

Luke 2:1-14**Ruined expectations**

Tonight, as we gather to celebrate the birth of our saviour, I bring to you grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Christmas story is full of ruined expectations. The people of Israel had long expected a Messiah. God had promised them long ago through the prophets that a Messiah would come who would be a new King in the line of David. This led to the hope that the Messiah would destroy the tyranny of Rome and restore the earthly kingdom of Israel. But this idea of the Messiah was not God's idea. The Messiah would not come with displays of earthly power and authority. There was a display of heavenly power with the appearance of angels, but they showed up to a bunch of shepherds in a field. Not exactly the sort of people that you would expect to get notified of something significant and world-changing.

Where they are told to go is just as lowly. They were to find in Bethlehem an infant wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. This was the sign that the Messiah had come. The long-expected Messiah had arrived and would now fulfil God's promises. And the sign was a baby in a manger. Not exactly the great and glorious announcement that many would have expected. And this sign that the shepherds were to find wouldn't point elsewhere, to something much grander. The sign of the infant points to nothing except himself. The Messiah of Israel does not make his appearance in visible might but in the form of a humble vulnerable child. And he wasn't even born in a place of significance. It's quite unusual that in a culture that valued hospitality, especially to family members, Joseph could find no room to stay in his hometown. Expectations were broken once more in the circumstances of this Messiah's birth.

I think all of us have experienced our fair share of ruined expectations this year. As a Christian community, we couldn't gather at Easter time to worship this Messiah who paid the price for our sin and disobedience. For many families, the expectation of celebrating a wedding or a birthday or some other milestone didn't eventuate. Family holidays interstate and overseas have been thrown into turmoil. Many people have been unable to attend the funerals of loved ones. And on the other side, an almost unknown public servant in the health department has become a household name. A virus so small that most people have not seen and will never see has impacted our lives in massive ways.

Certainly not what I expected from this year. Although the expectation that the media only bring us bad news seems to still hold true. We certainly need to hear some good news. When the angels did appear to the shepherds the first response was fear, but they were told, "Do not fear, I bring you good news of great joy." What a relief it would be to hear that it's time for some good news. And it is good news for us that the Christmas story is a story of a God who is pleased to be born among the humble, of a God who keeps his promises, and of a God who is in control of history, even when we cannot see it or when it is hard to believe.

With such a God on our side bringing us good news, we need not fear. Like the shepherds, we may praise and glorify the God who gave this great gift to us of his Son, who is the Prince of Peace and the promised Messiah. The angels declare peace on earth, and we know this peace is achieved later through Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus will continue to be the Messiah we need, and not necessarily the Messiah we expect. His life and ministry will encounter much rejection. For many, his death on a cross will signify failure, and thus be a stumbling block. But for those who believe in this Messiah, that cross will become a rock of salvation, and the source of all hope and joy for all eternity.

So as this year of ruined expectations draws to a close, may we rejoice in the good news of the Messiah's birth. May we be glad that God fulfils his promises according to our need, and not according to our various and ever-changing wants. And may the angel's announcement of peace and good news of great joy push aside any fears and doubts as we celebrate once more the birth of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

May God's peace, which passes all human understanding keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus. Amen.