

## Cambodia Mission Report - December 2009

### Back to School

Ann and I hope you had a good Christmas and we pray you have a good 2010. We are back in N. Ireland after 3 years in Phnom Penh. Ann and I need a rest, and need time to rest physically, mentally and spiritually. Also, we need to meet some commitments we have. I must return to my school, Sullivan Upper School, to teach as I have been on a career break. The Sullivan Principal, Mr John Stephenson and the Board of Governors have been more than good allowing me to have the career break. I want to convey something of our amazing experiences to the pupils and my colleagues. That's what the career break scheme is all about.

However, at this time, Ann and I feel we haven't yet finished God's work in Phnom Penh so I doubt if I will be back in Sullivan for very long.

### So Cold.

It's Christmas already. In fact I have started typing this report on Boxing Day but it's so, so, so cold. Most of you reading this live in the UK and you also are in the grip of a sub-zero, festive cold spell. Ann and I think our bodies must have become partially acclimatised to the heat of Cambodia because we are finding the current spell of ice and snow really quite difficult to cope with. At one point, Ann surprised me when she said she was so cold she could cry! We left Phnom Penh on the 13<sup>th</sup> December and the temperature was around 30 degrees and 15 hours later were in 5 degrees in Heathrow. Within a few days of our return to the Emerald Isle we are donning double jumpers, long-johns and burning expensive central heating oil - all to keep warm in arctic temperatures.

### Your Giving

I want to thank those of you who support us financially. You allow us to burn the heating oil. You may not know that Ann have lived on faith for the past 3 years. We do not have any salary from anywhere. Elim Missions have the system whereby their missionaries raise their own support. So you, our family and our home church - The Ulster Temple, keep us in all we need on and off the mission field. You share in the mission in Cambodia as we reach people for Christ. We could not do what we do without you. **Missionaries like us need people like you.** God uses each of us who are faithful, in different ways. Ann and I are called to go but that's only possible because of you. So when we report to you that God is doing great things in the Cambodian mission field, we want you to feel part of it. Your roll is vital. Lives, hearts and souls are being changed through the power of God. You sustain us in prayer and support us financially through your sacrificial giving and given the current economic climate in the UK your giving is indeed sacrificial and may the Lord bless you

### A Good News Story

All is going well in the Phnom Penh mission. The work is hard but outstandingly rewarding. As it's Christmas, I thought I should share a good news story with you. Something to warm the cockles of your heart in this cold weather.



Ann and I, and all at the Elim Mission in Phnom Penh, Cambodia hope and pray you had a Happy Christmas and we pray that you have a blessed 2010.



We are careful to put baby Jesus in the centre of all of our Christmas celebrations in Elim Phnom Penh.



Back home in a wintery wonderland. It's good to be home we don't remember it this cold.

If you received our previous mission report you may remember we reported to you about our rescue of a starving and dying baby girl, Chantee. Just to recap. We regularly visit and minister into some slum villages on the municipal dump area on the outskirts of the city. The general area is called Steung Meanchey. On one of our routine medical and church ministry visits, back in May this year the village chief took Ann and some of our medical team to a ramshackle hut where they were surprised to find a distressed mother and her 5-day-old baby. The baby was born with a hair lip and double cleft palette. Consequently, the baby had been struggling to feed, and now was in danger of starving to death. We established that when the mother was told that the baby was deformed she twice tried to abort the baby. Chantee survived. Now, she was being fed condensed milk diluted with dirty water. We gave the mother proper powdered baby food and clean water each day knowing that if we gave her the whole tin it would be sold. Despite monitoring and supporting her mother, within 2 weeks the baby lapsed into a coma and we were summoned to hospital only to find her on life support in a rather primitive Intensive Care Unit. The prognosis was that she would not survive. Ann and faithful others from the Elim stayed with her and cared and prayed for her. God responded to our prayers by sparing her and day by day she grew a little stronger. Then, out of the blue and far too soon, she was discharged from hospital. The doctors cautioned us that if the baby went back to the dump village she would not survive. We took her back to her village where a meeting was called. Medical personnel, her parents and most of the Elim church leadership team were in attendance. At the conclusion of the meeting Chantee's mother carried her baby across room and put her in Ann's arms and tearfully asked Ann to care for her baby. Given the squalor and filth all around we knew there was no time to put together an action plan, we literally had to act to save the baby. As we rode away in the Tuctuc with the baby, we explored several options some of which we tried in the following weeks and months but they all fell short of what the baby needed to survive and grow.

