

## Fear not, Joseph. Bethesda Coffee Morning. 7 December 2011.

Those who were here last week may recall that we then started a short series of studies in the run up to Christmas based around an expression which occurs many times in the Bible, 'Fear not'.<sup>1</sup>

Last week, Ivor spoke to us about the words 'Fear not', as addressed by the angel to Mary.<sup>2</sup> This week we shall consider the same words later addressed by the angel to Joseph, and next week, God willing, Len will speak about the words addressed by an angel to the shepherds in one of the fields around Bethlehem.<sup>3</sup>

But this morning the spotlight is on Joseph. And our reading comes from Matthew 1, the first chapter in the New Testament.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privately. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, fear not to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus,<sup>4</sup> for He will save His people from their sins". All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel", which is translated, "God with us".<sup>5</sup>

Last week Ivor read the angel Gabriel's declaration to Mary that power of the Highest would overshadow her, and that the child to be born would 'be called ... the Son of God'. Following a hint given by Gabriel, Mary then immediately left her home town of Nazareth and travelled some 60 miles to a town in the hill country of Judea to visit her near relative Elizabeth, then in the sixth month of her pregnancy. Mary stayed with Elizabeth for some three months, until the time of the birth of the child who later became known as John the Baptist, returning to her family house in Nazareth.

It is at this point that our passage takes up the story. For as soon as she returned home her condition was obvious to Joseph. She was, our passage tells us, 'found to be with child' ... 'discovered to be pregnant', that is. As Joseph saw it, he faced only two options – both allowed by Jewish law at the time – (i) to hold her up as an example – to have the matter exposed in an open court and to have Mary publicly disgraced and possibly punished; or (ii) to cancel their betrothal privately by handing her a letter to that effect in the presence of just two witnesses.<sup>6</sup>

Although strongly disposed to cancel their bond of betrothal quietly, he was still pondering his dilemma when an angel appeared to him, telling him that he wasn't to 'fear' to 'take' Mary – the word 'take' being the technical word for receiving a bride from her parents. By Jewish law, as then 'betrothed' to him – Mary would already be referred to as his 'wife', and the angel assured Joseph that she had done nothing unworthy of the name.

But, as the angel made clear, of far greater importance than Mary's name was the name to be given to her child. In confirmation of what Gabriel had told Mary some three months before, Joseph is now told, 'you shall call His name Jesus', but this time with the added explanation, 'for He will save His people from their sins'.

He was also, the angel told Joseph, to be called 'Emmanuel' – which means, as Matthew translated it for his readers, 'God with us' – and this not because of what He had always been ... 'the Son of God' – but because of what He would become ... 'God manifest in the flesh'. But the child would also be called 'Jesus' – and this not because of what He had always been, nor because of what He would become, but because of what He would one day do; namely, die to 'save His people from their sins'.<sup>7</sup> 'From their sins' – I want you to remember those words while I tell you a true story.

Today is the 7<sup>th</sup> of December – as some of you may already know, it is 70 years to the day since Japan attacked, and largely crippled, the United States Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbour – and action which brought both Japan and the United States into the Second World War.

The man who led and commanded the Japanese air raid was 39 year-old Mitsuo Fuchida.<sup>8</sup> As the senior commander he was the first over Pearl Harbour and the last to leave it.

Later Fuchida wrote about that morning at Pearl Harbour. 'Seating myself in the first plane, I led the whole squadron of 360 planes into Pearl Harbour, and having established that the main force of the American Pacific fleet, comprised of eight warships, was at anchor . . . I gave the order, "Whole squadron, plunge into attack!"'

Fuchida was one of Japan's most experienced pilots and took part in most major battles. One Japanese news cameraman had unofficial nicknames for all the senior officers. Fuchida's was 'Hitler', which gives you some idea of the sort of man he was ... he even grew a toothbrush moustache out of admiration for Hitler.

