

THE ESL LINK

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There's a certain danger in trying to say something about Christmas. The danger is that it won't be dangerous at all, that is, our words might imply no risk, convey no costly challenge... The love we celebrate at Christmas is about two risky, dangerous things: a gift and a call.
—Abbot Joseph

What in the World is God Doing? *Some Christmas Reflections*

The Christmas story is an old story, but this year I read it with new eyes. And what I saw caught me by surprise. It also helped me see the biblical account of Jesus' birth through the eyes of some of the new Canadians in my ESL classes.

Reading through the Bible I came to "... Joseph went up from Galilee... in order to register along with Mary, who was *engaged* to him and *was with child*." (Luke 2:5 NASB). What? They weren't married? Somehow, I'd never seen Mary and Joseph looking for accommodations (to stay together) at an inn as an unmarried couple in Christmas pageants. Of course, there were some obvious secrets to all of this.

Sometimes we have worked this story out so that it fits into our own categories. It's neat and tidy and doesn't raise a lot of questions—at least for us. We can't exactly see why those we are teaching (and those reading this narrative for the first time) have some huge questions about the incarnation of God himself among us. We no longer see what may seem scandalous.

So, how do we explain all of this to our ESL audience? What can we learn ourselves?

1. God didn't place Jesus into our "boxes." He created the universe and He writes the categories. He does order the Universe, governed by His words, but He also holds the prerogative to re-order our lives in new, profound, and category breaking ways should He so desire.

"Nothing is impossible with God." Can we welcome the impossible with open arms? God expected His people to welcome this new little one with

open arms, but they couldn't (John 1:12). They wouldn't let their categories shift to accommodate a new truth.

2. Truth from God is still rooted in Truth. God had foretold through Isaiah that the child would be born of a virgin. Would anyone really have believed she was still a virgin and a mother had she been married?

3. God bends minds to His Truths. The prophets of old found it hard to believe that God was dealing with Israel by allowing their enemies, ungodly nations, to defeat them. Will He do what we are thinking, or might we need to look at the world through His lens?

This year, as we look at the Christmas story, we may see it afresh through the lens of faith. And while we do, let us also consider the lens of those faith groups to whom we are teaching English. We're trusting that with fresh eyes, they could accept by faith that "As for God, His way is perfect." (Ps 18:30)

And in our own lives, let's trust God fully. Even when the categories shift. Even when the mountains move. Even when we can't understand all that He is doing. Let God be God. And God be good.

—Rick and Linda Reed



Christmas Celebration Ideas for ESL Programs

Christmas is just around the corner, and it is a good time to plan something special with your ESL students. We can talk about the meaning of Christmas and have special events or parties. Here are some ideas from the ESL program of some churches:

Westminster Chapel at High Park

One activity we have at our Christmas party is a scavenger hunt. The first part of the activity is a match between words and pictures so that the students know the objects they will be hunting for. I often cut pictures out of the newspaper for this. The second part is to spread out around the whole church in teams and find the objects. Finally, they match the objects to their meaning (see handout [here](#)).

Leaside Bible Chapel This Christmas we will be watching The Nativity Story DVD over four weeks in our ESL class. We have developed listening, speaking and vocabulary activities for the scenes we will watch each week. (See [here](#) for handouts.) We have also planned an evening of carol singing for our students in a local home where the students will mingle with families from the church, taste delicious Christmas baking, relax in beautifully decorated surroundings and sing some carols.

Bayview Glen Alliance Church

We are planning a Christmas party after class in mid-December. It will be a potluck lunch and after that we will sing Christmas carols, watch a video clip on the Christmas story (likely from "The JESUS Film"), play games

with lots of prizes and break for about 3 weeks.

Parkway Forest Community Church

We will be planning another Christmas party where building gingerbread houses will likely be the main activity. Students are divided into teams and a prize is awarded for the best design. Students enjoy working together and doing something creative and fun. It is also culturally relevant. The party will have other elements such as carol singing and a word from our Pastor.

