

We are in the Advent, or Arrival, season again and the familiar infancy narratives from Luke and Matthew will become the focus of many of us over the incoming weeks. As we especially reflect at this time of year on the incarnation, God stepping into our humanity, do we ever think of Advent beyond the confines of the stable, shepherds and wise men?

John has no infancy narrative. At the beginning of his gospel, he takes his himself..."In the beginning..." and John's with the words "and the Word became truth...". John's introduction of Jesus is,

not as an infant, dependent on the protection and care of Mary & Joseph, but as an adult, and the incarnation is described not in the terms of adoration of shepherds to a baby, but in the more mature language of God's next act and response to the law of Moses.

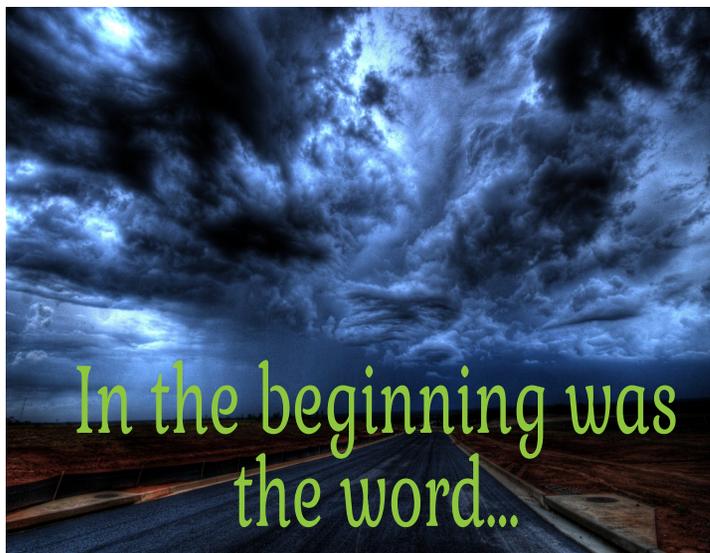
John's incarnation is dynamic, not, as hymn writers sometimes portray the Advent event, in the imagery of a helpless babe. God is not just entering into humanity, but into the human experience, the reality of Immanuel – God with us. God with us in the joys and pains of human existence, God with us in our grief at the death of a loved one, and in our joy at the birth of new life. The Advent/incarnation event in John, may not have the shepherds and wise men, but it has the manifestation of grace and truth expressed in Jesus, walking the path of humanity, and with every new experience, expressing that grace and truth anew.

This Christmas, whether experienced in the coolness of the northern hemisphere, or the heat of the southern hemisphere, we wish you a new experience of "the grace and truth" that entered the world in Jesus. In whatever situation you find yourself, may you know the reality of God's presence and find rest and peace in the knowledge and awareness of his grace.

## Review of 2019

Looking back, this year has been one of change and challenge for STS. Change in that we have added to the range of work undertaken, and that we have moved out from San Martin de Los Andes and the challenge of engagement with other towns and villages over a distance of 450km away to the east and how to sustain that contact.

The impact has, however, been rewarding. We have had the opportunity to speak into the lives of others in more remote communities and begin to show something of the benefits of reading Scripture and learning how to engage with it. We met with Miguel Yanka in Ingeniero Jacobacci and now have a slot on local radio, we have linked in with a congregation in Maquinchao for



monthly workshops, and potential bible study groups. We have begun to explore a link with a children's home in [Comallo](#) and the provision of both bible study and counselling training for the leaders. Back in [San Martin](#), we responded to an invitation from [Pastor Gustavo Leybo](#) to speak to his congregation and have continued to slowly build on that



relationship. We briefly reconnected with some congregations in [Junin](#) in the autumn, and have also seen some locals, like [Lucas](#) and his wife, who are likely to be future pastors, come to STS workshops and the autumn course. This has reinforced the need to speak into the lives of future pastors to help the next generation. All of this is Challenging in that we have the need to maintain regular contact, and also that we have seen to some degree, the suspicion and wariness of admitting that help is required to understand. We have also encountered some more basic needs in that we have had to think about how we present workshops in situations where literacy skills cannot always be assumed.

Alongside this, in 2019 we began a conversation with [Latin Link](#) to explore how



we might do some collaborative work in 2020. That conversation will continue over

the incoming months as we plan, pray, and look at the practicalities of how we might do some joined-up activities.

Back in the UK, we had some changes to the Board over 2019, and express out sincere thanks to those who stepped aside after a number of years, and warmly welcome those who have taken up the mantle for the incoming period. Financially, we also said goodbye to a couple of longer-term supporters, and at the same time welcomed others. We are always conscious of the financial need to keep STS going and in this we would like to express our sincere thanks to those who have continued to support STS and have shown their commitment to biblical education and training through their financial support.

We now look to 2020 and how best to use resources of time, finance, and ability. Our hope, however, is in the God who has brought us through 2019 and expanded his work as we have engaged in new activities. To him, we give thanks for his faithfulness and continued provision and just as he has been faithful in 2019, we trust him for 2020.

