

EVANS, CHRISTMAS (1766 - 1838), Baptist minister

Name: Christmas Evans
Date of birth: 1766
Date of death: 1838
Spouse: Catherine Evans (née Jones)
Parent: Joanna Evans
Parent: Samuel Evans
Gender: Male
Occupation: Baptist minister
Area of activity: Religion
Author: John Thomas Jones

One of the most famous Welsh preachers. Born at Esgaer-waen, Llandysul, Cardiganshire, on Christmas Day 1766, son of Samuel Evans, boot-maker, and Joanna his wife. Parish apprentice, farm labourer on local farms, among others at the home of the celebrated [David Davis](#) (1745 - 1827) of Castellhywel — that is his story as a youth. Joining, when about 18 years of age, one of the churches of which [Davis](#) was pastor, learning to read Welsh, going to his master's school for a short time and learning a little English and Latin, beginning to preach somewhat ineffectually in the midst of the intellectual coldness of Arminianism — this was his portion until he was about 21. He then joined the Baptist chapel at Aberduar and in this atmosphere of greater religious fervour his preaching improved. At the Maesyberllan Association, 1798, he was persuaded by the North Wales representatives to return with them to conduct an evangelical tour among the Baptists of Llŷn, Caernarfonshire. He was ordained in the summer of 1789; married Catherine Jones at Bryncroes chapel in Llŷn, 23 October 1789; walked, rode, and preached in his wide district with remarkable effect.

One Sunday afternoon, sitting at the feet of [Robert Roberts](#) (1762 - 1802) of Clynog, the most powerful preacher in Wales, he had a new vision of the art of preaching, and discovered in the drama the line most suited to his own genius. On Christmas Day 1791 he rode from Llŷn to Anglesey, with Catherine riding pillion, to take charge of the Anglesey Baptists at their headquarters at Ebenezer, Llangefni, and to make his home in the chapel-house — Cil-dwrn house and chapel. It was as 'bishop of Anglesey' that he liked to think of himself; he certainly left his mark on the history of the Anglesey Baptists, increasing their self-confidence and, by his incessant journeys between North and South Wales, linking them with the Baptists in every other part of the country. From the Felin-foel Association (1794) on, he was possibly the most popular Baptist preacher of all. At first he was an ardent supporter of [J. R. Jones](#) (1765 - 1822) and the Sandemanian movement, but when [Jones](#) formed his own connexion, Christmas Evans gradually withdrew his support. He restarted the North Wales Baptist Association in Anglesey in 1802, and one of his great achievements was to make that assembly the focal point of some of the best preaching of the day. In 1826 he left Anglesey, and subsequently held ministries at Caerphilly (1826-8), Cardiff (1828-32), and Caernarvon (1832-8). In the course of his tours he raised hundreds of pounds to pay off the debts on his chapels. He represented his denomination in the theological discussions of the time and published, as he himself put it,

'about twenty sixpenny books and one shilling book,' not to mention one book on 'teetotalism.' His knowledge of English was sufficient to enable him to preach in that language and to read commentaries, theological books, and the works of the Puritan fathers. He had a smattering of Hebrew and enough Greek to pick his way through Parkhurst's dictionary — his knowledge of Latin was about the same. There are many historical references in his sermons. He was fond of Welsh poetry, of trying his hand at an englyn, of translating Shakespeare, Milton, Cowper, and Young, and of modelling his language on the lines of [W. O. Pughe](#). Considering that his salary was only £17 a year, he showed astonishing generosity to the Bible Society, the missionary societies, and the Baptist College at Abergavenny.

But it was his genius for preaching that brought him fame. He was one of the three giants of the Welsh pulpit in the 'golden age' of preaching. His huge, ungainly, but episcopal frame; his strong feelings and fiery temperament; his formidable memory; and, above all, his imagination — these were his natural gifts. But his ability as a preacher was not due to chance, for he had studied and mastered the theory of the art. He had a genius for observing people and places and characteristics, and presenting them to his congregations in dramatic form. He was, in fact, the master allegorist of the pulpit in his day. His best-known sermons are really dramas — comedies and tragedies (as [Brutus](#) says), with Christmas himself as play-wright and actor; it must be remembered that this method of preaching had a particular attraction for the ordinary people of those days. The danger was that his vivid imagination would run away with him and that he would 'spiritualize' every little detail in his sketches, but his successes were more frequent than his failures. His written covenants are proof of his piety. He died at the house of [Daniel Davies](#) (1797 - 1826) at Swansea while on a preaching tour in South Wales, 19 July 1838, and was buried beside Bethesda chapel there.

Author

John Thomas Jones

Sources

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Further Reading

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Published date: 1959

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