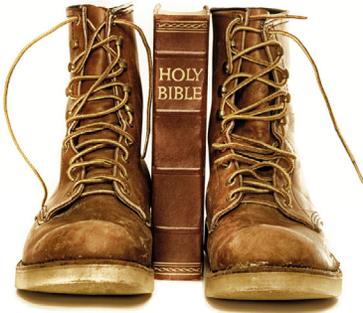


Christmas blows away fog about God



bring Jesus

Making sense of mission

by Rev Dr Steen Olsen



Steen also blogs at LCA eNews. To sign up to his newlist go to www.lca.org.au/enews, insert your email address and tick the box next to 'bring Jesus'. He would also love to hear your thoughts and stories about mission in your context.

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You can't focus on fog. Many have rather foggy ideas about God. For some, God is vaguely tied up with our religious feelings. For others, 'god' is an impersonal force that works through all religions to bring peace on earth and goodwill among people.

Even the Australian prime minister (at the time of writing) has been quoted as saying that 'every religion, every faith, every moral doctrine, understands the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you'. Really, Mr Turnbull? That is certainly true of the teaching of Jesus. Other religions teach that only spiritual realities matter and physical things are not important. Do they follow the Golden Rule?

We hear a lot about spirituality today. It is certainly a more positive term than religion. It can therefore be a good place to start when talking about God, much as Paul did when talking with the Athenians in Acts 17. But it is still a foggy idea for most people. 'Modern spirituality is centred on the "deepest values and meanings by which people live". It embraces the idea of an ultimate or an alleged immaterial reality. It envisions an inner path enabling a person to discover the essence of his/her being.' So says Wikipedia. What does that actually mean?

Talking with others about God is difficult because everything you say is passed through their foggy filters. You say, 'God is love', but what does that mean for me and my struggles and fears? How is that going to help me when I am in

a crisis? What practical difference does it make? Does it mean that if I love God then he will love and help me? What do I need to do to get the love?

Christmas blows away the fog. God is not my religious feelings, a religious system, a distant intelligence or a moral principle. God became a human being. That is the message of Christmas. The God who created the universe, who called Abram and Sarai, who formed a people and spoke to them through prophets, has become one of us in Jesus.

God has therefore become touchable. Not a disembodied spirit but a real human being with flesh and blood like us. If you lived in Palestine at the time of Jesus you could talk with him and touch him. Maybe even give him a hug. You could sit with him in the evening and enjoy a glass of wine together as you talked over the events of the day. You could hold the other end of the timber as he cut it in his workshop. The eternal Son of God became a fair-dinkum bloke. And he still is. Truly God and truly human. That's the message of Christmas.

So what about now? True, you can't touch Jesus as they could when he lived in Palestine. But you can still talk with him. He touched you when he made you his own through the water and word of baptism and still gives you his body and blood when you come to his table. Some things are even better now than they were then. He is present everywhere in our world. You don't need to travel to one spot and join the queue in order to strike up a conversation. The Holy Spirit is at



work through the word of God in your life and in your Christian community. The Spirit brings Jesus to you.

The message of Christmas is that Jesus is God who is Immanuel, which means 'God with us'. Again and again Jesus promises to be present with us: 'I am with you always to the end of the age'. 'If two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.' 'Abide in me as I abide in you.' '[The Spirit] will take what is mine and declare it to you.' (See Matthew 28:20; 18:20; John 15:4; 16:14.)

Christmas means we can't talk about God as though he was a code name for a religious philosophy or a moral system. Take people to meet the child born in Bethlehem. It is not a question of joining a religion and practising a particular form of spirituality. It is a question of faith, and faith is a relational term. There is nothing you

need to do to get the love. It is God's Christmas gift to you in Jesus Christ. Your family, friends and neighbours need to meet this Jesus. God's Christmas present to you is also the best gift you can give to others. Take your friends to Bethlehem this Christmas. Get past the romantic setting and the wrapping and look at the gift. Ask the question, 'Who is this child born in Bethlehem and crucified on Golgotha?' Blow the fog away. Bring Jesus to your friends this Christmas.

I would love to hear your thoughts and stories about mission in your context. You can email me at steen.olsen@sa.lca.org.au with 'bring Jesus' as the subject line.

Steen Olsen serves as the SA/NT Director for Mission and as a member of the LCA Board for Local Mission.



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Renewing Mission Life is the name of a series of resources being prepared by the Board for Local Mission for distribution across the LCA next year. It will include small-group materials, sermon outlines and devotions for leaders and help to form evangelism and discipleship teams in each congregation, school or other community.

