

CHURCH MAKES SENSE, SAYS PAULA



PAULA DALLEY was surprised at first when she heard that her local Anglican church was running a body and spirituality day – with free massages and make-up workshops – in the lead up to Christmas. “I didn’t think that church people would be into that sort of thing,” she said. Although the day included a talk about Jesus, Paula found it ‘quite different’ from the churches she’d been to before. “I grew up going to a Catholic school – had very much the old structured way of doing things.”

Christmas time had sparked Paula’s return to church. But what did that child-born-in-a-manger story have to do with life in Australia today? Well, everything, Paula found out. The life, death and resurrection of that baby was the climax of the story of

God’s love for the world. A God who really wants to have a relationship with us.

Paula encountered a community overflowing with God’s love. “I really felt welcomed from the start,” she says. “I walked in and didn’t even expect to be noticed, but some of the women came up to speak to me directly afterwards. I even got invited to a barbecue the next day. That completely blew me away!”

She’s been growing spiritually ever since. “I’ve definitely been changing,” she says. “I have a much better understanding of what the Bible is talking about.”

And Christmas has a new significance. “I’ve always loved Christmas, and always associated it with the birth of Christ, but it just means much more to me now. More than just the baby in the nativity scene.”

Craig Schafer, Paula’s pastor, can’t think of a better time than Christmas to reconnect with church – or to try it out for the first time.

“It’s a time of celebration,” he said. “You’re guaranteed to hear the basic message of why Jesus was born into the world in the first place, why it’s important that you follow him wholeheartedly, and you’re going to do it in the church’s most welcoming environment all year.”

Paula agrees. “Come along and have a look, because you don’t know what you’re missing out on. It’s not what you might think – it’s definitely not what I thought!”

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GOD MAKES SENSE

IT’S common sense to believe in God. This statement is not intended to annoy those who aren’t believers. It is simply a historical reality: throughout the history of the world people everywhere have worshipped some deity. Like our interest in art and music or our longing for good relationships, honouring the Creator, or creators, is one of the few shared hallmarks of the human race. It is common to most people who have ever lived. Whether ancient Babylonians, nomadic Goths, Australian aborigines or post-Christian Westerners: all cultures have expressed a belief in the divine. Even today, over 80% of Australians still acknowledge the existence of some kind of god. (i)

Of course, some people (around 5%) are still atheists. They argue that the beautiful complexities of the universe are just accidents. But most people follow the logic of the ancient poem found in the Bible:

The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
The first thing to say is that God is much ‘bigger’ than us in every sense. So we can never completely describe him or understand him. It would be like a slug trying to understand Einstein’s theories to expect us to understand God.

We do know something about God, but

we are dependent on him revealing himself to us. He has done that through the Bible and through his Son, Jesus.

The Bible tells us that God is a living personal Spirit. He is not an impersonal force, but a living being who acts. God is personal with his own characteristics. He is Spirit who exists apart from this world and is above and beyond it.

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