

## A message from the Rector. . .

As the New Year is now upon us I wonder what hopes it holds for us both as individuals and as a church. If we were able to write the script for 2007 how would it run? I hear a lot of talk about people making 'New Year resolutions' some of which leave me feeling a bit confused. A better question we might ask is – "If there was one thing I could change in my life or in the life of my church what would it be? This is not a trivial question encouraging us to be preoccupied with our own wants and needs. Rather, it is encouraging us to think about how we might make a positive difference in the lives of others and in the wider community.

I was interested that in the Sydney Morning Herald this week, the Federal Minister for Health, Tony Abbott, wrote an article on the place that Christianity has in modern-day Australia. This is a follow up to the very widely reported comments by the new Labour leader, Kevin Rudd. Abbott commented that "*Contemporary Australian culture has ... a disdain for authority, a fascination with what's new and preference for self-expression (which) counts against traditional faith.*" He later goes on to say – "*The impossibility of satisfactorily proving the existence of God or the divinity of Christ (let alone other doctrines such as the virgin birth) is a huge obstacle to those who regard themselves as sophisticated thinkers. The modern mind resists mysteries, even those which retain their hold over our imaginations.*"

With the publication of the book 'The God Delusion,' by a prominent Oxford scientist, it is easy to see how people take comfort in his position. He regards it as indefensible that people should believe what Christians believe in this modern world. Over the Christmas period I encouraged those who were present to examine the evidence for themselves. The idea that the accounts surrounding the life of Jesus are myths or legends and not to be taken seriously, needs to be scrutinized very carefully. This simplistic approach must not be swallowed in some naïve fashion. I encouraged people to take a copy of the leaflet, 'Evidence for Jesus,' and go away and consider it carefully.

In his book 'The Case for Christ,' the respected Chicago lawyer and editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, Lee Strobel, took on the challenge as an atheist, to examine the evidence behind Christianity's beliefs about Jesus. As a former atheist, Strobel is familiar with the major objections to Christianity. But at the end of his investigations which paralleled his own two-year search for answers, he summarized the overwhelming evidence for the truth of the Bible's claims about who Jesus was and what he did. This led, not surprisingly, to his conversion to Christ. His comment at the end of his period of investigation was this – "*The atheism I had embraced for so long buckled under the weight of historical truth. It was a stunning and radical outcome, certainly not what I had anticipated when I embarked on this investigative process.*"

It is this conviction that I hope inspires us and encourages us to be steadfast and committed in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ in East Sydney. One of my 'resolves' in this New Year is to explore a whole range of new ways of presenting Christ, that people might find hope and salvation in him. He is still 'The way, the truth and the life' and no one has adequately refuted that truth or found a better substitute. But the whole church must share this passion, and be praying for opportunities to 'make Christ known.' One of the observations we can make from the first recipients of the 'good news of great joy,' at the first Christmas was that the shepherds immediately shared the good news. Luke records – "*When they had seen him they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child and all who heard it were amazed...*" (Luke 2:17)

This year I will be introducing a short course here called 'Introducing God' which through a series of video presentations and discussions gives people the opportunity to explore these things for themselves. This course is an authentic Australian production, field tested here over the last few years, and it comes highly recommended by those who have seen it. I hope we will be keen to see this course flourish here at St John's and be looking for opportunities to invite people to be involved. Good news is for sharing and I hope each of us will play our part in these new initiatives in the life of St John's.

**Hugh Cox**