Given her special needs we have employed a full time nanny, Leen, to care for the baby and along with our housekeeper, Gumli, they and the baby stay in our home, even now while we are in Ireland. We expect this to be for the period of time while Chantee is having a series of operations and thus is vulnerable to infections. Now to bring you up to date. Chantee had her first operation at the end of November and it was a great success. Leen, Ann and Gumli took turns at staying with the baby around the clock in hospital, spoon feeding her and keeping her clean and healthy despite the environment. Their care was rewarded as she recovered quickly. The surgeon said he was very pleased with the outcome and said she was one of the best operations he had done. He sounded almost surprised at the result. I have to say we also were delighted but not surprised. We see our God do amazing things here on a weekly and sometimes daily basis. We certainly are not complacent. We are humbled that we should be included to witness such amazing things.



The day we first met baby Chantee. She had a hair lip and a double cleft pallet. The doctor's told Chantee's mother that her baby had no nose so she tried to abort her twice. However, Chantee was born on the 26<sup>th</sup> May 2009.



She lapsed into a coma and was put onto a life support machine. The doctor's prognosis was that she was too weak to survive – but she did, thanks to God.



Seen here In November Chantee had grown and developed into a beautiful, healthy, little,, baby girl. She is still underweight but when she reaches 5 kilo and was past 5 months she would be ready for her first operation.



After her first operation. Such severe surgery for a little baby.

## Our First Wedding in Phnom Penh Elim Church.

Ann has a gift for accounting and finances. That's her profession. She is meticulous, almost forensic, in her work and in early 2007 when we first took over the mission, she soon spotted some unexplainable financial discrepancies in the church. Soon we were looking for a new supervisor for the Day Care Centre. An outstanding young woman in the ranks, Nita, accepted the job.

Nita has proved to be a huge asset and the Day Care Centre. The standard of care, supervision, integrity and work have significantly improved.

As the months went by, we watched Nita as a friendship with a young man, Chamnap, flourished and turned into romance. We were delighted when they announced their intention to marry. We were even more pleased when they requested a Christian wedding in the Elim Church Centre in traditional Cambodian style and for the wedding ceremony to be conducted by myself. Nita and Chamnap are both born-again Christians and are two major figures in the leadership team of the Elim Khmei Church. The wedding date was set for the 5<sup>th</sup> December 2009 - just before we were to return to Ireland.

Both their fathers are dead so I, as their adopted father and Pastor had a major roll to perform on the day and I am pleased to report that all went well. Also they are the only Christians in their families and so I consider it very brave and a great witness for them to bring their families together for the Christian ceremony.

One charming typical aspect of their culture is, that despite their 2 year romance they had never once kissed. This level of intimacy is strictly reserved for marriage. Consequently, at the conclusion of the marriage vows, Chamnap was delighted when I publicly invited him to kiss his bride. Nita blushed visibly even through her heavy make-up and limited the kiss to the briefest of pecks on her cheek. Nevertheless, the ceremony went well. There were ceremonial and symbolic hair cutting, feet washing, candle lighting, food sharing and string tying. It was a wonderful day. The wedding ceremony lasted 5 hours and I was assured that this was a shorter version as foreigners (us) were involved. It started at 7.00am so it was a 4.30am rise for those involved and finished spot on noon. The after party in the evening was a great celebration and we all danced the night away to conclude a great day.

## Water Baptism Service

The Sunday before the wedding, the 29<sup>th</sup> November, we had our fourth water baptism service. We estimate we have baptised around 40 candidates so far, in our time in Phnom Penh. We once again used the Heritage International School ([www.heritagecam.com](http://www.heritagecam.com)) on Street 322. We would like to express our thanks again to the American Principal, Sonja Skeels for her kindness and co-operation. We appreciate the use of the campus and in particular the swimming pool for our services. There were 7 baptism candidates on the day. Chantee's mother, some new staff converts from the Day Care Centre and two players from our church football team. Clearly getting baptised in water became a new goal for these players.



After a few hours she was up and taking an interest in what was going on around her.



Chantee a few days before we returned to Ireland. Is God amazing? or is God amazing?



A wonderful wedding



The beautiful Nita, our new daughter. It's quite usual for the bride to have as many as ten dress changes on her wedding day

Are you a teacher reading this? Try visiting some of the Phnom Penh Christian School websites. For example, [www.heritagecam.com](http://www.heritagecam.com) or [www.hopeschool-cambodia.org](http://www.hopeschool-cambodia.org). Both are outstanding Christian schools. The mission of the latter is to teach missionary children. When God calls a married couple to the mission field, as responsible parents they ask two questions. One is there a western doctor for our family and two, is there a school for my children. Hope School and the like, tick that second box. I have taught in Hope School on and off during my three years. It's a great school. Visit their website - you never know what God might say to you?

