

### Christmas Day.

I know some very earnest ministers who get really wound up about Santa. I heard one in NI say to a school assembly once, 'Santa spells SATAN!' That is probably a bit over the top, but you can see why he might have thought that, since for many people in Britain today Christmas *is* all about Santa and nothing to do with Jesus. Instead of CHRISTmas, perhaps it should be renamed SANTAmas. It's very strange, isn't it, in our sceptical, scientific age that we have pushed out Jesus from Christmas who we *know* actually existed, and replaced him with Father Christmas who we all know *didn't* exist. Even the hardest atheists among us make their children believe in someone we know didn't exist. When their children get to the age when they no longer believe in Father Christmas, they are a little sad at the loss of make-believe. And yet those same atheists think it almost a criminal act when Christians tell their children about Jesus who was a real figure. What strange creatures we are!

Anyway, if we're not allowed these days to talk publicly about the Lord Jesus, it's OK to talk about Santa and to have his images all over the street. No-one will be offended by Father Christmas.

Now it's easy for us Christians to get po-faced about Santa, but what he stands for isn't so far removed from the real message of Christmas, for Father Christmas is a symbol of *giving*. He comes from the North Pole on his sleigh with his enormous sack of presents and heroically manages to get down everyone's chimneys to leave a present for every single child

in the world. He gives these gifts freely, expecting nothing in return, except perhaps that the children should be good boys and girls. Is that really so different from what Jesus is trying to tell the world?

Even the most hardened secularists who don't want anything at all to do with Jesus recognise that the spirit of Christmas is giving and generosity of heart. As the traffic warden is just about to slap a ticket on your car on Christmas Eve, you automatically reply, 'Come off it. It's Christmas time'. When a squabble is about to break out you instinctively say, 'Hold it lads. What about a bit of peace and goodwill towards men? Where's the Christmas spirit?'

The very first Christmas of the First World War was marked by a truce between the German and Allied trenches. Fritz and Tommy famously played a game of football in No Man's Land on Christmas Day.

In Charles Dickens' *Christmas Carol* all that miserliness, curmudgeonliness, and bitterness were immortalised in the figure of Scrooge. He had to learn to open his heart, and to stop thinking about money and to start loving people.

So, yes, if Santa is a secular figure, what he stands for is not wrong. It isn't anything that Jesus would disapprove of. Christmas is about giving. God is a giving God. He is also a *forgiving* God. He loved us so much that he gave us his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life. And when Jesus came, he *also* gave. He gave himself for others, especially the outcasts and

the forgotten, in love. He gave himself for our sins on the Cross of Calvary.

And we all *know* - Christians and atheists - that this is right. We all *know* that it is better to give than to receive. We all try to be more generous at Christmas, and to bury the hatchet, because we know it's right. The tragedy is that we don't keep it up once Christmas is over. Why not?

Well, if people don't want Jesus at Christmas, at least there is Santa to remind them of what Jesus wants from us - giving hearts that work for peace on earth and goodwill towards men.

So let's not knock Father Christmas. But if Santa is good, Jesus is better. Listen to this:

Santa lives at the North Pole ...  
JESUS is everywhere.

Santa rides in a sleigh ...  
JESUS rides on the wind and walks on the water.

Santa comes but once a year ...  
JESUS is an ever present help.

Santa fills your stockings with goodies ...  
JESUS supplies all your needs.

Santa comes down your chimney uninvited ...  
JESUS stands at your door and knocks, and then enters your heart when invited.

You have to wait in line to see Santa ...  
JESUS is as close as the mention of His name.

Santa lets you sit on his lap ...  
JESUS lets you rest in His arms.

Santa doesn't know your name, all he can say is "Hi little boy or girl, what's your name?" ...

JESUS knew our name before we did. Not only does He know our name, He knows our address too. He knows our history and future and He even knows how many hairs are on our heads.

Santa has a belly like a bowl full of jelly ...  
JESUS has a heart full of love.

All Santa can offer is HO HO HO ...  
JESUS offers health, help and hope.

Santa says "You better not cry" ...  
JESUS says "Cast all your cares on me for I care for you."

Santa's little helpers make toys ...  
JESUS makes new life, mends wounded hearts, repairs broken homes and builds mansions.

Santa may make you chuckle but ...  
JESUS gives you joy that is your strength.

While Santa puts gifts under your tree ...  
JESUS became our gift and died on a tree.

It's obvious there is really no comparison.

We need to remember WHO Christmas is all about.  
We need to put Christ back in Christmas,

Jesus is still the reason for the season.