

# JAPAN MISSION

Called to Serve

## FREEDOM FROM FEAR - PART 1

Shizu was born in 1960 in Osaka to a traditional Japanese family. She was taught to honour her ancestors in front of the Buddhist altar and appease the spirits that lived all around by going to the temples and shrines to pay her respects.

"As a small child, I remember glancing at the window as I saw something white pass by. It was dark, so I was convinced that I had seen a spirit," Shizu recently related. Her belief in the spirit world had a profound impact on her life.

"I grew up being afraid, but also strangely drawn to the spirit world. While in elementary school, I went on a school trip and spent the night at a temple on Mount Kooya. A number of my friends said that they saw ghosts in the form of fireballs and I remember feeling terrified.

When my grandmother passed away, I was taught and believed that her spirit



Shizu Imahori

was always around me to protect me from bad things.

My belief in such things later began to fade as I entered university. Around that time, I went to Tsuruga with my friends to stay overnight at a temple. I did not believe in spirits at the time, but that night I clearly heard footsteps and felt cold air flowing into my room. I sensed a presence watching me. Out of desperation, I closed my eyes and said some Buddhist prayers that I had memorized. After a while I felt relieved because I sensed that this presence had departed from me.

After graduating from university, I became a middle school English teacher. While teaching, I was attracted to a colleague, who was a middle school Science teacher, called Seiji Imahori. He was also born into a traditional family and was raised in Osaka. We had a lot in common and were married in 1986. We were happily married and had two daughters and a son. Shortly after each child was born, I was able to return to work because my mother helped take care of my children.

While teaching at school, I came into contact with Cally from the USA, who was assigned to my class as an ALT (Assistant Language Teacher). She was a Christian, but could not speak about religion in our public school. I sensed that she was a person with good beliefs, so I asked her to come to my home to teach my children English one day per week.

I became good friends with Cally and remember telling her once, 'I see God in you.' She smiled and gave me a big hug. Our friendship was my first contact with Christianity.

When she was about to leave Japan, she introduced me to Ginny, who was teaching part-time at KCS (Kansai Christian School). Ginny came to my home once a week to tutor my children.

Around that time my oldest daughter, Mari, entered elementary school. She was having problems and not happy with attending the local Japanese school. I discussed this problem with Ginny and she told me that she knew of a good school and introduced us to KCS.

I was worried about how well Mari would fit into this new school where the curriculum was all in English, but decided to send her there for one week. I remember how happy Mari was when she came

home from her first week at KCS and was convinced that this was the best school for her." That is how Mari came to start the 1st grade at KCS in 1995.

Ginny only taught at KCS for a number of months, but the Lord used her as a link to introduce the Imahori family to KCS. This triggered a string of events that led to the salvation of many.

"The homework Mari brought home was somewhat challenging, but I could understand most of it because I was an English teacher," Shizu shared. "The school would often send out a notice with the students called a **News Flash**. The Bible verses at the bottom of this notice brought me into contact with the words of the Bible for the first time.

As time went on, we decided to send all three of our children to KCS. Sometimes they would be assigned short Bible verses to memorize as homework. I found myself pondering the meaning as I helped them memorize the words. I started to believe that there was truth in these words and was impressed with the moral teaching behind the verses.

When I first attended the PTA meetings, I noticed that they would open with a prayer. At first I found this strange, but soon became impressed by their sincere belief and commitment to the Bible.

As I learned more about Christianity, I came to understand that the core teaching was that of love. I was always raised to fear the spirit world and felt that I needed to appease the spirits. I felt that if I failed to do so, I might somehow be punished by the gods. The Christian teaching seemed so much more free and full of hope.

Many of the parents at KCS were missionaries, so I could ask them many questions. I slowly found myself believing in Jesus, but could not bring myself to make a commitment. Then one weekend, KCS held a camp and the parents were invited to participate. I spoke to a missionary friend at the camp and asked, 'Would Jesus forgive any kind of sin, no matter how bad?' 'Of course,' he answered and prayed with me.

"As he prayed, I closed my eyes and saw a brilliant light and spontaneously said aloud - 'I believe in you Jesus and receive you into my heart'. I told him what I had just experienced and we both rejoiced in the Lord."

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***If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them*** (1 John 4:15-16).

"After I had confessed my sin, I felt an overwhelming sense of peace and knew that God had delivered me from the fear of the spirit world that had haunted me from my childhood.

The Lord led me to attend a church that was being held at Japan Mission. There I grew in the Lord and learned much about the Bible. Eventually, my three children also made a decision to accept Jesus as Saviour. My husband attended church for a while, but decided that the traditional Japanese ways were more suited to his lifestyle."

**Pray** that the Lord will continue to bless and protect the Imahori family. **Pray** that the Lord will clearly reveal Himself to the members of the family who have not yet found the Saviour.

*Read the next issue to find out about the challenges faced by Shizu Imahori, and how the Lord placed her in a position to influence many for Christ.*

## RELIGION IN JAPAN

It can be said that the Japanese are not religious, but taught from a young age to be continually mindful and respectful of the spirit world. They show respect towards all things, because they are taught that the spirits live all around them and could possibly reside in all things organic and inorganic – including in humans.

This is the reason it has become customary for Japanese to say *itadakimas* (*I humbly receive*) before they eat. It is believed that spirits resided in the food, which is about to be consumed. This is often said with an attitude of gratitude and regret for taking life in order to sustain one's own. Many often say this out of custom, without thinking much about the meaning.

**Pray** that the Japanese will experience a true revelation from the Lord, and that the Holy Spirit will reveal the truth about such matters, as we reach out with the Gospel.

## STAFF UPDATE - KANSAI CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

In 1970, Japan Mission (JM) saw the need to establish a Christian school for the children of missionaries who were seeking to reach out to the 23 million people in the Kansai area. Kansai Christian School (KCS) was founded by JM and four other mission boards and continues to fill this critical need. Although the purpose of the school is to provide a Christian education for missionary children, up to 20% of students come from non-Christian homes. JM provides missionary teachers to KCS and has also been represented on the School Board since 1970.

Teachers have a unique opportunity to encourage missionary children, witness to non-Christian students and parents, and influence the surrounding community for Christ. We have been encouraged to see a number of parents and students come to know the Lord – such as Shizu Imahori and her children.

## THE SWALLOW FAMILY

Brandon (25) and Laura (24) Swallow joined Japan Mission from the USA in September 2016. Laura is a certified teacher and is serving as a full-time middle school teacher at KCS. Her husband, Brandon, is helping with various evangelistic outreach efforts with JM, and is also caring for their two small children, Lisanna (3) and Arrow (1).

Brandon and Laura are excited to be part of the ministry at KCS and JM. They have experienced the Lord's guidance and miraculous provision as He opened the way for them to make this move to Japan.

**Pray** that **Brandon** will have discernment and be an effective witness.

**Pray** for protection for the **children** and that they will grow in their knowledge and understanding of the Lord.

**Pray** that the Lord will give **Laura** wisdom and strength as she teaches and reaches out to the non-Christian student and parent community.



Brandon, Laura, Lisanna en Arrow