What are your plans for this year?

For more Christmas activities and resources, see link in our website: <http://esl-christmas-lessons.blogspot.ca/>



Celebrating Christmas with International Students

I explained to my three Japanese students: "Silent Night is a famous Christmas carol in Canada and maybe we can learn to sing it together." They responded in 'oohs' and 'ahhs'. Their sheepish response is adorable and it is the reason why I minister to international students. The Japanese are called an unreached peoples group because they have no indigenous church that can reproduce itself and have less than 1% who are Christian. It is God's gift to the church that many visit Canada to learn English and obtain a one-year work permit. They are what Christ said are sheep without a shepherd.

Advent is an excellent time to work with newcomers to Canada because it provides reams of teaching and conversational opportunities, with ample field trips and lots of Christmas-like activities! If you are going on a field trip such as checking out the

Christmas market or the cascade Christmas tree lighting or skating at Mel Lastman Square, don't forget to teach the students where they can get affordable winter gear and ensure they bundle up. What I am looking forward to is inviting them to participate in a Christmas pageant. What amazing pictures they'll post on Facebook of them dressed up as an angel, a shepherd or a sheep. These are experiences that can become teaching moments for the story of Christmas.

Intervarsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF) and International Students Ministry organize special winter camps during the holiday season for internationals. Christmas and New Year are often lonely times when most of our churches take a break for their ESL programs. Maybe at your home you can prepare an extra plate at the Christmas dinner table or even clean

up the spare room to let an international student stay over for the season. A couple of years ago I invited two seminary students from India to stay over at my parents' place in Ottawa. That was a memorable experience they never stop talking about.

What about News Year's Eve? Our church will have our usual "New Year's Deep Fry Night" where we teach the internationals that you can fry all sorts of foods; i.e. candy bars and sushi, to the Japanese's chagrin. What a gift for them to experience a real Christmas and New Year with new friends that will love them. How about that for mission work that doesn't require you to move to the mission field?!

—Nathan Kwan

More ESL Christmas Ideas

- ★ Check out churches and their particular Christmas celebrations. For example, Knox Presbyterian church in Toronto has a quiet advent reflection time for those who want to experience with others what it means to mourn. Some churches also have joint choir performances.
- ★ Making Christmas cards, decorations or baking treats together
- ★ Watching Christmas movies together like Christmas Carol, Charlie Brown's Christmas, Elf, the Nativity
- ★ Handel's Messiah is offered in different locations throughout different cities
- ★ Large Pentecostal churches often have different plays about the nativity.
- ★ Even visiting larger churches and admiring their Christmas decorations together: try going at night—that's when things light up and look pretty

A Christians in English Language Teaching (CELT) Conference is coming to Toronto!

Organized by the Christian English Language Educators Association ([CELEA](#); history below), the CELT conferences are held once every year on a Wednesday before the big [TESOL International Convention](#). (TESOL is the largest professional organization for English Language teachers for speakers of other languages. It is based in the States and its annual Convention draws 6500+ attendees.) In 2015, as the TESOL Convention is going to be in Toronto, there is also going to be a CELT in Toronto. The date for CELT is March 25th, 2015 and the venue is Knox Presbyterian Church. It is a one-day conference that will end in the afternoon so that participants can get to the opening plenary of TESOL if they are planning to attend.

In CELT, there will be sessions that appeal to the needs of volunteers or beginners in ESL teaching as well as sessions that are relevant for seasoned professionals. Many people, especially those who work in secular settings, report that the best part of the conference is simply having an opportunity to meet and worship with others who work in our field and want to follow Jesus. *cont'd p.4...*



Gathering XI Report

Gathering XI, the annual conference of the Southern Ontario Cooperative of ESL Ministries, has come and gone. Our prayer for the 100+ people who attended is that the lessons learned, information acquired and fellowship enjoyed will continue to enrich each life and ministry. May we all be encouraged and motivated to serve our Saviour even better.

