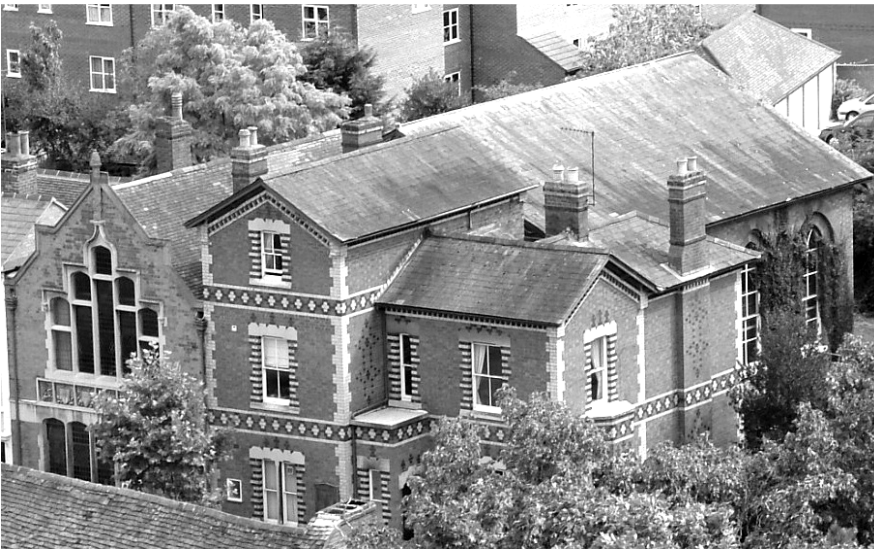


Pershore Baptist Church



Messenger

Broad Street, Pershore, Worcestershire

January 2009

www.pershorebaptist.org

Dear Friends

Gosh it all came and went so quickly. Weeks, maybe months, of materialistic preparation, maybe not a little frantic stress, diary juggling and money management, and it's all over and gone in a day or two. Tinsel and trimmings are more than ready to come down as the New Year is ushered in. In truth, Christmas as practiced in modern culture, both within and beyond the church, bears little resemblance to the purposeful rhythm and spirituality as practiced by our ancient forbears and deeply rooted in the liturgical calendar of the Christian faith. It is a poor and emasculated shadow of its true glory and core purpose. The season advent preparation, expectation and longing should give way to Christmas rejoicing and fulfilment at the Saviour's birth and, in turn, lead to the faithful followers of Christ entering into the season of Epiphany. Today, by Boxing Day, it all feels, for many, like a weary and futile anti-climax. Epiphany, taken straight from the New Testament means appearing, is referred to three times by the apostle Paul. Twice he uses it to speak of Christ's second coming. 'while we wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ ...' (Titus 2:13 also 2 Thess. 2:8) and once in respect to his first

coming. 'This grace ... has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.' (2 Tim. 1:9-10). Traditionally, Epiphany points to the manifestation of Christ in such events as the visit of the Magi (Matthew 2) Jesus' Baptism and the revelation of his glory at the Wedding Feast in Cana (John 2). Yet, the challenge of Epiphany spirituality, for us, is that, by the Holy Spirit, Christ would be manifest *in* us and Christ would be manifest *through* us. Robert Webber notes that there is, of course, a qualitative difference between God present in Jesus, and Jesus present in us. 'Jesus is God incarnate, the one man who participates in the essence of God. Christ in us is accomplished by the Holy Spirit, who urges us into conformity to the image of God perfectly expressed in Jesus.' (Colossians 1:19) As Webber puts it 'Through the Holy Spirit, we are able to enter into a spiritual union with Christ ... that effects a moral, intellectual and social conformity to Christ, the model of true humanity. In this sense Christ is manifested in us, in our very being, in our personality, and in the values we choose. This was the goal to which the apostle Paul was labouring 'day after day, year after year, doing my best with the energy God so