### Visit from our Area Missions Director

We were pleased to receive a visit from Pastor Andy Taylor, Elim's Area Mission Director for Indo China ( my boss ). He was accompanied by his wife Susan and their guest, Mrs Janice Clark. Andy seemed very pleased, impressed and surprised at how the Phnom Penh mission had developed and grown over the two years since his last visit. We are too. God is amazing. Susan had a good visit and enjoyed the female company of Janice especially in the markets in Phom Penh. They have to be experienced. They simply batter your senses with astonishing sights and smells and sounds. There are also some great bargains to be had.

### Christmas Events

Among all of this - Chantee's operation, the Water Baptism Service, Nita and Chamnap's wedding and the Andy's visit - **Suddenly** ----- **it was Christmas!!** We have never been in Phnom Penh on Christmas day but we know it's just another day. Children go to school, the markets are open as usual, people go to work and there is little to mark that it is a special day. However, more and more shops and shopping centres are erecting Christmas trees and shop decorations. The more affluent Cambodians are beginning to decorate their homes with led lights and Christmas trees. In the shops, the decoration is for commercial reasons. That's not that much different from the UK. In Cambodia the true meaning of Christmas is largely not known and again that's not that much different from the UK. However, in the Elim Mission in Phnom Penh, as you would expect, we make a big fuss about this special time of the year and we ensure Jesus is right in the centre of the celebrations where He should be.

The Elim Day-Care Centre was first to put on a Christmas event. On Friday the 11<sup>th</sup> December, the parents of the day care children were invited to their Christmas Carol Concert. We currently have 43 children and so there was quite a crowd at the event. The staff sang Christmas carols as did the children. The children recited Bible verses in Khmei, Ann and I did our bit and then each child, from the youngest at 5 months to the oldest at almost 5 years old, was presented with a gift for Christmas. We then retired outside to enjoy some Christmas fayre, Cambodia style. Wonderful fresh tropical fruit and iced tea

Then, the following day, Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> December, we had our Christmas visit to the Steung Meanchey villages to bring gifts to the children.



Chamnap and Nita on their wedding day Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2009



Another great Water Baptism Service. This holds special significance for all Christians and it is eagerly sought by new Khmei Christians. Buddhism has no equivalent.



Here you can see Janice teaching English for me. Once a teacher- always a teacher!



The Day-Care Centre concert was a great success. Here the staff is singing for the parents.



The Day care centre children performing

Over the weeks of our visits in November and December we have been telling the Christmas Story to the children and parents. Beginning with the Birth of John the Baptist, we then told them about the birth of baby Jesus, the visit by the shepherds and wise men and the family's escape to Egypt. Ann and I and our Khmei staff use picture flash cards to teach Bible lessons. Even though the pictures are only artist's drawings, they help make the Bible lessons more real. Buddhism doesn't have such tellable stories.

The children were delighted when we gave them their Christmas goodie bags. They clutched them tightly as they headed back to their ramshackle huts. We have not introduced Santa Claus or Father Christmas to the children. Apart from causing confusion, it would probably scare the daylights out of both the children and our staff. So it's no Ho, Ho, Ho, in Phnom Penh - not for the meantime anyway.

The following day, Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> December, we had church. The **Khmei Church** had a regular service keeping their special Christmas service for the 20<sup>th</sup>. However, the **Elim International Church** celebrated our special season with a special service. Our first treat was the children from the day-care centre. Then three of our staff gave a very unique contribution by dressing in traditional Khmei costume and performing a beautiful celebratory traditional Khmei dance - for Christmas. It was a beautiful treat. Then the students from our music school played and sang Christmas carols for us. These 9 young people have learned to play the guitar over the past six months and some are not yet Christians. When that was over we sang Christmas carols and watched a special Christmas slide show that reminded us of snow and frost, turkey and stuffing, Christmas lights and tinsel and not forgetting the international nature of the congregation, we had pictures of Christmas on the beach for our Aussie and Kiwi brothers and sisters.

At the end of the service we all moved from Hope School to the Elim Church Centre to have Christmas snacks. Given that I will be away from Phnom Penh for six months, we as the church leadership team feel that using the centre for both services for that period is sound in practical terms and pastorally prudent.

After the snacks, Ann and I said our farewells and headed to the airport.

To say we were exhausted be an understatement. Ann and I slept soundly on each of the three flights home. We had been feeling quite emotional under the pressure during the previous days but now it was time to rest. We left Phnom Penh and it was hot, and when we got to Belfast it was so, so cold.

