

Carols by Candlelight Sunday, 20 December 2009
No fear

Youtube - extreme ironing. On you tube you see skydivers doing extreme ironing after having jumped out of a parachute. Talk about leaving things to the last minute. Still you'd be you'd be "hard pressed" to find a better example of extreme ironing. There are a number of extreme sports and maybe there are those among us who enjoy the adrenalin rush of doing extreme activities.

What about extreme encounters.

Things are not always as they seem when the serpent got into conversation with Adam and Eve in the story of creation, the serpent got Adam and Eve to believe a lie and to disbelieve the truth. Fear entered the world when they acted upon that lie and discovered its reality and consequence. Fear can be a paralysing experience, like rabbits getting trapped in headlights, the feeling of being unable to move and being locked in its grip.

Our readings have been linked around this theme of fear and what God has done to counteract it. Three of our readings relate to extreme encounters with an angel or in the shepherds case angels. Certainly for me meeting an angel is not an everyday experience, in fact I am not aware it has ever happened.. I am not sure what they looked like, did they appear to be human, did they have wings, were very masculine or feminine probably not, but certainly Gabriel one of the most powerful angels, and he knew how to make an entrance. For Mary and Joseph and the Shepherds, fear or terror was their initial response as the message from God was given. Maybe they figured they were going to die. Certainly for them all this was an unexpected visit.

What of Mary , well what a shock, firstly a teenager seeing an angel but more than that to be told that she is going to get pregnant and that God is going to make it happen. Now as she was going to marry Joseph, you could imagine why she might be fearful. Who was going to believe her story and even today there are those who continue to struggle with it. Mary knew that Joseph would have no other possible explanation other than Mary being unfaithful. Yet God did not want Mary to be frightened rather to know how special she was and that God had chosen her to be the Mother of Jesus

Joseph discovering his fiancée literally the one who he was betrothed to, which means almost married is pregnant. Well he could have caused a real stink; instead he was working out how he could get divorced quietly in order to spare Mary shame. He just went to sleep as normal and there was this angel in a dream, yet this dream was the real thing, not just imagination at work, but an angel reassuring Joseph that this was God's doing. Joseph did need to be fearful Mary had remained faithful; marriage would not be easy for them but just as God had chosen Mary, so too Joseph was going to have the responsibility of bringing up Jesus. How do you bring up the Son of God? That's scary but the message was do not be afraid.

And then the shepherds, they were on the nightshift, when suddenly music, a choir, and angel choir lots of them. That was more than enough to cause fear yet they are told not to be afraid but rather that a baby was born who was a Saviour who was Christ (Messiah) the Lord (God too). These Shepherds hadn't studied theology too much in fact probably the religious hierarchy would have looked down upon them, but God didn't.

So God sends a message via a messenger from heaven which is what an angel is; he sends a message to Mary in her home, he sends a message to Joseph in a dream, he sends a message to the Shepherds in the workplace. God can speak in all sorts of ways and he wants to bring that message of peace to us all.

In stark contrast stands Herod, he looks like a Roman and he worked for them as their puppet king. Yet he was a man of influence, a man of power he helped restore the Temple in Jerusalem and it was a magnificent building. He had managed to establish order within this Jewish province which was no mean task. He was shrewd and powerful and with increasing age paranoid. So much so that he arranged for his wife, his mother in law and 3 sons to be killed. So you'll understand when he heard the King of the Jews had been born he was fearful. He was half Edomite, he was not the rightful heir to the throne, and therefore the baby Jesus must die. Jesus posed a threat; as there was room for only one King!

So this Christmas how are you feeling about Jesus? A cute little baby, a great tradition and part of our culture; or just maybe you came hoping that someone could help you with your fears that are locked away within. Perhaps it's the fear that you've prayed but God hasn't heard. Perhaps it's the fear of not knowing where to look but knowing deep within that there must be more to life. Perhaps God has spoken to you in a dream. Last year I was in India for two weeks and I met a number of Christians who spoke about how God had spoken to them in dreams and helped them to come to faith. Maybe you have been fearful to think that God could speak in such a way. Or maybe like the Shepherds you are doing what you do and then suddenly out of nowhere things begin to happen which cause you to want to know more.

The reality is Jesus is not just a cute little baby he is the one born the King of the Jews but also born Saviour. Jesus is our Saviour, I love that title it has renewed its significance for me. As I look at the world with global warming, with war taking place in Afghanistan, with global markets performing in most unusual ways, with people perhaps losing their point of reference for their lives. Then I am aware that we do need a Saviour.

The Headline on the magazine The Week had as is headline "Last chance to save the world". The Guardian reported our leaders "Have fourteen days to seal history's judgment on this generation." "The science may be complex but the facts are clear 11 of the past 14 years have been the warmest on record, a rise of 3C to 4C the least we could expect to follow inaction would be "parch continents" and drown whole nations".