generously gives me.' (Colossians 1:28-29 MSG) So, Christmas has gone and it's Happy New Year! Maybe you can, maybe you can't say it. Maybe you have already said these words without any outward hesitation or inward qualms. Life is good, hopes are high, life is full, your joy is complete. But maybe your own heart is irritated and heavy when hearing the words Happy New Year?! For some, such seemingly flippant, insensitive words, may jar like finger nails running down a school room board. Maybe the prospects for this coming year flood your mind with fear or uncertainty. In reality, life has left you feeling disorientated. As we enter another new year, I must be honest and say that I am aware that I carry in my own soul a mixture of both agony and elation. I bear what seems to be a contradictory dichotomy of both fulfilment and frustration, of genuine expectation for a hopeful future yet also moments of weary fatigue. I carry it for myself and for others I am aware of too. I thus feel both open and guarded. I want to commend for your prayerful attention the following poetic, prophetic prayer penned by noted Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann. It is, in part, a reflection of the enigmatic words found in Hosea 13:12-14 which the Message translation renders verse 13 as: 'When birth pangs signalled it was time to be born, Ephraim was too

stupid to come out of the womb. When the passage into life opened up, he didn't show.' In this vein, Brueggemann prays ...

There is a time to be born and a time to die.

And this is a time to be born.

So we turn to you, God of our life,

God of all our years,

God of our beginning.

Our times are in your hand.

Hear us as we pray:

For those of us too much into obedience,

Birth us to the freedom of the gospel.

For those of us too much into self-indulgence,

Birth us to discipleship in your ministry.

For those too much into cynicism,

Birth us to the innocence of the Christ child.

For those of us too much into cowardice,

Birth us to the courage to stand before principalities and powers.

For those of us too much into guilt,

Birth us into forgiveness worked in your generosity.

For those of us too much into despair,

Birth us into the promises you make to your people.

For those of us too much into control,

Birth us to the vulnerability of the cross.

For those of us too much into victimization,

The Bible in 50 Words

God made.
 Adam bit.
 Noah arked.
 Abraham split.
 Joseph ruled.
 Jacob fooled
 Bush talked.
 Moses balked.
 Pharaoh plagued.
 People walked.
 Sea divided.
 Tablets guided.
 Promise landed.
 Saul freaked.
 David peeked.
 Prophets warned.
 Jesus born.
 God walked.
 Love talked.
 Anger crucified.
 Hope died.
 Love rose.
 Spirit flamed.
 Word spread.
 God remained.

Barbara Pearson

Humility is not thinking meanly of oneself, but rather it means not thinking of oneself at all.

Birth us into the power of Easter.

For those of us too much into fatigue,

Birth us into the energy of Pentecost.

We dare pray that you will do for us and among us and through us what is needful for newness.

Give us the power to be receptive,

To take the newness you give,

To move from womb warmth to real life.

We make this prayer not only for ourselves ...

... at the brink of birth,

For the church at the edge of life

For our towns and cities waiting for newness,

For your whole creation, with which we yearn in eager longing.

There is a time to be born, and it is now.

We sense the pangs and groans of your newness.

Come here now in the name of Jesus. Amen.

As we enter this new year, with the writer of the well loved Carol 'O little town of Bethlehem' we can affirm that 'the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight' and we too may pray 'O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray; Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today.'

So, may Christ be manifest in us and Christ be manifest through us.

In His name

Mark

The attraction of Christ's humanity

There is no phase of human life, which Jesus is not willing to share, and through all our relationships and circumstances. He waits to breathe the fragrance of a perfect love... from the uttermost to the gutter-most He saves. Our Lord blesses man and wife as they live together in holy wedlock, He takes their children readily in His arms without reservation, He inspires young men and women with noble and worthy ideals and warns all men against the evil use of wealth and power; He promises to those who are willing to go through life denying all worldly lusts for the sake of the gospel that they will be infinitely compensated.

Why do we miss out on so many of His precious promises? Why do so many marriages end in acrimony and disaster? ... Is it not because men so often seek to get rather than to give, to be served rather than to serve their compatriots? If a husband and wife were inspired by a love, which made the other the centre of thought, care and tenderness, the wedding bells would ring-on for many years.

