

# Outback Owens

Latest news from the 'Curry with Simon & Angela Owen



## February 2024

Well, 2023 is well and truly over now and we thank God for another action-packed year of ministry and adventures! Reflecting over the past few months here's a snapshot of what we've been up to, and more importantly, what God's been up to in Cloncurry.

### October 2023 – Simon's first wedding

The weekend after we returned from our holiday/ministry trip in Julia Creek and Townsville, Simon conducted a wedding ceremony for an older couple that we have become friends with. Being the first wedding he has officiated at, it involved extra work and preparation on Simon's part, and with thanks to God, it all came together well. It was held on the picturesque banks of Cloncurry's Chinaman Creek Dam and was a great opportunity to minister to the couple and share God's word with their family, friends, and many locals. We have also seen ongoing fruit from this in people's lives which we praise God for.



Simon conducts his first wedding on the banks of Chinaman Creek Dam

### November 2023 – Remembrance Day

Simon also had an opportunity to share and pray at Cloncurry's community Remembrance Day Service in the centre of town again in 2023. It's a great honour to remember with the community all who



made sacrifices in the wars and point people to the sacrifice Jesus made for us. Simon has enjoyed meeting with the RSL committee to help plan Anzac and Remembrance Day services. Friendships are being established on the committee and we all enjoyed a Christmas party together.

### October & November – Regular ministry

Throughout October and November, we continued teaching through the book of John in our Sunday Services and were encouraged by the consistent attendance of our regulars as well as many returning visitors and new faces. On Fridays, Simon helped out with the school pancake breakfast at the Cloncurry State School and taught Religious Instruction (RI) to primary-aged students in the afternoon; Angela helped out with our Mainly Music outreach program for 0-5 year olds; and we began meeting in the evenings with a younger Christian couple in our congregation to read the Bible and pray which has been a real mutual encouragement.

We also had fruitful church services at Julia Creek in October and November with regulars and new faces at our monthly services. In November, Simon went back to Julia Creek to teach Christmas RI classes and a highlight was to have a student say "Wow, I didn't know that Christmas was about Jesus!". It is always a joy to do the three-hour round trip so that we can bring the gospel to this remote town and encourage the believers there.

### December – Christmas season

School finished at the very start of December which quickly launched us into the Christmas season. On the final day of term, Grace & Esther again enjoyed dancing in Cloncurry's community Christmas concert which is always an enjoyable night. Soon after, Simon had a funeral service to facilitate for an elderly Indigenous woman in the Cloncurry community. With thanks to God, this went well and was another opportunity to share about the hope that is offered to us through Jesus. We then had a small break and stayed in Mount Isa for a few days enjoying some R&R as a family before all the Christmas Services.

Upon returning, we held a special Carols Service in Cloncurry on Sunday 10 December. Simon spoke on *The Christmas Spirit* and we were thankful for the many regulars and visitors that came to this service, as well as the beautiful music played by our new musician (so that we no longer had to rely on YouTube songs!)

The following Sunday, 17 December, we had our normal morning Cloncurry Service and then drove the 1.5 hours to Julia Creek to run the same Carols service we had done the previous week. It was wonderful to see the little church building full of people, including many new young families who had driven long distances from isolated stations. Many of these people rarely get to experience the blessings of church and were thankful for the service and the opportunity to be encouraged in their faith.



Carols at Julia Creek & Christmas in Cloncurry

On Christmas Eve, Simon spoke on *Glory to God in the lowest*, which was followed by the message *Glory to God in the highest* on Christmas Day. While many of our regulars had left town by this time, we were encouraged by the number of visitors who came despite the extreme heat, many of whom

we have built friendships with over the past year. Grace also encouraged many with her 'Happy Birthday Jesus' hat and beautifully drawn nativity cards which she handed out to everyone.

After church, we had a quiet Christmas Day at home as a family and the kids enjoyed opening and playing with their new gifts. Angela cooked a roast pork dinner - however, this proved quite challenging as we had many power blackouts throughout the day caused by the bushfires between Cloncurry and Mount Isa. On a 43-degree day, with no air-conditioning at times, we really started to feel the heat! But God is good, and we managed to cook our dinner, enjoyed each other's company and reflected more on the wonder of Jesus. When Jesus sacrificed the comfort of heaven to come to earth to rescue us, he had no aircon either!

### After Christmas – January 2024

A couple of days after Christmas we managed to drive through the fires on our way to Mount Isa Airport; got through the predicted storms at Brisbane Airport and arrived safely in Sydney. We give God thanks that despite all these possible obstacles we had a very smooth trip. It was wonderful to spend time with family and friends and have some rest and leisure time. We also had a very enjoyable visit to one of our supporting churches (Kurrajong North Richmond Anglican Church) and it was great to share, be encouraged and fellowship over lunch.

In mid-late January, we arrived back to the strange sight of a burnt (yet wet) landscape around Cloncurry and Mount Isa, with streams of water everywhere in sight. While we were away the fires got quite close to Cloncurry and burnt all along the river. After a huge amount of rain (and some fierce storms) our river is flowing rapidly, although it's very low down so the town is safe from flooding. Unfortunately, some towns in the broader northwest region have experienced flooding, and road closures after heavy rains have affected food supplies and postal services etc from getting to Cloncurry.



The burnt bush showing how close the fire came to town. The full river after the rains

A big milestone for us since returning home has been Esther starting school and really enjoying it. We have also been getting back into a routine, planning, organising services and ministry and seeking the Lord for direction in 2024.

We have been encouraged by this verse to begin our year.

*"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Galatians 2:20.*

We truly appreciate your prayer partnership with us as we minister in Cloncurry. If you are planning to come through Cloncurry in 2024, the best time to visit us is on a Sunday morning at our 9 am service. This way our whole congregation can be encouraged by your company, and we trust it will be a blessing to you too. We



Esther's first day of school



also plan to be away this year with ministry commitments from late June until about mid-July, however, you are most welcome to still come and visit our congregation on a Sunday during this time.

### Prayer Points:

Please join us in giving God thanks for:

- A fruitful wedding ceremony and pray for ongoing fruit and connections post-wedding.
- Gospel opportunities and friendships that were established through the Remembrance Day Service.
- School ministry in 2023 and pray that the doors stay open for us to keep teaching RI classes in Cloncurry & Julia Creek in 2024.
- All the gospel seeds planted throughout the Christmas season at Cloncurry and Julia Creek and pray for ongoing fruit.
- Give God thanks that we could catch up with family, friends and a support church whilst in Sydney and that we had safe travel.

Please pray:

- That believers we will keep growing in the Lord and pray that newcomers will keep coming and experience transformation in Christ.
- That we will see ten people come to know the Lord and ten people have significant spiritual growth in Cloncurry & Julia Creek this year.
- For a godly new school chaplain at Julia Creek State School.
- For God's wisdom for our 2024 life and ministry, that we will keep trusting God and living faithfully for him as a family, and for God's protection and blessing on our children as they live, learn, and grow in Cloncurry.



Blessings and thanks,

*Simon, Angela, Grace, Esther & Josiah*

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