

2014: International Year of Family Farming and Crystallography. So, have a prosperous new year, all you farming families! The rest of us, meanwhile, might want to throw our lot in with the crystallographers.

Now, this is nothing to do with dangling queer bits of rock over expectant mums to find out what's inside; it's about something far more insightful. Crystallography is a science that uses crystal structures to give a decipherable image of the atomic structure of solids.

The trouble with trying to look directly at atoms is that light waves are far too big to "see" atoms and the spaces between, and x-ray or neutron beams cannot be focussed back into a sharp image. Therefore crystals, having highly ordered and repetitive structures, make good lenses for reflecting (actually, refracting) enough pattern to give an outline of what's going on in a solid material. That's my explanation; it may be oversimplified(!) - and not entirely the whole story - but by now you should've sobered up enough from the new year parties to get the point I want to make. Eventually...

Most of us, when faced with life's difficulties (or joys) don't have the perspective to see them in context. That makes life so much less clear - in fact, blurred. I believe God wants us to discover the amazing things of life for ourselves, to rise above our troubles, to deepen our joys; a virtually impossible task, however, if we don't have a lens through which life will come into focus.

Guess what's coming now. Yes, you're right: I'm going to mention Jesus! The lens on God, in one person's reflection/refraction. Even if you find it hard to understand the business about his being Son of God, at least look at what he taught, it *will* change your life for the better (if you follow it) - that's what getting things in focus is all about. Understand him, understand God. Understand God, understand yourself. Understand yourself, you will have heard God. Then you'll know Jesus. Then you will believe. Then you will trust. Then you will have life.

2014: a year for focus. You see?