The love of Jesus is so wonderful and attractive that when He is rightly presented to the human

heart even little children will turn to Him as flowers turn to the sun, but alas, when a world is corrupt and the heart of man evil and desperately wicked children will never hear and know of a loving shepherd of the sheep. Lloyd George once concluded,

"Education without God makes clever devils". How poor is our appreciation and response to so great a love? We may be willing to keep the commandments of a moral and respectable life because it suits and pleases our image, but when it comes to a commitment of renouncing wealth, position and self-esteem for His name-sake how many turn back; we may admire His ideals and commend His teaching but "go away sorrowful " because when it comes-to-the-crunch we love ourselves more than we love Him, and in so doing miss out on the greatest gift and blessings that man can ever know.

Adapted from "Our daily Walk" (F.B. Meyer.)

*I have found the pleasure I once
craved*

It is joy and peace within

His love is mine, my soul he saved

From the awful gulf of my sin

*It is joy unspeakable and full of
glory*

*And the half has never yet been
told.*

I support the metric system - every inch of the way!

For every tax problem there is a solution which is straightforward, uncomplicated and wrong.

Whoops

There goes another billion pounds or two!

What's a billion pounds between friends, eh? Have you ever known a time when so much taxpayers' money has been spent rescuing the very institutions that, traditionally, have told US to live within our means?

But perhaps that's the problem: most bank managers these days have been disguised salesmen, whose main interest has become persuading us to borrow as much money as possible. But the time of reckoning has arrived.

What are Christians to make of it all? Can we see God's hand in the economic earthquake? It's almost as if the two chapter prophecy of Haggai has been especially written for the modern age. The whole point of a prophecy is that God wants to rock his people out of complacency. It has always been thus. Is the Church today (ie, you and me) in need of a good shake?

Have we been just a little too comfortable - so much so, that we have neglected our main reason for existing? Isn't our first priority to serve God in gratitude for what he has done through his Son, Jesus? Shouldn't our every waking thought be all about how we can serve God and, in the process, serve others?

Have we neglected this?

Haggai's prophecy opens with a call to build the house of the Lord: **Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your panelled houses, while this house remains a ruin?** (1:4). An uncomfortable phrase crops up twice (1:5 and 1:7): **Give careful thought to your ways.** It is clear that God's people were more focused on their own creature comforts than they were with getting on with their God-given mission. Could this be where many of us are today?

Haggai warns that God is saying: **'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations...The silver is mine and the gold is mine...'** (2: 6-8). We live in distressing times. The old economic order is changing. Is God telling us to change our priorities?

Perhaps the Christian life should be more about mission, and less about accumulation; more about serving than being served; more about listening to God than telling him what we want. One thing we can all do: pray that God will speak clearly through times of turmoil so that we are ready to let go and simply serve.

The reality of faith in God

As we enter this New Year of 2009 even the most devoted Christians can't ignore the uncertainties we face. The whole world was caught up in a financial melt-down in the latter months of 2008. Established banking and financial institutions closed down, some of them overnight, and many people feared that not only their life savings but their present jobs were in real danger.

Almost daily the news has been gloomy and economic experts say the situation is the worst in living memory. How do we, as Christians, react to all this? What do we trust in? Has God something to say to us in these days?

An answer may be found in a well loved passage from the Bible - Psalm 23: 'The Lord is my shepherd ...he restores my soul ...he leads me ...I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.'

But in the middle of this lovely psalm there are three reminders that Christians are NOT exempt from the realities of life. The psalmist speaks of 'the paths of righteousness', 'the valley of the shadow' and 'the presence of my enemies.'

The mention of 'the paths of righteousness' is a reminder that we are called to love the Lord and live our lives in righteousness. The wonderful promises in this psalm come with a condition; they are given to those who determine by God's grace to live righteously.

And that must be our first resolution for 2009.

The 'valley of the shadow' may refer to death, but generally the reference here is wider. It means all those occasions when fear and sorrow and heart-break and loss come to even the best Christians.

Then there are our 'enemies.' Originally that probably meant those wanting to kill the psalmist. For us it may be the seduction of old temptations, the fears that paralyse us and the memories of sins that still haunt us.

The psalmist is a realist! As Christians we live our lives in the real world! We are not floating on cloud nine; we are rooted in a fallen world and surrounded by temptations and sins and infirmities. Any day, pain, an incurable disease, even death itself, may come to us or to those we love. How do we face these realities?

