

## Thoughts for Today... PREACHING AT CHRISTMAS TIME

I came across this article a couple of years ago; thought I'd share it.

We've all been there before. It's Christmas. The church is full. A whole bunch of people who aren't normally at church on Sunday mornings, are sitting in the pews. Perhaps you're 1 of them. Christmas carols have been sung. Maybe there's a play with a real live Mary, Joseph & baby. Maybe the Sunday school kids are singing a sweetly off-key version of "Away in a Manger". There are some prayers & more singing, & someone's read the familiar Christmas story that begins, "In those days a decree went out..." But before you can sing Silent Night, the pastor's going to ramble on for a while. This is the part you dread. What's the pastor going to say this year? As a pastor, I'm deeply aware that most people in church on Christmas aren't there to hear me. It's weird for us who preach. I'd wager a guess that many Sunday morning people look forward to sermons, or at least welcome sermons as an important part of worship. But Christmas is different. Churches are uncharacteristically full. Visitors, strangers, unfamiliar faces fill the pews. It feels like the Grand Final of the church year. Your small group of devoted fans have been watching you all year, but now the whole world wants to see the show... well not really the show, they're really there for the commercials. I've been in the pew more than in the pulpit on Christmas during my life. & I've been subjected to atrocious Christmas sermons. Sermons from good preachers that make me think... "Huh? Did I miss something?" For some reason, Pastors pick strange sub-themes for their Christmas sermons, sub-texts that're really about something else... I call these Junk Food sermons because they're mostly empty calories that don't really fill us. They're more about the anxiety of the preacher, than about the story of Jesus. Here are 11 of them.

The "come to church" sermon: The pastor tries tell all the visitors that because Jesus was born in a manger, they should try out this church on some other days of year. Churches are usually described as places that're pretty to cool to hang out at.

2. The "come back to church" sermon: This is related to the last 1 but it's for all the non-attending kids & grandkids of the regulars. The Pastor stresses the importance of Jesus' birth, & the commitment that follows. Jesus was born for you, so you better join a committee & give some money. Well, not quite that direct, but there's the awkward sense that we were signed up for a job without our permission.

3. The "why are you here?" sermon: This is preached by the pastor who's done a few too many "come to church" sermons. It's a passive aggressive lecture for the Christmas crowd. It reminds them that coming to church once a year doesn't count as being a real church goer, & so we should all feel bad for missing any Sundays at all.

4. The "Jesus is the reason, so Santa is not" sermon: This 1 is a bit of a killjoy. The pastor tries to explain the "real story" behind Christmas, by telling us that Santa isn't real. The War on Christmas people love this sermon, but everyone else feels a little sheepish for having the wrong kind of Christmas joy, & writing "From Santa" on the present they gave to their kids. (The War on Christmas people wrote "From Jesus").

5. The "This God stuff sounds implausible, but you can believe it because we love each other" sermon: This 1 can get a little esoteric. The pastor talks about virgin births, angels, & magi following stars. It all sounds a little fantastical yet sceptical at the same time. But the pastor assures you that it's okay because the rest of us believe this crazy stuff.

6. The "magic of Christmas" sermon: This 1 has all the feelings. & nostalgia. Maybe the Pastor shares a story of a childhood Christmas complete with grandmother's knitting & Charlie Brown Christmas tree. The only mention of Jesus is an uncomfortable apology for his awkward presence.

7. The "chicken soup for the... huh?" sermon: This is a storytelling sermon. The Pastor pretends to tell the story from the perspective of the donkey that Mary rode to Bethlehem, or the inn-keeper's nagging barmaid wife, or even from the vantage point of a nearby tree. It seems to be somewhat related to the Christmas story, but no 1 is sure why or how, not even the pastor, apparently.

8. The "theology lecture" sermon: This 1 is long, dry & confusing. It has big words like incarnation, eschatology, missio dei. The pastor seems to be really explaining what all this Christmas stuff is about, but you can hear snoring, a teen playing games on an iPhone & a baby crying the whole time. No 1 knows when it will end.

9. The "anti-consumerism, let's meet at the soup kitchen afterwards" sermon: This 1 is full of high-minded values, except everyone feels ashamed for having seen a Christmas commercial or accidentally singing along with a Christmas carol on the radio in the previous month. The good news is that the local soup kitchen has been informed that we all are coming to serve dinner after the service.