Bayview Glen Church was a wonderful venue for our conference, providing well equipped rooms and all the amenities a conference this size required. We all say a big "Thank You" to the Board of Bayview Glen, *cont'd p.4...*

"As a first-time attendee, I thoroughly enjoyed every aspect of the conference, including meeting other teachers and learning new strategies."

"Today I was refreshed and humbled as I went from class to class. I realized that I have a lot to learn."

A Christians in English... cont'd
Would you like to present at this conference? If so, see the "Call for Proposals" [here](#). The deadline for submission is December 13th, 2014. We at CELEA would like to learn about and from SOCEM, and we hope that there will be some good bridges built in March. Attendance of SOCEM affiliates at CELT Toronto will greatly bless the out-of-area attendees.

About the Christian English Language Educators Association
TESOL International used to provide e-lists and space to meet at conventions for groups of people who shared interests that were not necessarily common for the entire membership. Christian educators were one of those groups. When TESOL decided not to continue providing resources for these groups, the Christian English Language Educators Association (CELEA) was created. CELEA members work all over the world, sometimes in Christian institutions or programs, sometimes not, and they try to support each other professionally. A particular benefit of the new arrangement is that no one needs to be a member of TESOL to be a member of CELEA (and joining TESOL is a bit on the expensive side). Joining CELEA is inexpensive and we are trying to provide as many resources as we can for free while still making membership meaningful and beneficial.

Currently, we have four main initiatives: a website, an annual conference, a newsletter and a professional journal. The website can be found at: <http://celea.net>. Back issues of the newsletter are all available on the website, but one must be a member to receive the current issue. The journal is *International Journal of Christianity and English Language Teaching (IJC&ELT)*, ISSN 2334-1866, online [here](#) and information about making submissions can be found on the site.

—Nancy Ackles, President, CELEA

Gathering XI Report cont'd
Mary Hogan, the coordinator, and her team of cheerful volunteers for their important role in the success of the conference. Of course there would be no conference without participants. It was great to see so many first-time attendees. Contingents from London and Kitchener-Waterloo once again made the trip to be with us. Groups from Milliken Christian Community Church, the Peoples Church, East Ridge EMC, and Harvest Bible Chapel, Oakville also deserve special mention.

Our Keynote speaker, Jeff McCarrell, struck an encouraging chord, sharing from his rich experience how we might bring the whole church into this outreach ministry. Thank you, Jeff.

As for the various workshops and our 2014 team of gifted presenters,

they all excelled in engaging, encouraging and equipping the workshop attendees for their unique outreach through ESL ministry.

A participant summed it all up very nicely, "I got lots of great ideas to try to incorporate into my classes!" Mission accomplished. Thank you, Lord! And thank you to each and all.

Let us continue to pray for each other and for SOCEM as we have now begun planning G-XII, 2015. We have appreciated the feedback received and are considering it all prayerfully. Further feedback, of course, continues to be welcome.

If you need consultation, mentoring or visits by SOCEM representatives, please contact us at eslministries@gmail.com

If You Read This, You Will Be Refreshed (Possibly)

Recently, an interviewer asked me to explain the second and third conditionals. I had rehearsed the standard three conditionals in my mind beforehand. They are used for different purposes. Let's review them quickly.

First of all, conditional sentences have an "if" clause and a result clause. The commas in the sample sentences below separate these two clauses from each other.

The 1st conditional (future possible/probable situations)

If he *studies* (simple present) diligently, he *will pass* (will + base form) the course.

The 2nd conditional (unreal situations in the present/future)

If he *had* (simple past) his own airplane, he *would travel* (would + base form) more.

