



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula
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Sermon

Good News for All

Luke 2:8-20

Christmas Day 2014

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This sermon is based on David Pettett's research of Marsden's sermons. That document may be found at:
<http://alltogether.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Christmas-Day-1814.pdf>

About 2000 years ago, some shepherds in the fields near Bethlehem were surprised by a messenger. (Did you know angel means messenger?) This messenger had quite a presence – well the glory of the Lord shone around him.

The messenger said he had good news for them – this was a message which would bring joy to all the people. And, of course, the news was that at last a Saviour had been born. He was the Messiah, the anointed One, for whom Israel had longed for centuries. He had been born in Bethlehem.

And remarkably, he would be found lying in an animal's food trough.

At that many more angels appeared before them singing God's praises. When the angels had gone - and the shepherds had recovered - they went to see what was happening. Sure enough there was such a new-born child and the shepherds told other people what the angel had said and all who heard it were amazed.

Fast forward to Christmas Day 1814 - 200 years ago today. Another messenger came with good tidings. He also spoke to men who were puzzled by what he said.

That messenger was Samuel Marsden. He was a chaplain to the colony of New South Wales. Soon after he arrived in 1794, some Maori visited from NZ and he made them welcome at his farm at Parramatta. He was impressed by these visitors who included a young chief, Ruatara, who was eager to learn agricultural skills. Marsden determined to find a way to teach Maori such skills and to bring them the gospel.

In time, Marsden gained the backing of the Church Missionary Society for a mission to NZ. He returned from England bringing the first mission families out to NSW. However, after the killing of the crew of the "Boyd" in 1809, ship's captains were reluctant to sail to NZ.

How could missionaries go to so dangerous a place? The answer came through the help Marsden had given to Ruatara. Ruatara wanted the skills the missionaries could teach and as a chief he could provide protection.

So determined was Marsden, that he bought a sailing vessel the "Active" with his own money to serve the mission to NZ. Finally, in late 1814, he was able to bring to the Bay of Islands the first three families who would start the mission work in NZ. And so it was on Christmas Day, 200 years ago that the first church service was held on NZ soil and the first sermon was preached.

We know that Ruatara fenced off ½ acre of ground as an assembly area, provided upturned canoes for seats the Europeans, built a pulpit and a reading desk. At 10am, the service started. They sang, "All People that on earth do dwell" and his text was (as today) Luke 2:10 "Behold I bring you glad tidings of great joy."

We know he had already learnt some Maori from Ruatara, who assisted with translation. We don't have a record of his sermon but there are copies of three sermons he preached on other occasions. David Pettett researched them and found all of them covered the same eight points. So he may well have based his sermon on the same ideas.

I am not going to recite the suggested sermon reconstruction – it is available if you interested afterwards. Rather I will list his eight points with some quotations.

1. The birth of Christ is the most important event the world has ever seen.

It is, I suppose, the biggest festival of our year, but mostly the festival hides the event from us. If the message is true, if that baby was in fact God who had come to live as a man – it is a stupendous event.

2. It is good tidings of great joy for all people.

But is it relevant? The baby was first described as "a Saviour." That child grew to be the man who bore the sins of the world to save us from our sins. That makes this overwhelmingly relevant and vital for each of us.

It was news to bring joy to all but not all would receive it. Not all would receive him. Not all will be saved through him, but only those who trust him for the salvation he offers.

3. This event has been long and anxiously expected by the faithful.

The Jews had been longing for a Messiah and Saviour to come. The coming One was referred to as "The Desire of All the Nations". By this time, both Jews and Gentiles had an expectation that a great king was soon to be born.

4. Those who are awaiting a temporal messiah will be disappointed because this Messiah brings spiritual blessings.

They were thinking in terms of a human solution – a political or military solution to the troubles of this life. But as Marsden said, "Christ's kingdom was not of this world and the deliverance which he was to work out was not to be temporal but spiritual deliverance."

Most of the Jews presumably expected the Messiah as a descendent of King David would "distinguished by some outward significance, power and majesty. "

The Wise Men looked for the one born to be king of the Jews. So they went first to the King's palace.

6. This Messiah was not born in a palace, but a stable, making him accessible to all people.

Since his kingdom was not of this world he would not come as an earthly prince. Though his birth was proclaimed by angels, they were not sent to kings, priests or nobles, but to shepherds. Shepherds were poor working men and boys.

He was not born in a palace but a stable – he was one of the ordinary people - available to ordinary people.

7. This is the superior Saviour.

Moses had delivered them from slavery; Samuel defeated their enemies, but this Saviour came to save all the world from the power of sin, Satan, death and hell. He came to save us with an everlasting salvation from all evil.

To summarise Marsden's extortation on the ministry of Jesus:

- He came to deal with the sins of the world and give light to those who sat in darkness.
- He came to teach a better way and higher calling.
- He came to lay the foundation of the church – the gathering of believers in him.
- He came to bring life and immortality.
- He came to show us the nature of God and call us to follow him in that new nature. We are called to holiness, love and joy.
- He came to teach poverty of Spirit: put love into action, love even your enemies. This had not previously been in any philosophy – all thought in terms of revenge. But, Jesus taught us to show mercy even as our Father in heaven sends sunshine and rain on the evil and the good alike.
- He came to teach us to be content with poverty; to disregard the world and its greatness.

So God sent us one who came to bring about an immediate reconciliation between God and humans, and to teach us how to be happy here below in the confidence of eternal life.

This is the good news the angel proclaimed; these are the tidings which bring joy. They bring joy to those who know they are sinners and cannot rescue themselves.

The news is to the Jewish people and to the non-Jews. It was to the people of that day, to those of 200 years ago and it is to us now. It was good news to people in Bethlehem, in Oihi Bay, and it is to us in Whangaparaoa.

We all need this news. Do you doubt it? "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." Do you claim this is not true for you? Do you really believe you do not need someone to rescue you?

All are invited to come for pardon – whether rich or poor, ignorant or learned, whatever we have done, God will forgive those who come trusting Jesus' salvation.

8. Now is the time to follow this Saviour because you may not be alive next Christmas season.

So I urge you to investigate these things. Look at the Bible, look at the booklet we will offer you after the service which tells of the coming of Gospel here 200 years ago and its spread among the Maori.

What would you have thought of the shepherds, after what they had seen and heard, if they had gone back to sleep without making any enquiry about the new born Saviour?

Again, I urge you to look for yourself. Your eternal happiness depends upon knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he sent. When you are convinced that the Christ was born in Bethlehem and that he came to save us from our sins, tell others – pass it on. The shepherds did just that – should we do less?

Marsden concluded with these words:

"It is my duty to tell you what will be the final consequences of your sins. Remember this day you have been warned, therefore your blood will be found upon your own head. Before the return of another Christmas, you may be removed from this world and have no further chance to see him but as your judge.

"My brethren it was for such as you the Saviour was born. It was for such as you he preached the gospel, and for such as you he died and rose again, and hath gone into heaven to prepare mansions for them who believe, having obtained eternal redemption for them.

You then who love the Saviour rejoice and glorify God with the shepherds. They saw him in the manger but him "whom you have not seen you love ; and even though you do not see him now, you

believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”¹

“Keep continually in mind the exceeding great love of your Lord & only Saviour that “...he was rich yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich”.²

“ Make your solemn covenants with him at this period. Dedicate yourselves to him.”

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¹ 1 Peter 1:7-9

² 2 Corinthians 8:9