

A designer Christmas.
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John 1:1-14
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In the London Evening Standard last week (16-12-10) there was a review of a new show entitled 'Nine Lessons and Carols For Godless People'. The review begins with the assertion: 'Christmas would be perfect if it was not for all the religion getting in the way'. It then gives details of the alternative items on offer and ends by saying: 'Mitch Benn summed up the season best, singing: "The true meaning of Christmas is eat until it hurts, then drink until it doesn't hurt any more."'

Don't know about it being nine lessons and carols for godless people. It sounds more like an evening for pointless people. Why choose to celebrate something when you've surgically removed the whole point of the celebration? But I guess the event isn't alone. One of the striking things about Christmas is it is often celebrated without having the faintest clue of its purpose.

After all Christmas is about celebrating the breaking onto the stage of human history the person who embodies the very purposes of the great high God of the universe. Jesus can therefore be described as the ultimate designer baby. By that I mean he comes from the designer of the universe and comes to fulfil the designs of God for us on earth.

Well executed design is a very special thing. I'm an apple fan – I still remember the first apple mac being delivered to the consultancy firm I worked for in 1985. The whole office used to come and stare at it because wonder of wonders it could draw boxes and circles. It was a brace new world in comparison to the dot matrix letters the IBM PCs could manage.

Not an expert but what I know of Apple there are 2 key principles that have guided their design.

1. Human centric

- the first question is what is the need the customer has which we can solve and benefit the customer (very different from asking what can I make and sell in max quantities to max target markets at max margin)

2. Game changing

- when looking at the solution the question is what completely new approach or technology can I adopt which will transform the customer's life – ie not just do the necessary but do it with delight

But this isn't a talk on Apple Macs – it's about a gift designed in heaven which changes us for all eternity.

According to economists, growth in Christmas retail sales is expected to slow this year, with total UK sales predicted to rise by 1.3% (£862 million), compared with 1.9% (£1.3bn) between 2008 and 2009. New research by Theos, also published on Wednesday, confirms people will be tightening their belts, but 62% of people believe spending less will make 'no difference' to their Christmas because it 'is about more than presents'. Only 15% of people believe Christmas will be worse, while 18% think spending less will make it better as they can concentrate on 'the things that matter'.

So what are the design principles behind God's Christmas gift that matter to us today?

First, God's gift of sending his Son solves our human centric design problem:

1. The human centric design problem is that we've broken our relationship with God by ignoring him and his ways.

The Bible defines the human problem using the word 'sin' which isn't about eating too many cream cakes but is about rejecting God and saying I don't need help with life – I can do it by myself. John 1:10 says that people didn't recognise Jesus in the world. That's the problem – we fail to recognise the amazing reality of Jesus in our lives.

There's a scene in the film 'Mr Magorium's Wonder Emporium' where the manager of Mr Magorium's magical toy store is talking to the new store accountant who is blind to anything but numbers and balance sheets.

The manager says to him: 'I knew it as soon as I saw that suit – you're a just guy.'

Accountant: 'What's a just guy?'

Store Manager: 'Someone who walks around and no matter what, he thinks – oh it's just a store, it's just a bench, it's just a tree, it's just what it is nothing more.'

Accountant: 'But this is just a store.'

Store manager: 'I'm sure to you it is.'

But that's the human problem – that we've made the world very small – just about us and our want and desires. But cutting out God from our world isn't just limiting, it's deeply offensive to him.

Rejecting God and living without reference to him causes a catastrophic structural failure in human beings because it breaks our relationship with the God who made us to know him and we therefore cease to be the people we were created to be.

But the wonder of the designer gift of Christmas is that when we reject God doesn't give up, he gives his only son.
2. The human centric design solution is that the God of the universe becomes one of us to free us from being separated from God

Incarnation is the key element of God's design. As angels say to shepherds: 'we bring you good news, today a Saviour has been born.' In other words, the good news is that the heavenly designed and paid for rescue plan has now been put into operation. And notice also that it's a rescue plan of Christ the Saviour that the angels claim will be good news for everyone. It's a bold claim because by definition saviours are only needed when we need help being saved and cannot save ourselves

Basically if I'm perfectly happy getting on with life and someone dressed as a stormtrooper bursts into the room and says "I'm Luke Skywalker and I'm here to rescue you" you'd probably say, rescue me from what – I'm not princess Leah stuck in the cell of a deathstar – or at least I wasn't last time I checked!

But if I was a hostage in Somalia and troops burst into my cell and said 'I'm a British soldier and I'm here to rescue you' I wouldn't debate with them – I'd be overjoyed to go with them to safety and freedom.

That's why the shepherds are overjoyed at the news of the Christ coming: shepherds knew that things weren't right with the world – they knew they were far from being the people God had created them to be and intends them to be.

The point is that our wrongdoing cuts us off from God and once cut off we can't restore things – broken people and a perfect God just don't mix. So the only solution available to us is a rescuer from the perfect heavens to come and be born as a human being and live the perfect life we've never lived and then take our place and die the atoning death we all deserved. Jesus' death absorbs our wrong. Jesus pays the debt of our sin so it no longer hangs over us – we're free of the guilt. As the prophet Isaiah explains: 'by his wounds you are healed' (Is 53:5). That's why Jesus cries out on the cross: 'my God my God why forsaken me?' (Mk 15:34) – he's forsaken so we can be forgiven.

Jesus does all the running by coming from heaven to earth for the vital purpose of taking our rejection of God onto himself – he was rejected so we need not be.

As Jesus explains: he came to give his life as a ransom for many (Mk 10:45).

The new BBC Drama, Nativity is a retelling of the bible story by the award winning writer of Spooks and Eastenders. At several key points in the production the camera zooms out to show the earth from space. There is a groaning sound. As one reviewer puts it: the writer, Tony Jordan is reminding us that in *this* story something cosmic is happening; something of ultimate significance.

And the thing of ultimate significance is the game changing gift of being restored into relationship with God.

3. The game changing design provision of adoption as one of God's children (Jn 1:12-13)

The ultimate game changer is becoming a child of God - every time I enter God's presence in prayer he sees me as one of his dearly loved children. Through the gift of the Saviour Christ I receive and know in my inner being the security of God's complete forgiveness, the strengthening of God's unconditional love and the future hope of God's new creation promises.

Great design is about providing a simple answer in a beautiful solution. And that's what makes my Christmas celebrations bitter sweet. Yes I know the delight of my life being completely changed but I also know there are millions of people who don't know that game changing reality. So my duty of love is to invite everyone I meet to hear and receive the gift of new life as a forgiven child of God

The whole design of Jesus coming to earth is beautifully simple and absolutely necessary – there's no other way to be restored into relationship with God. So the question is, do you know that God designed the gift of his son because he loves you?

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (Jn 3:16), To all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. (Jn 1:12)

As the words of O little town of Bethlehem say: How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given! So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heaven. No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin, where meek souls will receive him still, the dear Christ enters in.

What's your source of joy this Christmas? Will you let the favour of God enter your life? Will you know the reality of being a child of God and let his unconditional love transform your life and give you joy that lasts for eternity?