Psalm 23 has the answer. If we, by God's grace, will walk in 'the paths of righteousness,' then all the promises are ours! The Lord will be our Shepherd. He will lead us by the still waters; he will restore our souls, prepare a table for us in the wilderness, protect and guide us with his rod and staff and, at the end, bring us into the house of the Lord forever. Let's make Psalm 23 our charter of faith for 2009!

Thanks to Worcester College of Technology for printing the colour pages of the December Messenger.

Heading into the unknown

While we were waiting for to board the plane to Johannesburg we received a phone call from Tom Howell at BMS, "They would like Mark to give a lecture on mission and preach the following day". There was a reason BMS say 'be prepared for anything'...

As the first BMS Church Team to visit Soweto, we were heading into the unknown. We knew where to go but not what it would involve. Being flexible and coping with all that means for yourself is one thing but quite another when you have the responsibility for leading a team.

In the end it couldn't have worked out better. We may not have known ahead of time what we were going to do, but as we responded to the circumstances we discovered that God was using us and giving us a tremendous blessing. We thought we would be helping through 'doing' but, rather,

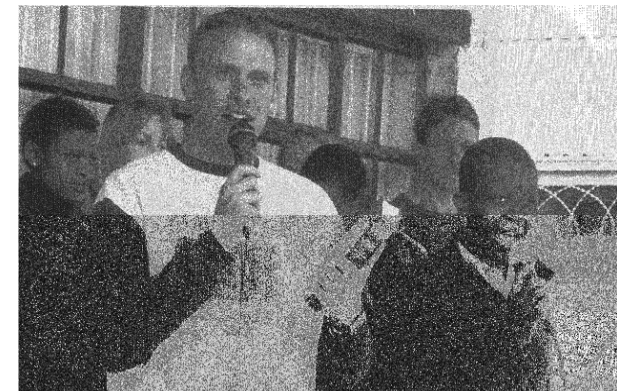
our call was to 'be' with God's people. We had no idea that something as simple as our presence would bring such enjoyment to the people.

Apartheid may have been abolished but it is still unusual to see a white person in Soweto. Living in their homes, eating with them and sharing our lives made more of a difference than we could possibly have imagined. We learned not to underestimate the importance of encouragement.

It turned out that flexibility wasn't the burden we expected but rather a blessing we are glad we did not miss. We discovered that if you trust the call you believe that God has made on your life, and if you seek to see what he is doing beyond our expectations, you see something more of God at work.

Mark Fairweather-Tall and Jo Westwood were the leaders of the BMS Church Team from Norwich Central Baptist Church that went to South Africa in August 2008.

From BMS quarterly news 'Engage'



Mark Fairweather-Tall and Jo Westwood in Soweto, South Africa

Who were the Magi?

The birth of Jesus - and the star which heralded his birth - was the activity of God himself. At significant stages of Jesus' life, certain phenomena featured - the dove at his baptism, the light at his transfiguration, the darkness and earthquake at his death, the cloud at his ascension. These occurrences attested Jesus to those who had minds to understand. Similarly then, at his birth, there was a star.

The significance of the wise men - the 'Magi' as they have been termed - is that they were Gentiles, probably from Mesopotamia. Traditionally it seems that the Magi (who were a kind of priestly tribe) were to the Persians what the Levites were to Israel; they were respected instructors of the Persian kings.

They would not have benefited directly from the privileges of Judaism or its Scriptures. It is, however, very likely that they would have taken note of a prophecy that had been uttered centuries earlier - by a Gentile prophet, Balaam by name. In fact he was from their own area, Pethor, by the river Euphrates (Numbers 22:4,5). His words would

have been remembered down the ages. Their enquiring minds predisposed them to recognise and then follow the star, when it appeared.

The star stood for regal power and splendour; here is a firm indication of kingship. Further lines point to the widespread rule of this coming individual. Consequently, when a special star came to the attention of the Magi, they decided to investigate further.

On reaching Jerusalem, the Magi caused great disruption with their enquiry as to where the new king has been born. Herod's advisers looked up the prophecies, and announced Bethlehem as the location (Micah 5:2). But none of them made the journey to Bethlehem. It was left to these Gentile enquirers to go and pay homage to Israel's king.