The 3rd conditional (unreal situations in the past such as regret)

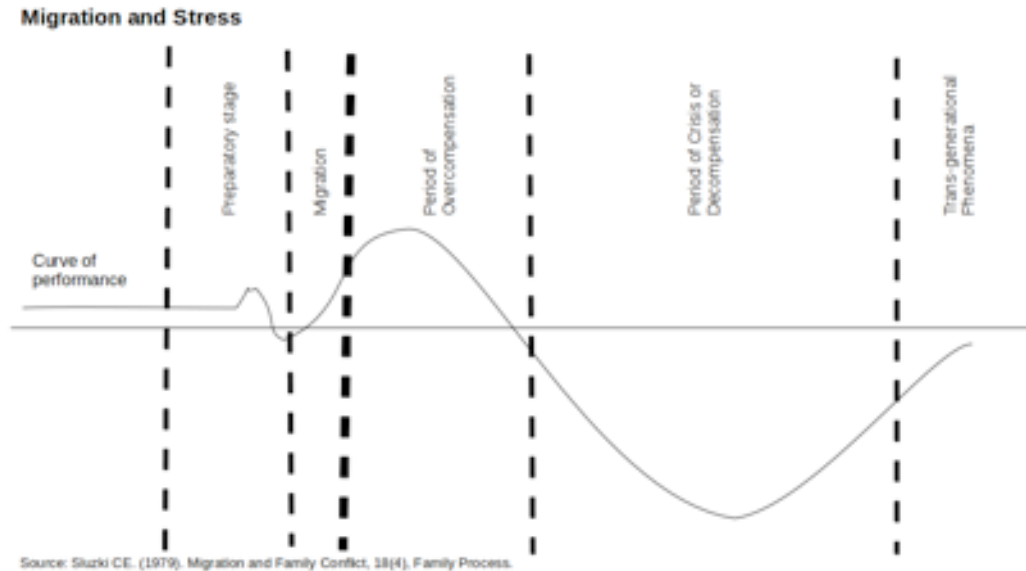
If we *had known* (past perfect) better, we *would have studied* (would + have + past participle) French more diligently.

Finally, for the 2nd conditional, for the verb 'to be' in the 'if' clause, instead of using "was" for singular subjects (I, he, she, and it) we should use (though many native English speakers do not) "were" (for example: If Bob *were* happy, he *would not complain* so much.). —Timo Posti

Introducing... [The TESL Ontario Blog](#)

A nice potpourri of ESL-related topics with new entries each week. Some examples are [Get-to-know activities in the language classroom](#), [About misplacing stress](#), and [My annotated web resource list](#).

Phases of Migration



For some, Christmas brings back the memories of the big ice storm of 2013. For many, the memories included being forced to leave their homes and stay elsewhere. It was difficult, a struggle. We then had a taste of being ‘displaced persons’, forced to leave where one belongs to a temporary, strange place. Did you realize that in the Bible, Jesus’ birth narratives indicate that he was born in ‘displacement’? Joseph and Mary were forced to leave Nazareth for Bethlehem for a census before Jesus was born (Luke 2). Then in Matthew 2, when Joseph was woken by the angel and told they had to flee for Egypt because of Herod’s destruction plan, Jesus essentially had to spend a large part of his childhood as a refugee in Egypt (more [here](#)). Among Jesus’ ‘sorrows’, then, he knew those of being an ‘immigrant’ or a refugee.

When we work in ESL programs, we work mostly with immigrants, who could be displaced persons or refugees. It is, then, good to give thought to patterns of the migration process to increase our understanding of them. Sociologists have observed and articulated the stress patterns of migration, and generally agree that:

(i) Before migration, at the preparatory stage, people are excited about the prospects of moving to a

new country and they typically over-perform.

(ii) When the actual migration happens, there is a dip as they experience the difficulties of uprooting and separating from their home country.

(iii) As they are in the new country, there is a brief “honeymoon” or “overcompensating” period where they find everything new, are (over-)confident and seem to be able to enjoy life.