### **In conversation with Jorge and Luz**

Jorge & Luz have been coming to STS events during 2018/9 and we thought you might like to know what the impact of STS has had on their lives, so we asked Pablo to find out a little bit more

**Q. As a little bit of background, could you tell us where you are from and a little bit about your family situation?**

Jorge: I was born here in San Martín and my family are still here – my mother and brother (my dad passed away) and I have a sister nearby in Villa la Angostura. I have worked most of my life as a gas/electric installer and have done some work on construction, but now work as an engineer, and employ two others to work alongside me.

Luz: I am originally from Quechuquina, a village just a few miles outside San Martín, and from a Christian home. I came to live in San Martín with my family in my early teens, so now my eight brothers and I all live in the town. As a family, we have always been

encouraged to work and I now work as a maid in about 4-5 houses in San Martín and love what I do.

**Q. Could you tell us something about the ministry you have had in the past?**

Luz: When we started working in the things of the Lord as part of a mission, we were in charge of looking after accounts and venues. Later, we were both anointed as pastors and held that role for another two and a half years.

Jorge: We had some doubts about how to interpret or read Scripture, our contact with STS has helped us decide that to take a break as we see the need to train more, even though our mission had previously anointed us and told us we were ready for ministry. We just felt that we could not develop that ministry in the way Scripture says, so we stepped back a little, although we still do some visiting.

**Q. What was your initial reaction to STS, and when did you start participating in STS events?**

Jorge: Well, I went because I was aware I needed more training and I also needed to deal with my own doubts. When I started attending the workshops and to study, I then realised that I needed much more than I had anticipated and it had quite an emotional impact. When I started going again this year, I had more of a fixed idea that I would find answers and here we are. It has not, however, been an easy journey but it is an important change to what I had been taught.

Luz: For me, it had a very strong impact, as every time I spoke to Jorge about God, he told me the things that he saw in the church meetings which were not right, and I got very tired of it as I always thought that everything in the church was given by the Spirit. I would



just tell him that he was not spiritual and he did not understand the things of the Spirit, so we would end up disagreeing. He always said that this was not how we were to do things and, for me, it was devaluing my pastor who had baptised me and who taught me the Word. I thought everything would be well as if this is what God wants it will all be in his word, and why would we need any kind of teacher, or anyone. Yet Jorge kept telling me there was more, there was always more and that was the difference between us, as I always told him that if God wanted to give me more, he would do so through the Spirit and I did not need to go to a class!

Now I see how important it is, and I feel despondent because I say "Why did I not have Pablo when I came to Jesus?", for it seems that I have experienced many wrong things. They taught you from the pulpit that it was all by faith you never saw anything different. We never had a bible study in my church...ever, because it was not the custom to study Scripture, we just had to accept everything we were told by faith. Jorge always wanted to study and know more, but I told him if we go to church, we go to the meetings, that is all, you do not need anything more, but now I realise... Sometimes I cry because of the ignorance in the church but it also inspires me to keep going to the events that STS provide and to keep learning, which also means Jorge and I get along much better!

**Q. How do you think STS can help you grow in your relationship with Christ?**

Luz: By going to the classes and keeping on learning. While I have respect for my pastor, we did not really learn anything, everything was so basic and primitive.

Jorge: STS provides us with the tools to help us understand and interpret Scripture. Before I was not able to assess what I heard, but today I have more tools to help me understand, and if I listen, I can tell if the preaching I hear is out of context or not.

**Q. And do you feel it has helped your relationship with Christ?**

Jorge: Since I started reading Scripture on my own it has given me more security. Knowing more about Scripture helps me to rest in it more, knowing it is not about me, or my emotions, or my understanding, but it is about God who chose me.

**Q. Final question... how can STS help you in your growth in 2020?**

Jorge: Next year, I would like to go more, outside of the timetable of events, as I still have questions and I don't want to absorb the time at the lectures and take it away from other students. Having the classes here means that you are available, and I want to squeeze as much out of the opportunities I have.

Luz: I just want to say a real "thank you!" to you and to Colin. You both can teach in a way that helps us understand, and it has been great. I just want to wish you every blessing...

***Points for prayer:***

- Give thanks to God for all that has been achieved in 2019 and for the expansion of the work of STS into Comallo and Maquinchao. Ask the Lord to protect and grow what he has begun.
- Give thanks to God for his provision and presence through the year, for the safety Pablo experienced when travelling, and for the openness of others to listen and respond to what is offered.
- Ask the Lord to undertake for our financial provision as we begin another year, and for the wisdom to use finances wisely.
- Pray that as we enter 2020, we may be able to take forward, to a practical level, our engagement with Latin Link as we consider our activities over the year
- Pray that Pablo may know the Lord's presence with him, especially as he travels, and be able to balance out life and work commitments as we explore how to consolidate the activities begun in 2019.
- Pray for Jorge and Luz, Lucas and his wife, Pastor Leybo, and the others who attend the workshops and courses, that they may grow in the grace and knowledge of God our Saviour.
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