

Catherine Lee

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The call in action

Happy New Year of the Tiger!

Celebrating with banquets, red envelopes, firecrackers, new clothes, new everything. Yippee, a holiday at last! We've worked all through Christmas, now we get a break. Time to travel, relax, reconnect with family and friends, eating and drinking galore. But hey, not so fast. Tigers are considered the unluckiest of all the animal years. Last time we had a tiger year, in 2010, there were 25,000 fewer births in Taiwan than in the year before. And now we're facing our third Chinese New Year (CNY) of the pandemic. Recent COVID surges in the last few weeks in Taiwan are making people worried, and may result in more restrictions. One such announcement by the government yesterday, in preparation for the rush to the temples over CNY, is of no eating or drinking during religious gatherings. In that context, now the churches have to work out what to do about Holy Communion – we had “takeout” Communion at church today. On the whole, as churches and individuals, we're all happy to comply; after all, we all want to live, and we all want our vulnerable friends and neighbours to be okay too. So far, Taiwan has done well compared with the rest of the world. Border restrictions and quarantine requirements are strict, but have enabled those of us in Taiwan to continue to live relatively normal lives.

A tiger year is not all doom and gloom, and trying to subtly change the narrative a little, I spent the day at a local primary school celebrating with a tiger tea party for every class. All of us wearing something a little “tigerish”, together we enjoyed

The Tiger Who Came to Tea
Judith Kerr, made biscuits into a tiger paw shape, and served tea (see photo). Plenty of opportunities for all 91 children to practice their English conversation around tea-drinking. Ah, such fun!

Chinese New Year is also all about family reunions, so it seems appropriate for the wider church family that the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is always held towards the end of January. Each year, the National Council of Churches of Taiwan organises a Taize prayer service, this year held at our beautiful Good Shepherd Church in Taipei.

by


Name: Catherine Lee
Location: Taiwan
My call: To serve, share, and support the ministry of the Church in Taiwan.
My role: Working with the Taiwan Episcopal Church, based at St John's University, Taipei, I support the church, chaplaincy and kindergarten ministry of the Diocese of Taiwan.



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*Bishop Chang and his wife
wishing us all a happy New Year*

The church is built in traditional Chinese style, and as you can see in the photo, above the altar hangs a Nestorian Cross, commemorating that in AD 635, Alopen, a Syriac monk from the Nestorian Church (Church of the East) became the first recorded Christian missionary to arrive in China to share the gospel. Interestingly, it was in that exact same year, AD 635, that Aidan and monks from Iona arrived and established the monastery on Lindisfarne, Holy Island, invited by King Oswald to come and share the Christian faith with the people of Northumbria. It is from the monastery on Holy Island that the early missionaries, led by Aidan and Cuthbert, spread the Christian faith throughout the whole of northern Britain. I went to Holy Island for six days in October 2018 on my first ever visit, and loved it.

Will I be able to visit again? Last time, I went there in-between church link visits. Now I'm wondering how it might work out this time. My six-month home leave is due this summer. I had thought to delay a year, but it seems better to go this year and visit my family, especially my mother, who turns 90 in March. Maybe I will be able to be based with her in the Lake District and make church visits from there, depending on the pandemic situation. My church visits will all require overnight stays, so if it's more convenient, we could do online visits instead.

On Christmas Eve, two of our students were baptised in Advent Church, both are the first Christians in their families. One of them delayed many weeks before he had the courage to tell his family about his decision. The other was baptised still waiting for the right moment to tell hers. Even having made a faith commitment, in Taiwan it is baptism that is seen as the defining moment, marking the point at which a person will now say they are a Christian. Baptisms, like the flickering candles in the church that night (see photo), bring hope: "Flame just flickering/light all shining/hearts still burning/hope inspiring". As the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu said, "Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all the darkness." Those two students are now preparing to be confirmed by Bishop Lennon YR Chang on his next visit.

For those who rely on luck to live their lives, being born in the Year of the Tiger is a burden they have to bear, and Christians in Taiwan will often say how they are free of all those superstitions. For those who rely instead on God's mercy and grace, being born in the Year of the Tiger is as much a blessing as being born in any other year. Well worth celebrating with a tiger tea party! I've been to two New Year banquets too, one hosted by Bishop Chang and the Diocese of Taiwan for all clergy families and diocesan workers, and the other hosted by St John's University. Always special occasions, and each with 10-12 courses (see the photos). A very happy New Year indeed!

Thank you for all your Christmas greetings, cards and letters, and your prayers too. Hope to see you all sometime in 2022!

Catherine Lee



Photos from top to bottom: All 12 courses at the St John's University CNY banquet; Advent Church on Christmas Eve; Taize service at Good Shepherd Church; tiger tea party

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You can give to Catherine at:
churchmissionsociety.org/catherinelee

Contact details:

Email: catherinelee234@yahoo.com

Blog: <https://catherinelee234.com>

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