(iv) But as time passes, they become a bit more settled and reality sets in. There is a usually long period of discouragement and under-performance where they feel the pain of separation and losing their own culture as well as the stresses of not being understood in a new culture—a “decompensating” or “crisis/culture shock” period.

(v) Some stay in that stage of culture shock, while others are able to come out from it and move towards an “adjustment/adaptation” stage where they are able to live relatively contentedly and realistically. They take on the new culture while still keeping aspects of their old culture.

This graph below summarizes these stages or phases.

Each immigrant’s journey will be different, and reality is probably more

complex and messy than any “model”. Wherever you find your students (or yourself) in this graph, let us remember that discouragements are often good opportunities to seek God, and where you earnestly seek Him, He will be found. Remember, too, Jesus understands the loneliness and pain of immigrants who are still struggling to settle. He identifies with us... such is the good news of Christmas.

—Jennifer Yung

Might you have lessons learnt from recognizing these stages in your own experience as an immigrant or in helping your ESL students? How do we gently intervene with help? Please send any responses to eslministries@gmail.com

Do you think we should use the students’ first language in the ESL classroom or not?

Maybe you have a position. This article presents some ways of using L1 in a principled manner in the classroom. See if you agree. [Using First Language \(L1\) in the ELT Classroom](#)

Do you think we can ever lose our first language?

Read the experience of some for whom this became a reality: [20 Readers Who Lost Fluency in Their \(First\) Language](#)

Would you like to dig deeper into the field of language teaching?

Here are some free, open-access journals on ESL / language teaching that include lots of good research papers.

- **English Language Teaching:** Encourages and publishes research in the fields of English language teaching and education. This is a Canadian journal.
- **Reading in a Foreign Language (Online):** Source for the latest developments in the field, both theoretical and pedagogic, including improving standards for foreign language reading. Not limited to EFL.
- **Teaching English as a Second Language**

Two excellent, free online resources

A book full of grammar games for all levels for different grammar topics, with photocopiable handouts, very user-friendly: [Fun with Grammar: Communicative Activities for the Azar Grammar Series](#), Suzanne W. Woodward (Prentice Hall Regents, 1997)

A useful reference book that lists learners' common mistakes in English pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary according to different first languages: [Learner English: A Teacher's Guide to Interference and Other Problems](#), Michael Swan and Bernard Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)

You thought this post would be funny?

I'm a frayed knot

Just for Fun

The Help Desk

Helpdesk: What kind of computer do you have?

Customer: A white one...

Helpdesk: Click on the 'my computer' icon on to the left of the screen.

Customer: Your left or my left?

Helpdesk: Good day. How may I help you?

Customer: Hello... I can't print.

Helpdesk: Would you click on start for me and ..

Customer: Listen pal; don't start getting technical on me! I'm not Bill Gates!

Helpdesk: And now hit F8. **Customer:** It's not working.

Helpdesk: What did you do, exactly?

Customer: I hit the F-key 8-times as you told me, but nothing's happening...

Customer: My keyboard is not working anymore.

Helpdesk: Are you sure it's plugged into the computer?

Customer: No. I can't get behind the computer.

Helpdesk: Pick up your keyboard and walk 10 paces back.

Customer: OK

Helpdesk: Did the keyboard come



with you?

Customer: Yes

Helpdesk: That means the keyboard is not plugged in. Is there another keyboard?

Customer: Yes, there's another one here. Ah...that one does work!

Customer: I have a huge problem. A friend has placed a screensaver on my computer, but every time I move the mouse, it disappears!

Helpdesk: Microsoft Tech. Support, may I help you?

Customer: Good afternoon! I have waited over 4 hours for you. Can you please tell me how long it will take before you can help me?

Helpdesk: Uhh..? Pardon, I don't understand your problem?

Customer: I was working in Word and clicked the help button more than 4 hours ago. Can you tell me when you will finally be helping me?

When you say something really awkward out loud and you think, "Well, that sounded better in my head."