

- Let me re-read a couple of verses from that last reading:
  - *“Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth **peace** to those on whom his favour rests.” (Luke 2:13,14).*
- Peace is a beautiful thing.
  - Whether it’s the peace of a sleeping baby
    - Who (having yelled its lungs out for what feels like hours)
    - finally settles itself and “sleeps in heavenly peace”
  - Or whether it’s a ceasing of hostilities between **two nations, two adults** or **two kids** who have been fighting...
- Peace is a beautiful thing. It causes dancing in the street.
- And doesn’t our **world need it** more than ever?
  
- But it’s worth being honest for a moment and asking since Jesus was born around 2000 years ago how much peace on earth there has actually been?
  - “Peace on earth, good will to men?” Has he made any difference?
    - Democratic Republic of Congo
    - South Sudan
    - Yemen
    - Mali
    - Myanmar
    - Gaza & Israel
      - (where wonderfully peace does seem to be holding).
    - Ukraine and Russia
      - (where all eyes have been for the last couple of weeks.
    - But Mark Rutte the NATO chief who on Thursday said *“Russia is already escalating its covert campaign against our societies, We must be prepared for the scale of war our grandparents or great-grandparents endured<sup>1</sup>”*. Scary stuff.
  
- Well I’ve called this talk “Peace on earth, question mark”
  - And just for a few minutes I’d like us to stop for a moment and take a deeper look at one line of what the Angels said to the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cn81x8py3j5o>

Shepherds was all those years ago, because as we do so, we find GOOD news in what is otherwise a rather depressing outlook.

- I've got 2 short points, and the first is this:

### **FIRST, PEACE WITH GOD IS ANNOUNCED**

- I wonder where you stand on the Christmas story
  - Perhaps some of us have grown up with it and we've kind of got used to it, wise men, shepherds, babies in the manger don't phase you. We almost don't question them.
  - Or perhaps you're a bit more sceptical, after all an army of winged messengers from heaven sounds more like something out of a fantasy novel than the kind of thing that really happens in reality.
- Well Doctor Luke is adamant that what he writes has been carefully researched from eyewitnesses who were there and passed on exactly what they saw, so do take a free copy of his gospel with you to read on the way out if you'd like.
- But even more than the **true story**, I'd like to focus on its **true significance** tonight, and for that we need to listen to what the Angels said.
- The first angel announces that a Baby has been born who is the Jewish Messiah- the King promised for centuries who the world has been waiting for. *V11 "Today in the town of David, a Saviour has been born to you he is the Messiah the Lord".*
- And this message which has been delivered to some of the poorest of the poor, is so important and so wonderful that an army of messengers bursts into praise, and this is our verse. *"Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests".*
- What is this peace on earth?
  - Is it a cute Skandinavian cosiness that comes from snuggling in the warm during the winter? No
  - Is it the family trying hard to stop sniping at one another just for a few days over the holidays? It's deeper than that.

- Is it a promise that all wars will cease? Actually no. The Bible never promises that.
- Peace in Luke's gospel is first of all PEACE WITH GOD.
  - To get a Bible concept need to understand a word in its context
  - The word peace comes 12 times in the book
    - In chapter 1 it comes on the lips of a man called Zechariah, a relative of Jesus' mother and he speaks of how a coming baby will bring ultimate peace that outshines death.
    - In ch2 A man called Simeon can depart in peace in other words he's ready to meet his maker through the coming of a saviour.
    - In chapter 7 A woman with a reputation who met Jesus is told she may go in peace.
  - So Peace from Jesus means a deeper wholeness, salvation.
    - It's much deeper than an end to fighting. Peace with God.
- You see if there's a problem you have to go to its root.
  - ▲ If there are cracks in the walls of your house as there are for some living in Huntingdon, it's no good just putting Polyfilla in the cracks and slapping on some new wallpaper.
    - You need to get to the root of the problem
    - Which is probably subsidence in the rock strata under your house.
    - So the foundations need shoring up.
- We might think that the problem with the world is the fighting between us,
  - But that is just the cracks in the wall, that's the symptoms.
- The problem if I can put it like this
  - is not horizontal- peace within humanity.
  - But it's vertical- peace with God.
- The real problem with the world is our broken relationship with God.
  - This is what has gone wrong with the world.
- We could spend every hour we have
  - As a peace activist trying to get **nations** to stop fighting

- As a teacher or parent telling **children** to stop fighting
- As a marriage counsellor to get **couples** to stop fighting
- You have to get to root.
  - We are at war with the God who made us.
- And here the true Christmas message gets a bit gritty. You see whether we realise it or not, we like to be King.
  - We like to be in charge.
  - Each of us.
- And when you put two people in a room who both want their own way it's going to be messy.
  - Anyone tried putting up some flat packed furniture with a friend or spouse lately?
  - Or had a discussion about how to stack a dishwasher,
  - Or what precise temperature the thermostat should be left on?
- I joke but if each of us seeks to rule from a throne that actually belongs to God, there's going to be a fight with God (because we don't like him telling us what to do) and with each other (because we don't like rivals).
- And very simply that is what has gone wrong with the world.
  - War with God leading to war with one another.
- So is the answer just to all be more nice?
  - Sadly we can't do that.
  - Selfishness
    - which is really wanting to be God
  - which the Bible calls sin
    - Is embedded very deep.
      - We basically need a rescue.
- And that's why the angels have burst into song.
- And that's why Christmas is more wonderful than we ever thought.
  - God has come down to the planet.
  - He hasn't come to tell us first of all to try harder or to be nice.
  - He's come down to rescue us from ourselves.
  - He's come to bring the one thing we all need before we die.