### **Back Home Again**

Our home church, The Ulster Temple, ([www.ulstertemple.com](http://www.ulstertemple.com)) Elim Church, has been amazing. As we sold our car to help sustain us on the mission field, they bought us a car, taxed and insured it, filled it with fuel and gave us money to help get us through Christmas. God is so good. Ann and I would like to publicly thank our Church, Pastor David Hamilton and Pastor Stephen Thompson, the Elders and Session and the membership, for their prayers, care, love and support.



**A unique performance – a Cambodian Christmas dance**



**The music school playing and singing Christmas carols**



**Some of our congregation head to the Sihanoukville beaches for Christmas.**



**Dancing the night away after the wedding.**



**As their Pastors and adopted parents the bride and groom ceremonially wash our feet. A very humbling experience for us.**

## Our Burglary.

Back here in Ireland, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> December, just over a week from our return, burglars broke into our home and stole all our computer laptops, our unopened Christmas presents that had been given to us by friends and family and also the presents we had brought back from Phnom Penh to give to friends and family. It was a shocking thing. We had been away three years and we were only back a week. Unfortunately our nephew, who had been living in our home, had transferred the insurance to his new home - so were uninsured. Ann has coped really well. Now, with time to look back, we can reflect that they only took things - and that we are OK! We weren't mugged for £5 which is what happens to some poor pensioners. They didn't come in the night while we were in bed etc. We were shocked and saddened but we're OK. Thankfully, I am in the habit of backing-up my computers onto external hard drive memory units, so 90% of our precious data and photographs is safe.

A member of our church was so angry that we should be victims of the crime that she rang the local TV Company and they came and interviewed us as did the local newspapers. Given time to consider it spiritually, it was clearly an attack. We feel reassured because it seems Satan doesn't like us being home. The publicity has actually given us numerous opportunities to talk about the work God is doing in Cambodia. Several bookings have come in from local churches groups who to hear our story. We are keen to be busy and share everything so why not give us a ring on 02891 810512 or email us [jtsat@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:jtsat@tiscali.co.uk) and book a date for us to come and share.

Through gifts, we have been able to replace two of the four laptops stolen. One man was angry at the incident and clearly was struggling to understand how God could allow this to happen to us. I was able to explain that the experience was just part of the sin soaked world we live in, but that God has supported and been with us throughout the experience and its aftermath. We have a real peace. Also at Christmas, when our society places so much emphasis on material gifts, the incident has enabled us to share that things - material possessions, are not all that important. Thank you for taking time to read this.

Bless you,

John and Ann Turner, 16<sup>th</sup> January 2010

Visit our photo website for more photos and past reports [www.picasaweb.google.com/johnturner460](http://www.picasaweb.google.com/johnturner460). Please feel free to use them for God's work. You can also read the latest news and issues concerning the mission on our Blogsite - [www.johnann460.blogspot.com](http://www.johnann460.blogspot.com)

To contact **John & Ann Turner** directly, send to P.O. Box 477, Phnom Penh, Cambodia or E-mail [jtsat@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:jtsat@tiscali.co.uk). Or ring 02891 810512 until July 2210

Donations towards our work in Cambodia should be marked "**for the Turners**" and either **personal** or **ministry**. You can be specific and label it for something you've read about here. Send your donations to Elim International Missions, De Walden Rd, West Malvern, WR14 4DF. Charity No's 251549 / SC037754.

**However, if you live in Northern Ireland you should send your donations to Elim Pentecostal Missions, 1-3 Old Cross Street, Newtownards, BT23 7NW.**



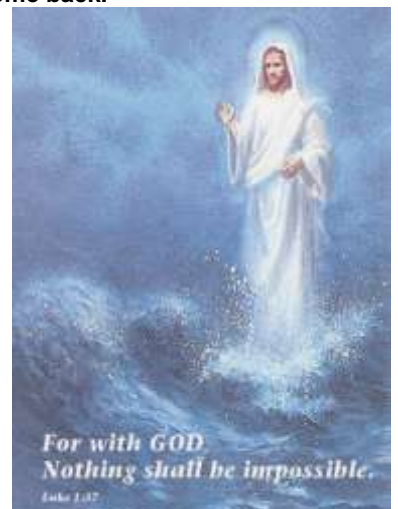
Christmas in the villages. We bring it with us – otherwise there is none. We put together Christmas goodie bags for the children. Much of the contents of the bags were bought by Khmei Christians connected with the Elim Khmei church



Some of the village children praying and giving thanks for their Christmas gifts. It's not easy to hold back your tears when you see such faithfulness and appreciation when they have so little.



We don't know how the thieves got through these doors. They were undamaged. This should make things more difficult for them, should they come back.



Ann and I have acknowledged our helplessness in the mission. We have learnt that with God, nothing is impossible. God is so good.