

Peace On Earth, Goodwill To Men

This month, I would like to pause and share a thought on the Christmas season. There are many exciting things to talk about regarding our Local Leaders, but the most exciting thing to talk about this time of year is the incarnation; the God of the Universe taking on flesh and dwelling among us (John 1:14). How amazing that He took the form of a humble, weak baby!

Skeptics will sometimes question the truth of the Christmas story because of an apparent contradiction between what one verse says and what we have all experienced in our lives. The verse in question is Luke 2:14, the record of the angelic announcement to the shepherds: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” Most of our culture interprets this to mean that the birth of Christ, the nativity scene, ought to inspire such feelings of peace and tranquility that entire nations will simply drop their agendas and their weapons and live in peace together.

In fact, the great American poet of the 19th Century, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, expressed the thoughts of many when he penned the Christmas carol, “I Heard The Bells On Christmas Day.” He wrote this hymn in 1864, during America’s Civil War. He had buried his wife due to a fire in 1861 and his son was severely wounded in the War in 1863. In the carol, Longfellow reflects on the irony of the words of Luke 2:14 and wrote this, “And in despair I bowed my head; ‘There is no peace on earth’ I said. ‘For hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, good will to men.’”

Longfellow’s misunderstanding (and many others today) of Luke 2:14 is due to a poor translation of the verse as well as the circumstances of his life. The KJV doesn’t give the verse the true sense of what is being communicated in the Greek. Perhaps the best translation would be the NASB which says, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”

God does not offer cessation of war amongst the nations at Christmastime. He offers cessation of war against Him, if people will simply please Him by responding to the message of His Son, that baby placed in a manger, in repentance and faith. The first step in pleasing Him is recognizing that the war exists. Man’s disobedience to the Law of God illustrates that war. Our rebellion against His righteous standard is the reason for the season. Christ came to seek and save the lost.

It’s those that please Him in repentance and faith that have peace with God (Acts 3:19; Hebrews 11:6). Christ went to the cross as a perfect substitute and sacrifice for our sins; He became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21). It’s this message that we must proclaim loud and long to this dying world. Peace with God (Romans 5:1) is the message of Christmas.

As you witness to the lost, keep in mind that they may have the same misunderstanding as Longfellow. For some it might even be an objection to the Gospel! It's our job to teach them the truth; Christ's mission was not the cradle, but the Cross. He came to bring peace between man and God; not between nations. Praise God, He did not fail in His mission! Every day, around the world, people humble themselves in repentance and faith and they are reconciled to God! Christmas was not "mission impossible", it was "mission accomplished."