10. The "Christmas spirit will make you believe" sermon: This 1 talks a lot about faith, believing, finding the divine, opening our hearts, letting the spirit in. The Pastor says just have faith, but what we're supposed to have faith in is not quite clear. Is it Je-

11. The “please believe in Jesus, my job depends on it” sermon: This 1 is from the pastor who’s feeling pressure to get more members. We’re encouraged to start believing in Jesus, even if it isn’t cool. But Baby Jesus was cool. Oh, & join the church, even though it isn’t cool. But our youth worker is cool! This 1 feels desperate.

Now, don’t get me wrong. I know there are a lot of great Christmas sermons that have been & will be preached. I know that many of my fellow pastors work hard to proclaim the story of Jesus born into the world for all creation & for us in particular. But I think Christmas can drive pastors, nuts, trying to preach a good sermon on the same story year after year. & if you do get 1 of the sermons above, forgive your pastor. They’re just trying to do a good job on, maybe, the most pressure filled day of year. To my colleagues. I don’t have the answers, try to keep it simple. Tell the story of God coming into the world. Don’t worry about why we should believe it or getting visitors to come back. Let God do that stuff. Just preach it like the angels: “Do not be afraid; for see— I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” Blessings.

## Prayer & Praise

- Prayer for Brian Miller as he is in the RBH.
- Praise God for the response we have had from our church family for BSF studies. Prayer that this will be a great time and resource to help us understand more of the Word.
- For our church family and wider community as we prepare to celebrate Christmas. For the gospel to be spoken and heard, and for each and every family to find joy and be able to celebrate this season.

### Toy Drive

Christmas is a time of year where there are many people who can’t afford to buy their children any Christmas presents. As a church we are constantly asked for Christmas presents around this time of year. If you can help, we love people to bring in some toys to the office over the next week.

### New Years Eve!

Get ready, because we are planning a special New Year’s Eve family time! Starting Sunday 31st December- 5pm until 8pm;. We’d love you to join us for some fun & games, a short message & of course a meal together (If you could please bring something for us to share). The theme is: *What made 2017 special for you?*

### House Sitter Required

Helen Warrener is looking for a person to look after her house from 16th Dec-26th Dec. If you can help, please phone Helen on 0402 128 437

### Sound & AV

We are looking for more people willing to jump on the team and help run the tech part of Sunday services. If you’re interested in being trained up, see Ross or Judith Niebling.

### Air Conditioning

We are extremely blessed to now have air-con! This will certainly help us through what is looking to be a very hot Summer! Please persevere with us while we try to get the settings correct for our comfort.

### Thank You

A special thank you to all who contributed in myriad ways to Christmas@theBay! We received written responses from 11 people with 20 requests for more information about ministries in our church - for our Youth Groups, Men’s Breakfasts, Christianity Explained, Wanting to know more about God, Craft group, Young Adults, and interest in courses Theo has planned for 2018. There have been additional conversations and phone calls with others from our local community. Please pray that the initial interest shown will not fade but continue to increase. "Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown." (Matt 13:8)

### For Your Information

**Toilets** are located through the breezeway and in the main hall.

**Baby’s change facility** is located in the disabled toilet.

**Additional car parking** is available opposite the church near Palm Lakes Care or Centrelink. Please do not park on grassed areas.

**Hearing Loop** operates in church—for access switch your aid to the “T” function.

**Sermon Podcasts:** are available on our website

**Prayer Chain:** Contact Lil Buchanan 3203 1188

**Bulletin Items:** Contact the church office by Tuesday afternoon.

### **Online Tithes & Offering:**

Name: Deception Bay Baptist Church Bank of Queensland

BSB: 124 001 A/C 22 153 809

### **CONTACT US**

Find us at: [www.dbaybap.com](http://www.dbaybap.com) Church Office 21 Water Street (PO Box 59) Deception Bay 4508

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## Celebrate!

### Birthdays!

17th Dorothy LeBherz

18th Shirley Mussig

### Anniversaries

18th David & Kris Wheeler



The Star Christmas movie is now showing at Event Cinemas Morayfield and Chermside. Make sure you take your family friends along to see it, it comes highly recommended! Check online for session times near you.