

An ancient Christian story Japan

The earthquake and tsunami which hit Japan in 2011 reminds the people of Sendai of an ancient story – a great earthquake and tsunami which struck the Sendai region in 1611. At that time, the feudal lord Masanune sought to initiate trade arrangements with Mexico to assist with the rebuilding of the economy.

Journey of the Samurai

400 years ago, there lived a samurai who crossed the continent of North America and travelled to the land of Europe for an audience with the Pope of his time. His name was Tsunenaga Hasekura, faithful retainer to the feudal lord Masamune Date. At the time, Masanune Date had dispatched Tsunenaga Hasekura to meet with the King of Spain and the Pope of Rome.

Masamune sought to allow Christian missionaries into his domain and to open direct trade with Mexico, which was a territory of Spain.

With his orders received, and travelling with the friar Luis Sotelo, Hasekura set sail from Ishinomaki in Sendai (Tohoku region) upon the ship San Juan Bautista on 28 October, 1613. The embassy first crossed the Pacific Ocean, making landfall in Mexico, and continued across the Atlantic Ocean to relay Masamune's request to the King of Spain. There, Hasekura converted to Christianity and entered Rome for an audience with the Pope. However, during this time, the Tokugawa Shogunate had begun to oppress those of the Christian faith within his domain. This trend was troubling for the Catholic Church, and it adversely affected the efforts of Hasekura and his troupe. They returned home.

—The Road Home—

In January of 1616, Hasekura had put Rome behind him, but the road home was not a victorious one. Despite the blessed joy of an audience with the Pope, the petition to open trade went unrecognized, and Hasekura left Barcelona for Madrid, largely on the same route by which he had come. However, in Japan during that time Christians faced heavy oppression. With Japan growing hostile to Christianity, the embassy received orders to leave the country. They departed Madrid, and came upon the outskirts of Seville, hometown to the friar Sotelo. A party of around four or five members spent a year in Seville waiting for the King of Spain to accept the trade agreement the embassy hoped to acquire. When a response never came from the king, they returned home, stopping in Mexico and the Philippines, before arriving in September in Sendai of 1620. From their initial departure, the trip lasted seven years.

Descendants of the present Archbishop Takami in Nagashaki diocese were samurai and travelled from Sendai as a member of the embassy.



*The monastic altar before which
Tsunenaga Hasekura offered his devout
prayers every day*