Worship - not power - was their aim. Another 'wise man' in the New Testament, Simon Magus (Acts 8:9-11), was in a lower order altogether, though through his exploits he wanted to be 'great' - and that is the approach of occultism. Not so, the Magi of Matthew chapter 2. They were wise with the wisdom that seeks God, and were obedient to him.

It is better to lose anything than to lose time; we can recover lost money, but time is irrecoverable.

Chrysostom

The probable reason some people get lost in thought is because it is unfamiliar territory to them.

Weekly Church Events

| Sundays | |
|------------------------------|--|
| 10.30am | Family service with Sunday School Communion 3rd Sundays |
| 6.00pm (5.00pm in winter) | Evening Worship Communion 1st Sundays |
| Mondays | |
| 1.30pm | Little Fishes playgroup |
| 7.30pm | House Group Middle Lane, Crophorne |
| 7.45pm | Prayer meeting at Church |
| Wednesdays | |
| 2.00pm | Women's Own – Lower Room |
| 8.00pm | Bible Study 48 Mayfield Road |
| 7.45pm | Prayer and Bible Study 21 Ganderton Court |
| Thursdays | |
| 10.30am | Baby talk |
| 7.45pm | Deacon's Meeting 1st and 3rd Thursdays |

There is a **Monthly Communion service** on a Wednesday at 2.30pm

Impact- A generation Youth Event on 4th Sunday at 7.00pm

The **Thursday Club** meets in the Lower Room at 7.30pm on the 4th Thursday of each month.

Church Badminton is between 8-9pm on 1st and 3rd Fridays of the month in Pershore High School. Details from Anne Sadler.

The **Multiple Sclerosis Group** meet on Monday mornings in the Worship area.

The **St John's Ambulance** use the Upper and Lower Rooms on Tuesday evening.

U3A Choir uses the Upper Room on alternate Wednesdays at 2.15pm.

Thursday Club

The meeting on 22nd January will be the AGM and a talk by Eileen and Peter Merry entitled "Slides of Hawaii". The meeting will start at 7.30pm and be held in the lower schoolroom. All are welcome

Women's Own

| | |
|------|---------------------------------|
| 7th | Birthday Party and Beetle Drive |
| 21st | Communion Service |

A Rising Prayer as the New Year begins

Thou King of the moon and of the sun,
Of the stars thou lov'd and fragrant King,
Thou thyself knowest our needs each one,
O merciful God of everything.

Each day that our moving steps we take,
Each day of awakening, when we know
The dark distress and sorrow we make
To the King of hosts who loved us so;

Be with us through the time of each day,
Be with us through the time of each night,
Be with us ever each night and day,
Be with us ever each day and night.

An Ancient Celtic Prayer

Social Event
Swim & Supper on January 31st at 5pm at Pershore Swimming Pool. Details from Tracy Wheeler

6 January - Epiphany

On 6 January we celebrate Epiphany - the visit of the wise men to the baby Jesus. But who were these wise men? No one knows for sure. Matthew calls them 'Magi', and that was the name of an ancient caste of a priestly kind from Persia. It wasn't until the third century that they were they called kings - by a church father, Tertullian. Another church father, Origin, assumed there were three - to correspond with the gifts given. Later Christian interpretation came to understand gold as a symbol of wisdom and wealth, incense as a symbol of worship and sacrifice, and myrrh as a symbol of healing - and even embalming. Certainly Jesus challenged and set aright the way in which the world handled all three of these things. Since the eighth century, the magi have had the names Balthasar, Caspar and Melchior.



STARS

January 6th is the Feast of the Epiphany, the day when we remember the wise men that followed the star to where it rested over the stable at Bethlehem.

Every Christmas we sing about Three Kings but we don't really know that they were kings, or even that there were three of them. The Bible just says 'wise men'; you can check the details in St Matthew's Gospel, chapter 2.



We do know that they brought with them very expensive gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Traditionally the gifts have a special meaning: gold is for a King, frankincense (sweet smelling incense) for God and myrrh (a spice used to prepare bodies for burial) for mortal man. Not the usual kind of gifts that people give to a small baby but symbols that show what Jesus was and would be.

WHICH STAR....

The wise men followed a star to find Jesus - each of the answers to this quiz start with the letters STAR, so can you say which STAR is....

