

Sermon – 11.00pm 24th December 2007:

Make room in you heart for Jesus:

There was once a great king whose love for his people knew no limits. Although the kingdom was very large, the king took the time to know every person by name. Also everything the people of the kingdom had was a gift freely given by the loving king.

So, to show their love and appreciation to the king for all he had done for them, the people decided to have a great celebration to honor his birthday. Everyone agreed it was a marvelous idea. Preparations for the celebration were very elaborate. No expense was spared by the people. They adorned their homes with lights, decorations, and expensive ornaments. There were parties, dinners, and celebrations throughout the kingdom.

All the people brought gifts for their friends and family. Many of the gifts which the people gave each other were quite expensive, involving considerable indebtedness. In fact, the people spent more on the birthday celebration than they spent at any other time of the year.

Many who were not citizens of the kingdom, and who did not even know the king, joined in the celebration. Their celebration of the king's birth was marked by excessive drinking. Since they did not know the king, they invented a good-natured, fat fellow in a red suit. He laughed a lot, but never said anything. But that didn't matter because they were too busy celebrating to listen anyhow.

The great day of celebrating his birth finally arrived, and some of his people did come bringing gifts and thanking him for his goodness to them. But to his dismay, most of the citizens never came to his house at all on the day of celebration. And the gifts brought to the king by those few who came were very meager when compared with the gifts they had given themselves.

For the most part the people said they had been so busy with all the celebrations and personal plans that they had forgotten about the king. Several said they had thought of him, but really could not work it into their schedules or budgets to come see him or bring a gift. A few were known to

be quite put out when it was suggested that going to the king's house or remembering him with a gift was important.

Those people who did come to his house and who brought their loving gifts were welcomed and blessed by the king. But when they had gone and he was alone again, the king fell to thinking of the vast numbers of his people who had forgotten and forsaken him. How could they have forgotten? Had he not loved them all? How could so many of his beloved people who had found the time and money for shopping and feasting and partying and decorating and all sorts of celebrations—how could they possibly be so thoughtless, so ungrateful or selfish? Did they not know that he, too, had feelings? Was not the purpose of the birthday celebration originally planned to honor him?

When the king was alone, pondering these questions, he felt the tears well up in his eyes. And in his loneliness, he wept.

One thought brought some hope and consolation. Even though they had forgotten him, but because the King loved his people so much his grace and mercy would not let him forget them.

It is with this same grace that our Heavenly Father sent an angel with a message of hope to a group of Shepherds gathered in a field. Much like us tonight on the Christmas Eve gathered in this field in Port Macquarie. The Shepherds were looking after their flocks. Tradition has it that a Shepherd had about 100 sheep and so at night they would congregate for fellowship and safety from predators of all kinds. Also as it was winter it is thought that they would have gathered around a fire for warmth.

Shepherds were also thought to be on the lowest rung of the social ladder so when God's messenger appeared to them it indicated that all people were included into what was about to happen. After the initial shock of the angel's appearance, our reading says they were terrified, I am sure that if a messenger from God in dazzling cloths was to appear before us now, we would be terrified also then after a few instances of CPI and some smelling salts we too would be ready to hear the angel's word from verse 10 – “do not be afraid – I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people”, and verse 11 – Today in the town of David a saviour has been born to you, he is Christ the Lord.”

The Angel then gave instructions as to how they would find this child and encourages them to go and see for themselves. The saviour of all people had been born but they had to go to Jesus and see him in his manger an animal's food trough. He was in this manger for there was no room for him in the inn.

The Shepherd's decided to accept the Angel's invitation and went into Bethlehem to see the baby. Not just another baby boy but one who is very special for he is God's Son now in human form, he is Christ the Lord, he is King. On seeing the baby Jesus these rough men of the outdoors knelt and worshiped their King, and as they returned to the flock they were filled with joy for they had made room in their hearts for Jesus.

Our story of the King has a resonance with the story of Jesus birth, as the Kings people really had no room in their hearts for him, much like the Christmas story and the message of the prophets had a resonance and message for the people of Ancient times, the message still has that resonance with people today, and shows that many in church and society as a whole still do not have room for Jesus in the hearts and their lives. They are too busy even on his birthday to acknowledge him. They enjoy the festivities associated with his birth, but do not invite him to share in them or in the gifts. It just does not seem right does it, that we should enjoy his gifts to us without honouring the giver with our gifts.

However it is not material gifts that our King seeks from us but rather spiritual gifts of love, joy, peace, patience, self control etc., He want us – you and me – 100%, not 60% or even 90% - in total surrender to him and his way, so one of the greatest gift you can bring to Jesus this and every Christmas is to acknowledge him as your saviour and King and to surrender YOURSELF to him, for with yourself comes you money, your time and your talents.

To do this we need to hear the Angel's message for ourselves and go to the inn and see the baby Jesus for that is where it all begins. Yes his life amongst us and his death on the cross are important to our faith journey but it all started with his humble and miraculous birth. So just like the Shepherds of old, we also need to bow down before him, acknowledge him as or Lord & King, praise him and make room for him in our lives. We need to put him in the penthouse of our world and then we too will return home joyfully and praising God for his Grace and Mercy and that he has not forgotten us.

So let us each one this, Christmas Eve, make room in our hearts, minds and lives for Jesus, and then let him take up permanent residence

Then as you share gifts with family and friends this Christmas season, give one to Jesus, give him yourself, warts and all, for he loves you and will lift you up and bring a peace beyond all understanding.

May the Grace and Peace of Christ be yours? Amen
Micheal Perrott