

## Peace Came to Earth

✧ **In grace, bringing salvation (vv.11,14)**

✧ **In hope, powering love (vv.12-14)**

In the name of the Christ of Christmas, dearly redeemed people of God:

Does it seem to you that our world has had enough of Christmas? I Googled “Christmas card templates” today, and not one template contained the word “Christmas.” Everything was “Holidays” this and “Holidays” that. Maybe you also like to smile sweetly at store clerks, when they say, “Happy Holidays.” Then you answer, “Merry Christmas!” Most are glad because then they can say it too.

Even folks who want Christmas may have a hard time celebrating. A famous American poet named Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, was despairing in 1863. Imagine how his sorrow over the Civil War became so very personal when his son Charles enlisted. Against his father’s wishes, Charles felt his duty, but then was severely wounded in battle. Sorrow upon sorrow for Longfellow; his wife had recently died in a fire. Can you remember what Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote Christmas Day in 1863? It’s one of the world’s most famous carols: “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day.” His heart travels from near despair, “There is no peace on earth,”...to hope, “God is not dead, nor doth He sleep.”

The Christmas bells of Christian churches rang out for one reason, **Peace Came to Earth...**

✧ **In grace, bringing salvation (vv.11,14)**

An email from a friend got me thinking about this in modern America. A man name Mike Ehredt wanted to give personal tribute to over 6,550 fallen US Servicemen and women by placing a flag every mile for each one. In 2010, Mike ran from Astoria, OR, to Rockland, ME, and placed 4,424 flags, one every mile for every US soldier and Marine lost in Iraq. Then in 2012, he began at International Falls, MN, again running for several months more than a marathon every day. Finally on Veterans Day, November 11, 2012, in Galveston, Texas, at 1:30 PM, he finished placing the last of 2,140 flags, honoring those US soldiers and Marines who had died in Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup>

Many grateful Americans joined him along the way. A month ago Mike wrote some wise advice, “Thank you for the kind words everybody. You have one chance to do something unselfishly for someone in your life. Find your calling if you haven't already....” In typical American fashion, not to diminish his accomplishment, one individual asked about safety and running on the left side of the road. Someone always has a better idea or some criticism no matter what you do. So also for the Christ of Christmas.

God’s Son born to a poor virgin girl from Nazareth? In Bethlehem? One Israeli woman wrinkled her nose in disdain when we said we were going there. Why no room in the inn? Why stay in a stable with animals? Why announce to shepherds, of all people? Was Jesus on the wrong side of the road?

If we could bring **Peace...to Earth** by diplomacy or weaponry, why isn’t it done already? Why so much heartache and bloodshed along the way? Why in spite of our best efforts are our own hearts and homes hardly a place of peace? Why hasn’t some system or hero brought about the utopia they always promise? Sometimes it seems that Christmas **Peace** is only in your dreams – maybe not even there!

Aren’t you glad God does not wait for us? That’s what **grace** is all about. **Grace** is that loving kindness in the heart of God so determined to set things right between us and Him. *“God loved the world*

<sup>1</sup> Google: One Life, One Flag, One Mile: Summary of Project.

*so much that He gave His one and only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life.”* (John 3:16) Jesus came to give us *“life to the full,”* life to the max! (John 10:10)

You might not be able to hear it in the bells these days, but you can still see it in the manger: *“For the grace of God has appeared with salvation for all people.”* (HCSB) How could God come more kindly in our own flesh and blood than as a baby born in a manger? How could God make His kindness more clear than to come to the lowliest of men – not to kings and princes, but to shepherds, workmen, insignificant to society like most of us – until someone wants your vote! How could God make the miracle more obvious than to use the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary as His haven to bring us heaven?

God did not give us gold; that would be gone in flash. God did not give us power; that can be taken by those with more votes or bigger guns. God did not give us fame; that dies with the next big star. God’s own Son came to this earth to give us the greatest Gift of all. *“He gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own....”*

Whatever disappointment has come into your life, even what you regret causing for yourself and your loved ones, all the selfishness and lust that keeps cropping up in our hearts – for all these sins Christ *“gave himself”* in our place *“to redeem us.”* The cost was His own shed blood. God’s **grace** shines like a brilliant star by the place God inspired this to Pastor Titus. He was on the proverbially wicked island of Crete. Paul wrote, *“Even one of their own prophets has said, ‘Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.’ This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith.”* (Titus 1:12f NIV84) Something more than Christmas lights keeps the light of Christ shining in our hearts. Something more than Christmas bells keeps the songs ringing. **Peace Came to Earth...**

### ✧ **In hope, powering love (vv.12-14)**

We don’t need another *Hallmark Hall of Fame* for Christmas – two hours of trouble, a one-minute kiss. Don’t some of you have to work with people who act like *Cretans*? Serving folks who love you and support you for Jesus’ sake encourages you to do good. “It requires no great wisdom to live only among the godly and do good, but the keenest judgment is necessary to live with the wicked and not do evil.”<sup>2</sup> What can keep you from falling into the ruts of foul language and selfish attitudes surrounded by them?

Here’s the joy and power: **Peace Came to Earth...In hope, powering love.** God’s grace that brings salvation *“teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”* You see, Jesus also *“gave himself for us to purify for himself a people that are...eager to do what is good.”* We lose nothing by saying, “No!” to sin.

**Hope** in the Christ of Christmas has motivating power. We see what our sins did to Jesus since it took His holy, precious blood to wash them all away. We’re *eager* not to be *“crucifying the Son of God all over again.”* (Hebrews 6:6) Thanks to Jesus, this **hope** of heaven makes us *“eager to do...good”* because God promised a better day when sickness and sorrow will end. Seven centuries before Christ was born God promised this. In America our Constitution guarantees everyone the right to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” But Christmas turns that all around. **Peace Came to Earth** for happiness from God to pursue us. And happiness will finally catch up. As favorite prophet Isaiah was inspired to write: *“The ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.”* (35:10 NIV84)

We saw that little gleam of heaven in the Children’s Christmas Service last Sunday. Their eagerness to say and sing the story of our Savior’s birth is starlight from above. What the shepherds saw, what Mary held, we ponder in our hearts. No matter where or when the bells may toll, for us there’s always **Peace** in the Christ of Christmas. Good will from God! **Peace Came to Earth.** Amen.

<sup>2</sup> *Sermons of Martin Luther*, a.k.a. “Luther’s Postil.” J. Lenker, ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1988, Vol. VIII, p. 339.

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