1. Used to stiffen washing?
2. The right side of a ship?
3. A beginning?
4. Another name for the American flag?
5. A bird?
6. Surprising?
7. What Patrick, Sponge Bob Squarepant's friend, is?

Answers at the bottom of the page.



When is a window like a star?
When it is a sky light.



What is big, bright and stupid?
A fool moon.



ANSWERS:
1. STARCH, 2. STARBOARD, 3. START, 4. STAR, 5. STARLING, 6. STUNNING, 7. STARBUCKS

Start the New Year with a purpose

At the start a New Year in an uncertain world we all need hope! However Christian hope is not simply wishful thinking - hoping for an economic upturn, or avoidance of divorce, illness or disappointment. It looks to God's purpose for our lives and world, in which his kingdom is established and we are transformed.

Christians should live in such a way that they raise questions in other people's minds. *'In your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you'* (1 Peter 3:15). But what does such a life look like?

Psalm 121 is a *song of hope*, in which God is portrayed as one who watches over us and protects us on our journey through life. It also lays out the basis of our hope:

*** A lifted head** (*'I lift up my eyes to the hills...'*):

God uses troubles in our life to teach us that we cannot help ourselves!

It is better to lose anything than to lose time; we can recover lost money, but time is irrecoverable. *Chrysostom*

For every tax problem there is a solution which is straightforward, uncomplicated and wrong.

*** A God who is in control** (*'My help comes from the LORD...'*):

True help can only come from God; the gods who are worshipped on the hill-tops have no power.

*** A God who loves us** (*'The LORD will keep you from all harm...'*):

He will keep you (mentioned 6 times), so that your feet will not slip in difficult circumstances.

*** A God who is alert** (*'The LORD watches over you'*):

We can trust in a God who watches over us at all times and says to us: 'I am trustworthy. Cast your anxieties on me. Realise that I care for you, and that I don't sleep so that you can sleep.'

*** An eternal security** (*'The LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and for evermore'*):

The psalm is not saying that God will protect us from all the difficulties or set-backs we might experience. However, we can be sure that he will use everything in our circumstances to further his eternal purpose in our lives.

A boy was watching his father, a minister, write a sermon. "How do you know what to say?" he asked.

"Why, God tells me," replied his father contentedly.

"Oh, then why do you keep crossing things out?"

Prayer Calendar for January 2009

| | | |
|----|--|----------------------|
| 1 | Deidre Wellon | |
| 2 | Margaret West | |
| 3 | Gemma Wheeler | |
| 4 | Be careful not to parade your good deeds | Matthew 6:1 |
| 5 | Rob & Tracy Wheeler & family | |
| 6 | Andrew Whichman | |
| 7 | Adrian & Ann White | |
| 8 | Vi Wilcox | |
| 9 | Ivy Winkett | |
| 10 | Tim & Emily Wood & family | |
| 11 | I will put a new way of thinking inside you | Ezekiel 36:26 |
| 12 | Marc & Kate Young & family | |
| 13 | Wesley & Muriel Adamson | |
| 14 | Peter & Sheila Allies | |
| 15 | Mary Attwood | |
| 16 | Betty Banbury | |
| 17 | Marjorie Barbour | |
| 18 | The son of man came to find lost people and save them | Luke 19:10 |
| 19 | Tony Beaton | |
| 20 | Stan & Joan Bell | |
| 21 | Mary & Norman Bowley | |
| 22 | Nick Bridges | |
| 23 | Les Brookes | |
| 24 | Peter & Wendy Burfitt & family | |
| 25 | Casting all your Care upon Him | 1 Peter 5:7 |
| 26 | Miriam Burton | |
| 27 | David & Brenda Cameron-Mitchell | |
| 28 | Eamonn & Kathy Canning & family | |
| 29 | Ann Chaplin | |
| 30 | Stephen & Cindy Chidlow & family | |
| 31 | Silvia Christian | |

Editorial

1. Messenger material for the February edition to be in by **noon on Sunday 18th January**. Please observe this deadline.
2. If there are any serious errors/oversights, please tell me!
3. If you would prefer a larger print version of the Messenger, have a word with me.

Thanks

Mike Taylor