- PEACE WITH GOD.

- The Peace was announced out in the fields in Bethlehem but that peace was achieved when this little Baby born in the cowshed grew up to be a man and he was executed.
- But it wasn't a tragic accident
  - It was God's plan to rescue a broken fighting world to bring peace with himself.
  - Jesus experienced what you and I deserve on the cross for our selfishness and fighting.
  - He faced execution in our place.
- The Bible says "the punishment that brought us PEACE was upon him".
- Jesus has done everything needed to bring us PEACE WITH GOD.
  - One writer puts it like this. "the "war to end all wars" has already been fought. It was launched on Christmas, won on Good Friday, and proclaimed on Easter morning"<sup>2</sup>.

- **Well if 1) PEACE WITH GOD IS ANNOUNCED**

- **Then 2) PEACE FROM GOD IS AVAILABLE**

- Look carefully again at the message on the screen
- It doesn't actually say "on earth peace to ALL".  
It says "peace to THOSE"
  - (those on whom God's favour rests).
- While the peace that the angels announced is for the whole world, no matter how you view your background, ethnicity, identity.
  - It doesn't get received by all.
- When you are given a gift, it needs to be received.
  - Otherwise it sits under the Christmas tree waiting.
- ▲ I'm a bit of a procrastinator, and it takes me ages to decide how to spend my Christmas vouchers.
  - There have been times when gift vouchers at Christmas and birthdays have sat in a drawer for too long. A couple of years ago I found a £1 WHSmiths Gift voucher from a friend at Primary School.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/advent-meditation-peace-earth/>

- And if you leave them too long they expire. I did try, believe me, I got a funny look!
- Please don't do that with the greatest gift ever given. Peace with God through Jesus Christ.
- This peace **needs to be received**.
  - It's for those on whom his favour rests.
  - There's favour available, but it's not automatic.
  - There will be a day when it's too late.
- It can be received by asking the God who loves you to forgive you, to give you new life, and to give you peace with Him.
- **Have you done that?**
  - Have you received what is announced and available.
  - Peace with God It's only a prayer away.
  - Wouldn't it be a wonderful Christmas to receive THE only gift you ever needed.
- So And by the way, once this peace is **received it is to be shared**
  - You see once you have Peace with God
  - You have everything you need
  - And the thing that you were fighting for
    - That land
    - That status
    - That argument.
      - It doesn't matter as much any more.
  - You find that little by little,
    - You are able to forgive others as you have been forgiven.
    - It's a process, it takes time,
    - But peace with God leads to peace with people.
    - In the church God in microcosm starts to fix up a broken world.
  - If you need help to forgive others
  - We've got a **talk** on our website by John Henson<sup>3</sup>,
  - and I have a **book** by Tim Keller<sup>4</sup> I can lend about how to forgive.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://christchurchhuntingdon.co.uk/Media/AllMedia.aspx?show\\_media=299029&show\\_file=328110](https://christchurchhuntingdon.co.uk/Media/AllMedia.aspx?show_media=299029&show_file=328110)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.amazon.com/Forgive-Why-Should-How-Can/dp/0525560742>

- Peace to be received and peace to be shared.
  - In any community there are going to be fallings out and difficulties. But Christians actually have the resources to be able to mend things rather than just walk away and make things worse.
  - Christians are not necessarily better people, we are forgiven, and that helps us to forgive one another.
  - So it starts by receiving Peace with God.
- I wonder if you've heard of Henry Longfellow.
    - He was an American who lived through the American Civil War.
    - He had a tragic life including the loss of his first wife in childbirth and then his second wife in a fire
    - And his son was injured in the Civil War, despite his attempts to stop him fighting.
  - He wrote a poem<sup>5</sup> that I think captures some of the pathos of what we've been thinking about. The tragedy of war.
  - But also the confidence that in a sad world, God is going to win the victory.
  - We're going to hear a modern version of it now, sung by Ben.
  - As he sings, you might like to think to think about the following...
    - Have I received this Peace from God paid for as a gift from his own son.
    - And if so, how can I share it out to others this Christmas?

### **SOLO ITEM- "I heard the bells on Christmas day"**

- **Thank you Ben.**
- Come and chat.
- Pick up a booklet by Rico Tice which goes into this theme.
- Thank you for listening.

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<sup>5</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I\\_Heard\\_the\\_Bells\\_on\\_Christmas\\_Day](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I_Heard_the_Bells_on_Christmas_Day)