



## The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society December 2018

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## **Are Christians Gullible?**

By Rev Todd Beiswenger

I was on the plane heading back from Perth when I was watching this stand-up comedian do his routine. He was transitioning from one topic to another when he said, “Are there any Christians in the room?” Some hands raised up. He then proceeds to say that these are the most gullible people in the world. They'll believe anything. His basis for this is the Christian belief in the virgin birth. A young girl gets pregnant, and she says, “No, I didn't have sex outside of marriage, it was an immaculate conception!” The comedian's argument was essentially: if your daughter came home with that line, would you believe her?

This was not the first time I encountered this line of thinking. I think I was about 17 or 18, and a friend who I worked with basically made the same argument. I probably didn't have a good answer for him. As an adult, particularly living in Sydney where there are a lot more Muslims than I encountered in the US, I find that the Divinity of Jesus is definitely a stumbling block for non-Christians. People are happy to give Him credit for being a “good guy” and even being wise, but Son of God? Conceived through the Holy Spirit? It gets to be a bit too much.

Believe it or not, I am somewhat sympathetic to these concerns. Part of what sells it for me though is the longevity of the New Testament story. You see, it isn't hard to find people in the world today who claim to be the Son of God, or ones who have claimed to have had an immaculate conception. It's just that usually you'll find them in a mental institution. Check out the book “The Three Christs of Ypsilanti” and you'll note that their lives are lived in stark contrast to Jesus of Nazareth. Their stories will come and go, they'll make their wild claims, and in all likelihood they will disappear without being even a footnote in the books of history.

The story of Jesus, well, it is so much more than a footnote. It's really a defining story, if not the defining story of the past 2000 years. I tend to think that it's no accident. Why is it that Christianity has spread around the world, and not some ancient Chinese religion? Buddhism has spread, but not in the way that Christianity has. Is that an accident, or is it part of God's Providence? It will be no surprise to you that I think Providence is in full effect, and that Christianity has spread because God has willed it to. The more access we have to the Bible, and the connection it brings us to heaven, the better. Confucius' works just don't do that, which is why, in my humble opinion that Christianity actually has some credibility.

Yet, still for many a leap of faith is required to buy in, especially if all you do is hold the advent in isolation without considering the rest of the New Testament narrative. That's just it though, Christianity has also spread because the entire story of Jesus is truly unique. Jesus doesn't go claiming He's the Son of God, but instead lets His actions do the talking, which gets other people to make the claims for Him. What other non-fiction story in the world is there where a man heals people in an instant? Where he – or she – turns one

substance into something else? One who challenged authority peacefully, and was persecuted for it... and then rose from the dead? You can find that there are some people who seem to have done some miracles, even in more modern times, where a healing had occurred. I've heard legends of Asian gurus who can manifest an item out of thin air. Maybe it's true. But I've never heard of a person who has the scope of abilities that Jesus had, and the willingness to do them in public settings as a way to prove that his abilities are not just mere illusions or parlour tricks. Certainly there's no other story of a person raising themselves from the dead.

That's what I think this comedian is missing. Sure, the virgin birth all on it's own can be a tough pill to swallow, but we believe in that because of all the things that happened *after* the virgin birth. When you've got a man who rose from the dead after a very violent and public execution, suddenly Mary's claims of a virgin birth don't strain credulity quite so much.

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## **Movies, Parties and Popcorn**

We've had a Halloween party and a movie night for grown ups – not to be confused with an adult movie night! - since our last newsletter was published. To the surprise of no one, after the grown up movie night there was a lot less cleaning to do than after the Halloween party. It seems that when you give popcorn to children there's a statistic that describes the percentage of popcorn that makes it from the popcorn container into the belly of the child. This statistic is known as the “Beiswenger Ratio” because I just made it up, but it accounts for the many ways that popcorn ends on the floor and not in the belly. I specify “belly” because there is a percentage that makes it into the mouth, but doesn't actually get swallowed due to the child's attempt to shove more popcorn into their mouth that actually creates some loss of the popcorn that had been shovelled down only moments prior. Popcorn can also fall to the floor when transferring it from a large container to a smaller one. My favourite way of popcorn ending on the floor is from the failure of the child's hand to accurately land the popcorn into the mouth, but instead landing the hand at least partially to the side of the mouth so as that a percentage of popcorn just gets mashed against the child's face and then that popcorn falls to the floor. This problem is exaggerated by the child's brain failing to calculate accurately the amount of popcorn that the hand can actually take from the cup to the mouth in one go.

However, after reviewing the data that was gathered by emptying the vacuum cleaner bag after the party, we were able to ascertain that an astounding 74% of all the popcorn popped for the party actually ended up on the floor. Now this may seem high, but actually we are quite pleased with the result because it shows a decrease from last year where the Beiswenger Ratio was 78%. So we're heading in the right direction.

We also can observe that the Beiswenger Ratio for each child is likely to improve with time. This particular cohort was mostly boys, so if we had some more girls to even out the population I think the ratio could be moved to under 50% without any trouble. Eventually the boys will want to impress the girls, which will cause things to shift in the

right direction. We also have evidence from the grown up movie night that popcorn can be eaten cleanly.

Now aside from all of that silliness, the Halloween party was once again one of our better events. We had a great team of helpers that got Baringa decorated up and into the spirit of things. We had a lot of non-perishable foods given to us that we donated to the Kogarah Store House so that they could help local families in need. We're willing to do the clean up in order to get the food to help out in the community! The kids did have a good time watching Hotel Transylvania 3, and got to play some games and get a taste of Halloween that wasn't all death and gore.

