

## “Promise and Presents”

Luke 1:46-55 [MW18-42]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai & Wellsford, Sunday 23 December 2018

Here we are, December 23 already, only two days till Christmas!

- nearly through the Advent season of preparation  
have you done all your Christmas shopping?  
wrapped the gifts, written and sent cards, got the menu all planned ... ???

Two young boys were spending the night at their grandparents' house. At bedtime, the two boys knelt beside their beds to say their prayers when the youngest one began praying at the top of his lungs: "I PRAY FOR A NEW BICYCLE ... I PRAY FOR A PLAYSTATION PS4 ... I PRAY FOR A RADIO CONTROLLED HELICOPTER ..." His older brother leaned over and nudged the younger brother and said, "Why are you shouting your prayers? God isn't deaf." To which the little brother replied, "No, but Grandma is!"

A couple of years ago, Kim and I came up with a kind of rule regarding presents and gifts

- “NDG”  
which stands for “no dust gatherers”
- we would not buy each other, ourselves, family and friends  
“dust gatherers”  
things that look nice but actually do nothing, except ... gather dust
- we resolved to give gifts that were useful, that people actually needed  
that would contribute something positive to people's lives
- it did not mean we would be all boring and practical  
ties, socks and handkerchiefs here we come!
- no, but it did mean we would think carefully about the person and the gift  
and if we could, we would even be a little bit creative

NDG – no dust gatherers

- does not mean a husband should give his wife the electric drill *he* wants  
or that a woman should give her boyfriend a voucher for a spa treatment
- it may mean buying your wife an iron or a food mixer  
your husband a wheel barrow or barbecue  
the children t-shirts and shorts
- as long as there is something 'personal'  
that recognises the person's unique talents and interests, to go with it

On the other hand this NDG thing could mean “giving a goat”

- Tear Fund, CWS, CBM and World Vision among others  
have programmes where you can contribute to a village water scheme  
buy a family a goat or a chicken, help with schooling or supplies and so on
- the money you would have spent on a gift  
goes to help a less fortunate community in a developing country  
and a card goes to the person you made the gift in the name of

Gift giving and receiving is great

- it has even been proved that giving to others does something good for the giver  
as well as the receiver
- we just need to keep things in perspective

Remember Christmas is celebrated as Jesus' birthday

- but who gets the gifts???

God gave us the gift of himself

- this is the greatest gift ever  
it is *the* gift that is behind all our gifts and our giving
- God gave himself to you  
God humbled himself and came among us as a tiny, helpless baby
- that baby lived as one of us and grew to be the one we know as Jesus Christ  
who gave his life that we might have life  
and have it fully
- it is as simple and as huge as that

As a child, talking with other children after Christmas

- these two intertwined questions always came up:  
Did you get what you wanted for Christmas?  
What did you get for Christmas?

Well, it's not quite Christmas, but for most of us who live in Aotearoa New Zealand

- I can already answer those questions  
yes, indeed, we got what we wanted for Christmas:  
peace, freedom, a beautiful country, food, shelter, family, friends
- these are precious, priceless gifts  
let us not take them for granted  
and in this season of giving be thankful for what we have already received

In researching on the internet for things for the Advent and Christmas services

- I came across this video clip that I think puts it all in perspective

[show video clip: "Christmas Presents"]

Promise and Presents ... p-r-e-s-e-n-t-s

- which becomes the promise of "Presence" ... p-r-e-s-e-n-c-e  
God promises to be with us  
whoever we are, wherever we are, however we are
- Mary, the mother of the baby, boy and man Jesus  
received an amazing visit and an absolutely astounding message  
that she had been chosen to give birth to the Son of God  
who would be "God-with-us"
- when Mary visited her relative Elizabeth, Elizabeth told Mary:  
*The Lord has blessed you because you believed that he will keep his promise*

Mary responded to all this with some special words that have been treasured

- sung, memorised, recited, remembered  
throughout the generations  
a song of praise many know as the "Magnificat"
- words of promise and presence

Here is a contemporary version that seems appropriate for us today:

*My soul sings in gratitude.  
I'm dancing in the mystery of God.  
The light of the Holy One is within me  
and I am blessed, so truly blessed.*

*This goes deeper than human thinking.  
I am filled with awe  
at Love whose only condition  
is to be received.*

*The gift is not for the proud,  
for they have no room for it.  
The strong and self-sufficient ones  
don't have this awareness.*

*But those who know their emptiness  
can rejoice in Love's fullness.*

*It's the Love that we are made for,  
the reason for our being.*

*It fills our inmost heart space  
and brings to birth in us, the Holy One.*

Promise and presents ...

This Christmas may we, like Mary, be grateful  
- may we give thanks for all the gifts around us  
may we share of our abundance  
and so allow the presence of God-with-us  
to become real in our midst