So the world is looking for a saviour. Our final reading in Colossians 1 tells us that this Jesus is the One who holds the very world together. Please do not misunderstand I am not saying Jesus will choose to sort the planets problems out regardless of us, as the custodians of God's creation we have a responsibility, but he does care not only about the individual but about this world,

In the summer I was lent an interesting book it's called "Moon Dust". 40 years ago man first landed on the moon and became the first moonwalkers. This book explores what happened to these men who had this experience and their families

These guys had to find answers to a question that had never been asked before.

"Where do you go after you've been to the moon?"

A journey of 250,000 miles, that's a long way from home. Talk about No fear, well certainly these astronauts were courageous. The initial landing of the Eagle on July 20 1969 did not go according to plan. But it did go. Those memorable words were recited "the eagle has landed."

Well where do you go after that?

Each astronaut had their own inner journey to take. Jim Irwin who was one of those 12 and flew with Apollo 15 had a very powerful experience of God and heard God whispering to him. This led him to travel worldwide to share his story he established an organisation called "High Flight" He carried this poem with him to the moon.

(The name "High Flight" was inspired by the famous aviator's poem by John Gillespie Magee, Jr., a copy of which was carried to the moon by Col. James B. Irwin on the Apollo 15 lunar mission).

*Oh, I have slipped the surly bonds of earth
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;
Sunward I've climbed, and joined the tumbling mirth
Of sun-split clouds -- and done a hundred things*

*You have not dreamed of -- wheeled and soared and swung
High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there,
I've chased the shouting wind along, and flung
My eager craft through footless halls of air.*

*Up, up the long, delirious, burning blue
I've topped the windswept heights with easy grace*

*Where never lark, or even eagle flew.
And, while with silent, lifting mind I've trod
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,
Put out my hand and touched the face of God.*

...John Gillespie Magee, Jr.

The eleven had other stories I would like to tell you about Charlie Duke who found his return to earth really difficult. Charlie married Dotty. She found that when she married, the courtship, the romance, the beautiful close relationship they had with each other stopped. With the struggles in her marriage by the end of the 1970's she felt directionless and suicidal. Charlie became a remote partner and a brutal alcoholic father. She suffered depression, thought about divorce but couldn't face it.

"Her decision to seek resolution in Jesus was just that, a decision She'd always been to church but in a routine kind of way. She prayed.

"God I don't know if you are real: Jesus I don't know if you are the Son of God. But I have made a mess of my life and if you are real , You can have my life. If you are not real I want to die"

So she handed over her scepticism, her will her life, just like that. She says she kept it to herself to begin with, but over the coming months a kind of peace descended and she found herself able for the first time to forgive Charlie his drunken rages and rejections and insensitivity –.. ..Yet it was so simple once the decision was made. She says God told her not to try and change or save or chastise Charlie, just to be bold enough to love him with no conditions attached. So she did, then felt better and the love now flowing through her faith seemed to lift some of the burden on her husband's love. He saw the transformation in Dotty and eventually asked God to give him the strength to love his wife and duly found it".

One of our readings said
When you're in over your head, I'll be there with you.
When you're in rough waters, you will not go down.
When you're between a rock and a hard place,
it won't be a dead end—
Because I am God, your personal God,
The Holy of Israel, your Saviour.

No fear – God constantly says to people do not be afraid, God longs for us and our world to know that as we embrace the love of God then we too can have the strength to love and to keep going. You may have never been to the moon but like Dotty and maybe like Charlie you know you need a Saviour. Why don't you reach out to the one who was that baby at Bethlehem but who is now the Saviour of the World-God Himself. And his name is Jesus.

First Lesson

God created the world and it was very good. Things went badly wrong when Adam and Eve started to believe they knew better than God. The act of rebellion that followed resulted in fear being introduced into our world. This was not something God ever wanted and our Bible readings reveal how God wants us to experience his peace.

⁶ When the Woman saw that the tree looked like good eating and realized what she would get out of it—she'd know everything!—she took and ate the fruit and then gave some to her husband, and he ate. ⁸ When they heard the sound of GOD strolling in the garden in the evening breeze, the Man and his Wife hid in the trees of the garden, hid from GOD. ⁹ GOD called to the Man: "Where are you?" ¹⁰ He said, "I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked. And I hid." ¹¹ GOD said, "Who told you were naked? Did you eat from that tree I told you not to eat from?" ¹² The Man said, "The Woman you gave me as a companion, she gave me fruit from the tree, and, yes, I ate it." GOD said to the Woman, "What is this that you've done?" ¹³ "The serpent seduced me," she said, "and I ate."

Genesis 3.8-13 (The Message) [Ron Langridge 5pm](#), [Trevor Morkam 7.30pm](#)

2nd Lesson

Isaiah 9:2, 6-7

²The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in

the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.

⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and for ever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

(New International Version)

[Ann Davis 5pm](#), [Sharon Bird 7.30pm](#)

Third Lesson

Isaiah 43.1-3

¹⁻⁴ But now, God's Message, the God who made you in the first place, Jacob, the One who got you started, Israel:

"Don't be afraid, I've redeemed you.

I've called your name. You're mine.

When you're in over your head, I'll be there with you.

When you're in rough waters, you will not go down.

When you're between a rock and a hard place,

it won't be a dead end—

Because I am God, your personal God,

The Holy of Israel, your Savior. (The Message)

[Ron Newman 5pm](#), [Gary Roberts 7.30pm](#)

Fourth Lesson

Luke 1:26, 29-33

God sent the angel Gabriel to the Galilean village of Nazareth to a virgin engaged to be married to a man descended from David. His name was Joseph, and the virgin's name, Mary. Upon entering, Gabriel greeted her:

Good morning!
You're beautiful with God's beauty,
Beautiful inside and out!
God be with you.

²⁹⁻³³She was thoroughly shaken, wondering what was behind a greeting like that. But the angel assured her, "Mary, you have nothing to fear. God has a surprise for you: You will become pregnant and give birth to a son and call his name Jesus.

(The Message) [Donna Cook 5pm](#), [Lynda Mitchell 7.30pm](#)

Fifth Lesson**Matthew 1.18-25**

¹⁸ This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement^[h] quietly.

²⁰ As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. ²¹ And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus,^[i] for he will save his people from their sins."

²² All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet:

²³ "Look! The virgin will conceive a child!
She will give birth to a son,
and they will call him Immanuel which means 'God is with us.'"

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus. New Living Translation

[Martyn Cook 5pm, Andy Simmonds 7.30pm](#)

Sixth lesson**Luke 2.6-20**

⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. ⁷ She gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them. ⁸ That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. ⁹ Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, ¹⁰ but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. ¹¹ The Saviour—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! ¹² And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger." ¹³ Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in highest heaven,
and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."

¹⁵ When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

¹⁶ They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. ¹⁷ After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. ¹⁸ All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, ¹⁹ but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. ²⁰ The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them. (New Living Translation)

[Ivy Newman 5pm, Heather Blandford 7.30pm](#)

Seventh Lesson**Matthew 2.1-12**

¹⁻² After Jesus was born in Bethlehem village, Judah territory— this was during Herod's kingship—a band of scholars arrived in Jerusalem from the East. They asked around, "Where can we find and pay homage to the newborn King of the Jews? We observed a star in the eastern sky that signaled his birth. We're on pilgrimage to worship him." ³⁻⁴ When word of their inquiry got to Herod, he was terrified—and not Herod alone, but most of Jerusalem as well. Herod lost no time. He gathered all the high priests and religion scholars in the city together and asked, "Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?" ⁵⁻⁶ They told him, "Bethlehem, Judah territory. The prophet Micah wrote it plainly:
It's you, Bethlehem, in Judah's land,

no longer bringing up the rear.
From you will come the leader
who will shepherd-rule my people, my Israel."

⁷⁻⁸Herod then arranged a secret meeting with the scholars from the East. Pretending to be as devout as they were, he got them to tell him exactly when the birth-announcement star appeared. Then he told them the prophecy about Bethlehem, and said, "Go find this child. Leave no stone unturned. As soon as you find him, send word and I'll join you at once in your worship." ⁹⁻¹⁰Instructed by the king, they set off. Then the star appeared again, the same star they had seen in the eastern skies. It led them on until it hovered over the place of the child. They could hardly contain themselves: They were in the right place! They had arrived at the right time! ¹¹They entered the house and saw the child in the arms of Mary, his mother. Overcome, they kneeled and worshiped him. Then they opened their luggage and presented gifts: gold, frankincense, myrrh. ¹²In a dream, they were warned not to report back to Herod. So they worked out another route, left the territory without being seen, and returned to their own country.

[**The Message Tim Freeman 5pm Paul Graham 7.30pm**](#)

Eighth Lesson

Colossians 1.15-20

¹⁵⁻¹⁸We look at this Son and see the God who cannot be seen. We look at this Son and see God's original purpose in everything created. For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible, rank after rank after rank of angels—everything got started in him and finds its purpose in him. He was there before any of it came into existence and holds it all together right up to this moment. And when it comes to the church, he organizes and holds it together, like a head does a body. ¹⁸⁻²⁰He was supreme in the beginning and—leading the resurrection parade—he is supreme in the end. From beginning to end he's there, towering far above everything, everyone. So spacious is he, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the cross.

[**The Message \(MSG\) Anne Wang 5pm, Cathy Butcher 7.30pm**](#)