A couple weeks later the adults were watching the movie "Flywheel." Kudos to **Jenn** for deciding to class up Baringa a bit and to create a nicer ambiance by using some floor lamps, table cloths and other such touches that really made the place a bit nicer. We had several neighbours from up and down Dudley Street attend, which was nice. People brought food, and brought so much that we were able to keep eating it the next day as after church snacks. The movie, while low budget and therefore low on Hollywood effects, was a nice surprise. The story gave us a surprise ending that none of us predicted, but was a really good way to wrap up the story. If you're in the mood for a Christian movie, we'd recommend Flywheel.

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## Perth Visit

I made my third visit to Perth this year, having visited in February and June already. As usual this trip involved doing some pastoral visiting, a few classes, some shared meals, and a worship service. This worship service was different than others I've done before in that we decided to do a joint service with **Rev Trevor Moffat** and his group. The idea was that we should get both groups together, and combine our efforts.

It worked well. Trevor and I gave the kids talk together, and for the adult portion he did the readings while I gave the talk. We're going to have to figure out a way where we can both give the sermon similar to how the kids talk was done, but overall people seemed to be happy with how this went which leaves it open to being repeated in the future. At this point the plan is that Perth will get visits next year in February, May, August and November. **Rev Pete Buss Jr** will be visiting in May, and maybe another minister will take another one of the visits. We'll see how it goes, but that's the plan for now.

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## Society Meeting Outcomes

Keep your eyes on the calendar for the months of December and January. Note that there will be an **evening vespers service on 16<sup>th</sup> December**. We will of course have a service on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December, but we **won't** have one on Sunday the 23<sup>rd</sup>. On the **30<sup>th</sup>** though we will have a **Holy Supper** service as a good way to start the new year... even if it technically hasn't started yet. There will be no services on January 20<sup>th</sup> or 27<sup>th</sup> due to the church retreat, but normal services will resume on February 3<sup>rd</sup>. This will all be on the calendar, but just be sure to take a look at it.

One of the bigger items on the Society Meeting Agenda was to start to develop a plan in regards to the **Baringa gardens**. The main idea is to retain Norman Heldon's vision for the gardens, while at the same time making them easier to manage. Margaret Heldon said she had found out about a lady who is a professional horticulturist who could come in and develop a concept plan for the Baringa Gardens, and we agreed to bring her in and see what she has to say.

Another aspect that is going to be addressed is the signage in the gardens. There are a number of wooden signs in the gardens that were installed in 2005 for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, but they're starting to look like they were installed at 1905 birthday party. The idea here is to replace them with a metal sign that will be engraved as these kind of signs are likely to last beyond the life of the church itself.

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### **Camp Wanawong or Blue Mountains Retreat**

I know, you've got Christmas and the January retreat on your mind at the moment, and perhaps your crystal ball isn't forecasting all the way into March 2019 at this point, but... at the Society meeting people expressed interest in having a weekend camp **March 29-31**. We did this once before a few years ago at Camp Wanawong in Loftus, and it worked well so we would like to have another go at it if people are interested. We could have it at Wanawong again, or at Kanimbla View Clifftop Retreat in the Blue Mountains. Kanimbla is a nicer venue, but has a maximum capacity of 18, versus Wanawong can handle 48.

Costs should be reasonable because it is a self catered venue, so while exact figures are yet to be determined, we're looking at around \$100 per person if we get 18 people to sign up. At this point I'd greatly appreciate it if you'd email me if you're interested in joining in the fun. A theme for the camp has yet to be determined, so I'm taking suggestions on that as well. But here's what I do know: it'll be a fun weekend where you just might learn something too. Hope you can come!

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### **Perils of New Technology**

Text to neighbour:

Hi, Fred, this is Richard, next door. I've got a confession to make. I've been riddled with guilt for a few months and have been trying to get up the courage to tell you face-to-face. At least I'm telling you in this text and I can't live with myself a minute longer without you knowing about this. The truth is that when you're not around I've been sharing your wife, day and night. In fact, probably much more than you. I haven't been getting it at home recently and I know that that's no excuse. The temptation was just too great. I can't live with the guilt and hope you'll accept my sincere apology and forgive me. Please suggest a fee for usage and I'll pay you. Regards, Richard

Neighbour's Action: NOT A TEXT

Fred, feeling so angered and betrayed, grabbed his gun and shot Richard, killing him. He went back home and poured himself a stiff drink and sat down on the sofa. Fred then looked at his phone and discovered a second text message from Richard...

Second text message:

Hi, Fred , Richard here again. Sorry about the typo on my last text. I expect you figured it out and noticed that the darned Auto-Correct had changed “wi-fi” to “wife.” Technology, huh? It’ll be the death of us all ... Regards, Richard

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### **No Pressure Movie Night**

Here's the deal: we're going to have another movie night on **December 15<sup>th</sup>**. But we also know that everybody has a lot going on this time of year, so we don't want to pressure anybody into coming. Jenn, Zach and I will be watching “Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street” at 7pm, and you are more than welcome to join us. We're not intending to make this a lot of work for us either, so we're not organizing food. So if you just want to come, hang out, and watch this movie with us, come on over. If it's just the three of us, that's fine too.

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### **Kogarah Storehouse Donations**

Finally a reminder that donations of non perishable food and other supplies to help less fortunate people are due by **30<sup>th</sup> December**.

### **Birthdays**

Happy Birthday to **Sam Johnson** (1<sup>st</sup>), **Gai Kennedy** (2<sup>nd</sup>), **Beryl Laidley** (14<sup>th</sup>), **Ken Horner** (16<sup>th</sup>), **Patricia Walsh** (19<sup>th</sup>), **Kristen Johnson** (29<sup>th</sup>)

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