

# Celebrate Heaven



One of the great unmentionable subjects today is death. We pride ourselves that the taboo subject of Victorian times, sex, has been brought into the daylight but death is hardly ever mentioned. Christians also are culpable, heaven is rarely spoken about. Years ago we went to a Festival of Heaven on Canaan, in Darmstadt, the motherhouse of the Evangelical Sisterhood of Mary. We tried when we came home to copy them but something was lacking. With hindsight it was because death had not come close to us and although we had been urged to keep little books with quotes, scriptural and otherwise, about heaven, the reality was still not penetrating.

All that changed three years ago when our Sister Lynda was called home to God. On the first anniversary of her death, we thought, what can we do? We decided that we would have a Celebration of Heaven. Recently we held our third Festival. Friends always join us for the day. The chapel is made beautiful with gold and white flowers – masses of them! Our beech trees are just in leaf, a fresh, soft, gentle green. We gather handfuls of branches and bring them into the chapel. All the pictures of angels that we possess are collected and then positioned amongst the greenery. We trust that real angels are there, too! “But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.”<sup>1</sup>

In the morning of our Celebration we look at what Scripture, especially the New Testament says about heaven. There is a surprising amount once we have eyes to see. In fact if we excluded every reference to eternal life out of the New Testament there would be a very large hole. A doctor once said to us, as we sat with a friend who was dying, “It is not what we see with our eyes that is important now, it is those things that are happening around us that we don’t see that are important”. From time to time the veil is lifted even for the silent watchers keeping their vigil.

One day, a Sister came back from a visit to West Kirby to the news that a friend had rung to say, “Goodbye”, as the Lord had told her that she would be going home to heaven that day. The Sister viewed this message with frank scepticism. The phone call came; our friend was very definite that this was the day she was going to die. She was very joyful and wanted to share her joy. The Sister struggled to say all the right things but in her heart was still quite unbelieving, especially as the voice at the other end of the phone was so strong. You will have guessed by now, our friend did die later that day, gently and peacefully. There are so many people who have said to us that they would never be afraid of death again after experiencing the death of someone close to them.

In the Festival afternoon we all go into the chapel which looks truly heavenly. The music is beautiful. We begin with the German hymn,<sup>2</sup>

“Haste, haste my soul to heaven

With Christ I yearn to be.”

Also included is the Keith Getty song, “Jesus draw me ever nearer”.<sup>3</sup>

“When the midnight meets the morning,  
Let me love You even more.”

The front of the chapel is arranged in such a way that each of us can go forward (into heaven!) and receive a golden crown. St Paul wrote, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Heb:12:22-23

<sup>2</sup> “Fort, fort mein Herz, zum Himmel .”by J. L. K. Allendorf

<sup>3</sup> Songs of Fellowship 1382

<sup>4</sup> 2 Tim.4:7-8