



ALTERNativity
Just God, Simply Christmas

Press Release

No time for Christmas

This week the 'Christmas menu' became available in my local butcher shop. I passed a dozen pubs and restaurants advertising Christmas dinner deals. We received a number of Christmas catalogues in the post and a young friend proudly told me about the 42 slide power point presentation she had put together for Santa Claus.

It is the last week of September.

I'm sure it is not my imagination that the count down to Christmas starts earlier each year, and the run up to the big day speeds by faster and faster. I remember as a child that December seemed to last *forever*, especially the first two weeks, until we were allowed to put up the tree. Now, if you blink you'll miss it. The most festive month of the year whirls by in a flurry of parties and concerts and late night opening shopping; and before you know it, New Year is over, and it's back to work.

Excuse me, but are we not missing the point?

A brief online search produced 170,000 hits for 'stress at Christmas' and 312,000 hits for 'effective time management at Christmas'. Glossy magazines from October onwards feature articles offering tips and advice on how to best spend your time preparing for Christmas, saving for Christmas and surviving Christmas.

When did Christmas become something that we have to survive, rather than anticipate and enjoy? When did it start to be a caricature of the busy - ness of our day to day life, rather than a holiday? When did people start squeezing the meaning out of Christmas?

At ALTERNativity, a Glasgow-based charity, one of the main aims is to encourage people – and especially women- to take time out from the preparations, to think about the year past and to dream about the year to come. Advent was traditionally a time of reflection and this has got lost in the flurry of spending. One of the questions the charity often asks women as they talk about their preparations is; 'what is Christmas preparing you for?'

The group sells a variety of resources, including advent reflections encased in beautifully made star boxes which come from a co-operative in the slums of Bangkok. The reflections and the boxes are designed to take some time out to think about yourself, think about the friends and community around and also to think about the poorest, especially across the world.

Perhaps the pressure cooker that Christmas has become has something to do with growing, and to some extent, conflicting expectations of what Christmas *should* be like, and how we *should* spend our time: the modern, yet stylish decorations, the gourmet Christmas dinner, the personal witticisms hand-scripted in each greetings card, the home-made mince pies and the hectic social calendar.

And it's not just that these expectations are imposed on us by other people – we actually impose them upon ourselves. If we are not out every night and run off our feet, overwhelmed by 'things to do', then quite frankly, there is Something Wrong.

Two years ago, a throat infection turned nasty saw me in hospital for the second week in December, and I was allowed home on the condition that I kept a low profile and didn't go out much for the next 4 weeks. I was quite devastated; and convinced that Christmas was going to be rubbish because I had to cancel all my plans, and stay close to home until after New Year, whilst everyone else was out having fun.

It turned out to be one of the best Christmases ever. When I got home from the hospital my lovely husband had lit the fire and bought the tree, and we spent a decadent evening hanging decorations, listening to the Rat Pack Christmas c.d. and sipping mulled wine. We prioritised who we really wanted to see, and what we really needed to go out for, and only the essentials made the list. Our get-togethers with friends – those that took place – were cosy and relaxed, and we grabbed the opportunity to watch all the cheesy, classic Christmas movies that we both love. Christmas Day was the piece de resistance – just the two of us – church in the morning, and the rest of the day at our own pace. I loved it because I actually felt 'Christmassy' instead of just exhausted!

The best thing of all was that I was able to make the time to reflect on what Christmas is really about. The baby, the stable, the star, and the incredible gift that God gave to us in Christ Jesus. Because Jesus was born and lived on earth as a human we can be assured that we don't have a God who is distant and aloof, we have one who loves us very much, and understands the challenges and troubles we face. He shares our joys and He shares our pain. He is our shining example of how we should live our lives in a busy and broken world.

The census and the journey to Bethlehem aside, Jesus wasn't born into the hustle and bustle of a busy city. Mary and Joseph weren't cross checking their diaries, trying to co ordinate Magi, Angels and Shepherds into their busy schedule. Joseph didn't nip out to get a few extra bottles of wine – just in case. The Gospel of Luke tells us that Mary received her guests, heard the praises they had for her Son, then took the time to 'ponder them in her heart' (Ch 2 v. 19). To me, this implies that she had times of peace and quiet and reflection.

How much of that do we make time for at Christmas? Not just church services, not just carol concerts, not just stopping to look at the Nativity scene in the centre of town – but genuine peace and quiet and reflection at what God gave to us on that very first Christmas.

*"T'was the month before Christmas and all through the city,
Lights twinkled brightly, shop windows looked pretty ...
Harassed looking shoppers were milling around
For food, cards and presents had to be found.*

*The children were nestled snug round the TV
Whilst you bought this year's colours for trimming the tree
You were up wrapping gifts 'til a quarter to two,
And you still hadn't booked for the works Christmas do ...*

*The neighbours invite you for mince pies and mulled wine –
You know you'd accept – if you could just find the time!" Nicola Finch*

Ends

Further Information

For more press information or interviews please contact

Maggie Lunan, ALTERnativity:

0141 221 4242

info@alternativity.org.uk

Notes to editors

ALTERnativity

ALTERnativity helps people look at Christmas with new eyes. It enables people to make choices around the celebration which are fun, challenge the pressures of commercialisation and make life easier for themselves. It hopes to take the stress out of Christmas! Underlying this are questions of injustice, exclusion and inequality both locally and globally and these are the serious issues it tries to address in a light-hearted and accessible way.

Full details of resources for women, families, schools and faith groups are available on www.alternativity.org.uk