

**Hospitality...
Community...
Food...**



THE HEAVENLY PARTY

Recover the Fun:
Life-Changing
Celebrations for Home & Community

By Michelle Guinness

Published by Monarch Books/ LionHudson
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ISBN: 978-1-85424-835-0 pb

RRP: **\$29.95**

Having attended Cheryl Magrini's workshop last year, on hospitality and the gospel for children, I was interested to see if this book developed Cheryl's ideas further.

Michelle Guinness draws on the exuberance and richness of her Jewish heritage and her life as the wife of an Anglican minister, in this blend of Jewish celebration and Christian tradition, which, while initially home-based, applies just as easily to congregational life.

Michelle Guinness was born and brought up Jewish, but in her teens she turned to the Christian faith because at last in Jesus she found a warm, accessible and welcoming manifestation of God the Father, whom she had always known but only remotely. But on joining the Christian church she experienced moments of profound culture shock – she found western Christianity dull and lifeless. She missed the exuberance, the partying, the celebrations, the food, the incessant noise of chatter and dancing, the splendour and richness of family and community festivals, of her Jewish heritage.

I found the first half of the book riveting as she reflects on the journey to find an authentic expression of faith and to develop a rich and inviting spiritual context in which

to bring up their children. It was a journey that drew with increasing confidence on both her Jewish roots and her husband Peter's different traditions, and the resulting blend of hospitality and spiritual adventures, while originally home-based, eventually spilled over into their church community and became an integral part of Peter's approach to the parishes and congregations in which he worked.

I loved the Jewish Jesus she uncovers – a "full-blooded, life-loving gourmet of a Messiah ... a broad, strapping Jesus" as she describes him: "I never realised how attractive Jesus was, how dynamic, authoritative, affectionate, outspoken and true... the merry twinkle in his eye, his wonderful sense of the absurd, his fun with his friends (and with the Pharisees, often at their expense) and his capacity for living life to the full..." (page 40)

She explains in detail the Jewish history of the various celebrations she describes, which I found very readable, interesting and informative. However, as she described the communal celebrations and their accompanying liturgies I found some of the liturgies very wordy, particularly those that stretched out over days or a week. I wondered how child-friendly they were; they

really need the flesh and blood of colour, music, costume, props, atmosphere and hospitality to bring them to life – which is the reader's job!

Among the ideas that particularly appealed to me were the alternative Halloween or All Saints celebrations, the Advent ideas for families, and the weekly ideas and seasonal ideas for families. And of course the food – the fabulous recipes with scrumptious photos to tempt you!

Highlights of the book include:

- the Jewish background to the various celebrations she describes
- Jesus as a "full-blooded, life-loving gourmet of a Messiah"
- Community is central to her understanding of Christian living – the western Christian churches are in danger of losing that communal ethic in the rampant individualism of post-modern society and the severity of the protestant work ethic since the industrial revolution.
- Scrumptious recipes...

The overall impression is of sumptuous, extravagant hospitality and uninhibited joyful enjoyment of life. It's a book I'll have to go back to time and again to see what I can glean and adapt from it.

This is an extended version of the review published in **KUCA e-News Autumn 2008** page 20.

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