

# Down Down our God came Down

It can be very hard to get a clear understanding of what Christmas is about. This was particularly brought home to me yesterday morning as I was reading *The Mercury* and discovered that inside the Christmas Church Service Guide and the words of wisdom from the leaders of Churches was the Christmas Racing Guide. With all adverts for the various church services it made me wonder what a form guide for the Churches would look like: Baptist – good in the wet; Pentecostal – goes like the clappers; Anglican - tends to hang around the back but makes a good showing a couple of times a year; and so on.

The flutter theme was continued with an article about how you can now bet on the weather at Christmas. It made me wonder if there was going to be a book run on the length of sermons at the various churches. What are you betting on, 5 minutes, 10 minutes or real stayer?

Our culture seems to want to take on all bets when it comes to Christmas. On Christmas cards I received this year there are stars, angels, Christmas tree baubles, Dickens style London street scapes, stained glass windows, families, santas. Not much clarity there. If you watched the news recently you would think that Christmas was all about retail sales figures, and they are down, down sales are down.

This leads us to the message that is at the heart of Christmas that we want people to grasp and celebrate is the wonderful, astounding and life changing truth that Down, Down our God came Down, or to put it more poetically in the words of *Once in Royal David's City* "He came down to earth from heaven, who is God and Lord of all."

I hope that by parodying a secular advert we are giving notice that while commercialism has stolen Christmas and we are stealing it back. We want to move Christmas back from being a sellabration, with an "S", to a celebration with a "C". As we shall see the message of God's self giving at Christmas fundamentally undermines the self centred message of consumerism. The truth of the come down God helps us see beyond the all the fuss of Christmas presents to Christ's presence. At Christmas we celebrate that God came down, this is a visited planet.

John Betjeman's poem *Christmas* wonderfully captures this

And is it true,  
This most tremendous tale of all,  
Seen in a stained-glass window's hue,  
A Baby in an ox's stall ?  
The Maker of the stars and sea  
Become a Child on earth for me ?

And is it true ? For if it is,  
No loving fingers tying strings  
Around those tissueed fripperies,  
The sweet and silly Christmas things,  
Bath salts and inexpensive scent  
And hideous tie so kindly meant,



No love that in a family dwells,  
 No carolling in frosty air,  
 Nor all the steeple-shaking bells  
 Can with this single Truth compare -  
 That God was man in Palestine  
 And lives today in Bread and Wine.

If we will but grasp again that Down, Down our God came Down we will have a lot more to celebrate this Christmas, I'd bet on it.

### **SELLING POINT 1: WHAT IT SAYS ABOUT GOD**

But we are doing something else in parodying an advertising campaign, we also remind ourselves that we have a product, a message, a truth that we want others to grasp, we have something to promote, and we should have great confidence in this truth.

There is much that we could say at this point but I simply want to say that this message of Down Down our God came down tells us wonderful things about both God and ourselves.

Firstly about God.

#### **There is a God**

To make a perhaps obvious point, if God came down in Jesus then there must be a God. This means that we don't live in a meaningless universe which is simply dictated by chance as our atheistic friends would have us believe. They are holding a conference in Melbourne in April called *Celebrate Reason*, but it always seems to me that for the true atheist they have to celebrate for no reason, for nothing means or signifies anything.

I find it fascinating that one area that atheists seem to refuse to debate Christians is on the person of Jesus. Richard Dawkins prefers to believe the myth that Jesus didn't even exist. He quotes a university professor to back up this idea, but the man in question is a professor of German! I hope that they will get down, down to some serious looking at the history, if they are to celebrate reason it is surely demanded, and I pray that they will find something to truly celebrate.

#### **A God who loves us**

But the coming of Jesus not only assures us there is a God, but reveals to us the nature of that God. It is not only fast food restaurants that are in to up sizing their goods. Most religions up size their god, even super size their god, but Christianity makes the outrageous claim of the downsized God. Nowhere can we see more clearly the self giving nature of God. The glorious God whose hands shaped the universe becomes a child with hands the size of a table tennis ball.

The manner of God's coming into the world tells us a lot about our God.

God coming down could have very ominous overtones, but Jesus came not as God against us, but God with us and for us. Jesus came in not in vengeance but in love, in forgiveness and in grace. The Book of Hebrews tells us that whilst God has spoken in many ways in the past he has now spoken through his Son, we now have a clear understanding of God because our God came down.

### **SELLING POINT 2: WHAT IT SAYS ABOUT US**

#### **Dignity of humanity**

But that God could come down and be truly human not only says a lot about the nature of God, it says a lot about us as well.

That God could become human gives great dignity to humanity. I know that we are in the realms of speculation here but I am not sure that God could have become an ant, a squirrel, or an elephant and still remained God, but he could with humanity.

To be theological for a moment the incarnation, God becoming human, is only possible because of and is the proof that humanity is made in the image of God. If you ever doubt your worth remember that our God came down. Do not underestimate how valuable you are to God.

But we also need to remember that this is true of those we are in relationship with as well, those with whom we struggle with. They too are valuable to God and have the full dignity of being human. Does this mean we have to change the way we think about them.

### **Dignity of all humanity**

But we need to push this point a bit further, this is not only true of each of us, but it is true for all of humanity. In fact the Christmas narratives make it clear that God has a particular affinity with the poor. When our God came down he didn't come down to human palaces which would have been slumming it by his standards. Rather he came to the homeless and soon to be refugee Mary and Joseph, as well as the rural poor shepherds. As the carol puts it: "With the poor and meek and lowly lived on earth our Saviour holy."

As we start to grasp ideas such as these it must challenge our views on issues such as euthanasia, homelessness in our society, but I think particularly at this time our thinking about asylum seekers. They too are made in the image of God, they too have the dignity of being human, God came to be with them too. I wonder if Jesus were to be born today it would be on a boat that had been turned around, or in a detention camp for there was apparently no room to let them in.

### **SELLING POINT 3: HE DIDN'T STAY DOWN**

Grasping that our God came down then teaches us much about God and about humanity, but wait there is more.

A friend of mine who it would be best to say is cynical about matters of religion delighted in pointing out to me that part of the supermarket advertising is down and staying down but of course the great news of the Christian gospel is that Jesus did not stay down. He came down to be our saviour as we are repeatedly told in the accounts of his birth. And by his life, death and resurrection this was achieved.

That we need saving I would suggest is in no doubt. We have thought about the dignity of humanity, and it is clear that we do not live up to that high ideal either in the way we behave or how we treat others. We need someone to raise us up, we all need Jesus. C.S. Lewis uses a wonderful analogy of a deep sea pearl diver to describe what God has done in Jesus. The diver has come down, down, to rescue this precious thing and bring it back up, up into the light.<sup>1</sup>

But actually our salvation is even more wonderful than that, for as Jesus not only comes down to be a human but remains human, in his resurrection we see our hope clearly and wonderfully revealed. God came down to lift us up into his eternal life and light.

*Down, Down our God came down because we all need Jesus.* This is more than a Christmas advertising slogan, it is a truth and I pray it will be with you not only this Christmas but always.

<sup>1</sup> "One may think of a diver, first reducing himself to nakedness, then glancing in mid-air, then gone with a splash, vanishing rushing down through green and warm water into black and cold water, down through increasing pressure into the deathlike region of ooze and slime and old decay; then up again, back to colour and light, his lungs almost bursting, till suddenly he breaks the surface again, holding in his hand the dripping, precious thing he went down to recover. He and it are both coloured now that they have come up into the light: down below, where it lay colourless in the dark, he lost his colour too" (Miracles, chap. 14).