

## **2CH Sunday at 7.30**

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Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

### **Christmas Day 2009**

Presented by Richard Quadrio

#### **Introduction**

Can you believe that it's Christmas Day again? Where did that year go? How come when we were kids the year dragged slowly from one Christmas to another – and now they seem to fly by. We no longer take the decorations down- pack them back in the linen cupboard and then it's time to start all over again.

But to be honest my highlight this Christmas is be here with you on 2CH this Christmas Day. I hope you enjoy our special time – a time to sing some great carols and remember the birth of Jesus.

#### **Part 1**

Many years ago I was the pastor of a little church in the south west of Sydney. I remember one Christmas day vividly. A family had joined our church – the parents were Buddhists but they sent their kids each week to our Sunday school. In fact if I remember rightly someone from our church would go each week and pick up these two kids to come to church.

This particular Christmas day I assembled all the kids up the front of the church service about 10 minutes into our service. I asked the kids if they had received any presents- it was after all Christmas day and children normally receive many gifts. I went around the kids and they mentioned various gifts. One received some toys, another a bike, another a doll and others received various electronic devices.

Then foolishly I asked this little boy who I had forgotten came from a Buddhist background if he had received a present that morning. He did not speak. Then I noticed his bottom lip start to shake. And then the boy who was probably only 5 or 6 began to shed a tear. He did not sob or bawl – I just remember this one little tear coming down his face. His family had no connection with this Christmas event- their shop was open for business and their was no special presents.

You will be very pleased to hear that though our church was not large that little boy left after church that day with an armful of presents. Somehow the parents of our church rallied to find some toys to teach this little boy of our traditions of giving and the reasons behind our giving.

There are plenty of children sadly who will not receive a gift today. But what is worse is that most will not know the real reason behind our generous tradition of giving gifts.

At the time of Jesus birth there were a group or star gazers, called Magi – who were literally studying the stars at night to see if there were any answers.

We don't know how many of these magi there were- and they are incorrectly called Kings but they saw a star in the East – and they came to Bethlehem to worship the king born as Jesus. And they bought gifts of gold, and incense and myrr. – to worship the Christ child.

We give because God first gave to us – we give on Christmas Day – because God has given the greatest gift of all. There is joy of course in giving as well as receiving – but our tradition of presents should remind us of the greatest gift of all – Jesus – the baby of Bethlehem.

## **Part 2**

I remember another Christmas – many years later when I was the pastor of a church which had a connection with a major university in Sydney. Again as we celebrated Christmas one year we gathered together for worship on Christmas day. Most of the students had returned to their homes in country NSW or overseas. A few remained to worship with the local families of the church.

Again the children gathered at the front during part of the service and I asked them if they received any gifts. A few spoke and then I encouraged them to share what they had received. One child of about 6 years of age, who just happened to be one of my sons, remarked that he had received a new toy airplane, some textas, some books and then he mentioned three or four other small things.

I couldn't help myself asking if he had received any other gifts. "No he said that was all". "What about the bike I heard myself asking him." As a parent who paid the bills I knew what was the most valuable present he had received. I knew how tight our personal finances were and that that bike had stretched the credit limit that month. As a father – I knew that giving your child their first bike was a big deal.

But to a 6 year old a present was a present. For children value or cost is less important than their perceived enjoyment. So easily the values we place on this special day we call Christmas can become so easily skewed.

On the first Christmas day – the magi – sometimes called the wise men – came to worship as they followed the star from the east. We don't know what their presents were worth. Gold has always been a precious metal – valued for its purity and strength. Frankincense and Myrrh were resins used to create incense. Incense was used in Jesus days to create a beautiful aroma in a home – Gold was to please the eyes and incense was to please the nose.

The magi's gifts represented value in an ancient culture – they were a way of recognising the worth of something or someone. And so these men came to seek out the baby Jesus – and to offer their gifts not just in respect, but in quiet adoration. We read in the Gospel of Matthew:

When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.

## **Part 3**

Years later at church a problem occurred in our family – and to this day I am a little embarrassed to tell the story. My wife and I at this stage had three children their ages at the time being about 10, 8 and 6. We would often go to church in separate cars as I often had to go early to set up. My wife and I would normally check when we left church to make sure between us we had all three children.

This particular Christmas was hectic and busy, and when we got home from church we began the morning celebrations with friends who had come for morning tea.

The phone rang unusually on Christmas morning and on the other end was the assistant pastor of our church. Mal here he said – Richard did you leave anything at church- he asked. “Not that I know of“ I replied. There was a pause. “ Are you sure he said”. He then proceeded to tell me that we had left our daughter at church and as he was the last to leave he thought I might like to know.

I hope you have not forgotten anything this Christmas day.

I trust you know exactly where all your children and grandchildren are.

I am sure you have not forgotten a present or failed to have every item of the your Christmas lunch ready to eat. We spend so much time in Australia preparing for Christmas ; it is sad that for many people – they do forget one thing. In all the hype about Santa, about snow, about cards , presents and food often we forget altogether about the real star of Christmas, Jesus.

The wise men , the magi bought their gifts and they bought their worship to the one who was sent by God to be the saviour and Lord of the world. Imagine if the wise men had come and bought their gifts, had followed the star and on the way home had commented- “oh no we forgot to worship Jesus.”

To worship Jesus is to remember why he came. We humans decided long ago that we could do without God. We turned our backs on his ways and decided to run things our way. And the chaos and destruction that our sin has caused- continues to threaten our very existence. God could easily have put an end to this world but instead he sought to send a saviour.

Born to the virgin  
 He would die an unjust death  
 But would be raised from the dead  
 And would now reign with God the father

We must not forget that our Christmas celebration is first and foremost a time to worship the God who is willing to rescue us from our sin. The prince of peace – wants that peace to start as we turn back to God and offer him our worship and praise.

Thanks so much for being part of our 2 CH service this Christmas morning. For the many who listen to this program who are not able to get to church this day – can I thank you for being part of this special radio opportunity to worship our King – the babe of Bethlehem.

To those who are able – can I invite you to worship in your church this day – to remember that the reason behind the presents – is the presence of our saviour Jesus.

Merry Christmas – may Jesus ever be our prince of peace

*Lord on this Christmas morning- we thank you for the birth of your son, Jesus – we worship Him with gifts, with song , with family and with joy !*

*Amen*