was cast out of the church she attended for denying the Trinity... and rejoices that we offer Russian Bibles for free. It is an absolute pleasure to feed her with soup and coffee."

Truly all this is "fruit that remains" and we so long for the day of resurrection and the eternal felicity of the Kingdom.

NORTH AMERICA

We were delighted this week to witness the baptism of NOAH online, you can see him in his bath tub surrounded by us online. The Angels who rejoice in Heaven were joined by us in Latvia, UK, Australia, Italy and Canada. Brother Jim Barton will mentor our new brother. He came to Christianity recently, and began reading his Bible every day, and [no surprises] didn't therefore find any church he felt comfortable with.



PRAYER POINTS

- For those recently baptized
- For all those struggling through the economic collapse in Latvia and elsewhere
- For those facing unashamed Russophobia
- For those in the unending struggle against the cold this Winter in Eastern Europe

With love from your brothers and sisters of Carelinks