Just before the Battle of Midway he had an operation for appendicitis. He struggled up from the sick bay to the deck of the aircraft carrier to wave off his fellow pilots. An American plane dropped a bomb which broke both his legs, but had he not been on the deck he would have burned alive with the other 30 men trapped down below in the sick bay. He was blown into the sea and rescued.

By the end of the war he was the sole survivor of the seven commanders and 32 squadron leaders whom he had led at Pearl Harbour.

In 1945 he was in Hiroshima attending a week-long conference. An urgent order came through ordering him to leave and report to Tokyo. The next day the atom bomb was dropped.

In all there were six events during the war where he survived in what we might call 'unusual circumstances'.

With Japan's defeat, Fuchida became a bitter, disillusioned man. He took up farming which gave him time to think, and to ask himself why he had survived a war which had cost the lives of almost all his comrades.

It was now the period of the Cold War (a period of enormous tension between the Communist world and the Western World) and it looked as if another war might start. He wrote a book called *No more Pearl Harbour*, during the writing of which it struck him that the mess the world was in was due to human nature. 'But who or what can change people?' he asked.

It was at this point that he was called to give evidence in war crimes trials which the Americans were conducting. As he passed through Tokyo railway station a missionary gave him a tract called 'I was a prisoner of Japan'. In this tract the American, Jacob De Shazer, described how he had read the Bible while a prisoner of war and how he turned to Christ as a result.

Almost in spite of himself, Fuchida bought a Bible and, when reading Luke's account of the crucifixion of our Lord, he read His prayer: 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do'. He thought of the many men he had killed in battle with his heart full of hatred. In his own words: 'Right at that moment I seemed to meet Jesus for the first time. I understood the meaning of his death for my wickedness, and so in prayer I requested him to forgive *my sins* and change me. That ... day I became a new person ... Jesus became my personal Saviour'.

Media reaction was not slow in coming. 'Pearl Harbour hero converts to Christianity' was one typical headline.

Men who had fought for Japan wanted him to give up what they called 'this crazy idea'. One even attacked him with a knife saying he had embraced Christianity to impress the American conquerors.

But time proved them wrong. Fuchida decided to serve the Lord full time and so turned down a well-paid job with the new Japanese government to advising them on defence issues.

He travelled widely as an evangelist, particularly in the USA. At one point, he returned to Pearl Harbour to make a documentary film in which he is seen over the spot where a US battleship sank and became a permanent tomb for hundreds of men. When the American film company Twentieth Century Fox produced the film, 'Tora! Tora! Tora!' 40 years ago, Fuchida supplied Japanese technical information and attended the London premiere.

Often he would say: 'I would give anything to retract my actions at Pearl Harbour, but it is impossible. Instead, I now work at striking the death blow to the hatred which ... causes such tragedies. And that hatred cannot be uprooted without Jesus Christ ... He is the only answer.'

Eventually he settled back in Japan, serving the Lord and working alongside Jacob De Shazer, the missionary whose own story was the starting point in Fuchida's conversion to the One who was given the name Jesus, because He had come to 'save His people from their sins'.

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> The words 'Fear not' are found 63 times in the King James Version.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 1. 30.

<sup>3</sup> Luke 2. 10.

<sup>4</sup> In Luke Mary is told to give the name, but presumably the formal naming would be by Joseph; see note 7 below.

<sup>5</sup> Matt. 1. 18-23.

<sup>6</sup> See Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Book 2, chapter 4.

<sup>7</sup> We remember that, although, as witness the meaning of His name 'Emmanuel', the birth of Christ brought God to man, it is, as witness the meaning of His name Jesus, the cross of Christ – and the cross of Christ alone – which brings man to God.

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<sup>8</sup> See ...

<http://www.e-n.org.uk/1516-Pearl-Harbor-Bomber.htm>

<http://www.biblebelievers.com/fuchida1.html>

<http://personal.georgiasouthern.edu/~etmcmull/FUCHIDA.htm>

<http://personal.georgiasouthern.edu/~etmcmull/DESHAZER.htm>

<http://www.potsdam-naz.org/sermons/fuchida.htm>