



Press Release

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Santa or Jesus? Who is more important at Christmas?

CTA Christmas program host Karl Faase, reflects on the meaning of Christmas

Christmas is a wonderful time of the year, full of celebration and expectation. The pressure that it must be a special day for everyone brings some fairly unique pressures to all concerned. In an article on her 'MamaMia' web site and published in a number of national daily newspapers, Australian commentator Mia Freedman lists her Five Pressures of Christmas. One of them is 'Keeping Santa Alive'.

"I have one friend whose Santa-Is-Real-Oh-Yes-He-Is! pantomime grows more elaborate every year as her children become more suspicious and she more desperate to keep the magic alive." (www.mamamia.com.au)

There is however another figure under pressure to keep his place in the Christmas celebration – Jesus. For many the story of the birth of Jesus at the first Christmas is just a quaint idea. For others, this Christian part of the Christmas celebration has long since had its day and ought to be left out of any Christmas celebrations.

There are some who want to go a step further and rid Christmas of anything religious or Christian altogether. They fight against carols at school and community Christmas pageants and create Christmas events that are free of Mary, Joseph and Jesus. For them, Christian faith is the dead weight of Christmas and belief in a life changing saviour, born as a baby, is delusional.

Is it possible they are right? Should we rid Christmas of the Jesus factor and reinvent it as a purely secular community event, focused on peace and goodwill to all and some time off work. What is the point of keeping Jesus as part of Christmas?

One key reason is that Jesus is linked historically to the first Christmas. While many might put Jesus and Santa into the same mythological basket, Jesus is actually a figure from history. His birth and life are well attested to in documents viewed as credible by serious historians.

Dr John Dickson, who studied at the Department of Ancient History at Sydney's Macquarie University where he also holds the post of Senior Research Fellow says, "No ancient historian has any doubts that Jesus existed – the evidence is

overwhelming, not just for Christian historians but for historians of other faiths or no faith at all.”

Each April 25th, Australians celebrate Anzac Day. The day celebrates much more than one military battle on the Gallipoli Peninsula in modern-day Turkey in 1915. As each year passes and time dulls the memory of the first Anzac Day, our community revives the history and gathers to be reminded of the horror of war and the sacrifices that brought peace. The history is integral to the event. Similarly, the history of the first Christmas is integral to the Christmas event.

The values of Christmas don't come from the birth of Jesus as much as from his life and teachings. Christmas is a celebration of love, selfless giving, the call to peace and the hope for the future.

Across the centuries the Christian church has been the leader in education, health care, response to injustice and standing up for the oppressed. The leaders of these movements of Christians were not motivated by the birth of a baby but the inspiration of his teachings and the example of his life. Human history would be a very different place if it were not for the motivational impact of the birth and life of Jesus.

There are some who take examples of the misuse of religious motivation and suggest that belief and faith have only been destructive in human history. This is in the face of the fact that the vast majority of the deaths from totalitarian leadership of the past hundred years, were from godless and faithless political movements far removed from any notion of Christian faith and belief in Jesus. Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia and Cambodia's Khmer Rouge are three examples of regimes that cost millions of lives.

The message of Jesus as the teacher, not the baby of the stable, is one of giving, service and sacrifice. As people across the world and over the centuries have followed this example millions of lives have been impacted positively.

If Mia Freedman and her friends are trying to keep the message of Santa alive for their children you have to ask if this actually makes much of a difference? What is added to a child's life by holding onto belief in a man wearing a big red suit if their lives remain untouched?

People involved in the Christian Church know that the story of Jesus and the message of Christmas is a daily encouragement for millions of people.

Christmas and the focus on Jesus is not just a quaint tradition reminding people of an ancient birth. It is a very real celebration of faith and belief. Christmas becomes a moment of personal reflection of the changes in their lives that Jesus came to bring. It reminds them of the new life they have found and the fresh start they have experienced. For these people the loss of Jesus from Christmas would be to take the heart out of the event, leaving it as a hollow festival with little point.

While our community will struggle long and hard to reinvent the story of Santa for each generation of young children, the story of Jesus' birth at Christmas and the message of his life will continue to permeate our society. The reason for its continued place in modern culture is that human nature has not changed.

Greater education, increased technology, accessible media and developed health care have not changed the basic fault of humanity. We still find ourselves in need of help and inner change. There are many solutions for the help humanity is looking for and the one that has a two-thousand year track record is the message of Jesus.

The story of the baby of the manger reminds us that our need and the solutions are still both very real.

Rev Karl Faase

Karl Faase is the host of 'The Difference Christmas Make', a Christian Television Australia (CTA) Christmas Day special screening at midday on the Seven Network. Karl is also Senior Pastor of Gymea Baptist Church in Sydney's South.

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