

## God's peace

One starry night, a group of shepherds out in the fields were scared out of their wits, when an angel of the Lord appeared before them. **Luke 2v9** says this, *and behold an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid.*



The word for 'afraid' comes from the Greek work 'phobos', where we get our English word 'phobia'. As we all know a phobia can so grip a person that they are unable to function in their normal fashion. The shepherds were immobilised by their deep sense of fear.

Then the angels gathered to praise God saying in **verse 14**; *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.* What caught my attention was the phrase, **and on earth peace.** Peace in today's world seems a very long way off. How many years have we been watching vain attempts to bring peace to the Middle East?

Then there is the conflict that is going on in homes. The divorce rate in Australia is almost 1 in 2 with marriages ending up on the scrap heap. Home violence is at horrendous levels. Community conflict is not much better. So what were the angels referring to when they declared peace on earth?

### **PRAISE** the Lord for:

- ★ Our Challenge directors around the world. They are our vital link in terms of promoting and distributing the newspaper in their countries and beyond.
- ★ Our team of writers, all of whom have done a fabulous job this year.
- ★ Another successful trip for Carl and Graeme to South Africa and Kenya as we continue to develop street and prison editions.
- ★ All the people who have supported the work of Challenge financially, prayerfully and practically throughout 2019.

First of all Jesus' coming at Christmas was a declaration that mankind had a problem they could not fix. However, the prophet Jeremiah clearly portrays for us the nature of every human heart when he said, *The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it? I, the Lord, search the heart. I test the mind, even to give every man according to the fruit of his doings.* **Jeremiah 17:9-10**

The fact, that we have a problem we can't solve, no matter how good we think we are, is underlined by Jeremiah in his use of the word 'desperately', which literally means 'incurably sick'. It is beyond human endeavour to fix. Why do we keep seeing violence wars and conflicts. Answer. Because the human heart is incurably sick, and is in need of the divine doctor – Jesus Christ.

Secondly, because the human heart is in this condition we are born spiritually separated from God. Christmas is all about bringing reconciliation between God and man. This reconciliation process is summed up succinctly for us in **Romans 5v1**, which says; *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

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The word for peace here and in Luke 2v14 is identical. Peace in this context means the absence or end of strife, a state of untroubled, undisturbed wellbeing. Greek scholar Spiros Zodhiates sums it up well. “Such a state of peace is the object of divine and saving promise and is brought about by God’s mercy, granting deliverance and freedom from all the distresses that are experienced as a result of sin.” This can only become a reality as we put our faith in the finished work of the Cross of Jesus.

Christmas was the beginning of this mission to bring reconciliation and peace between rebellious man and a holy God. The problem with all the conflict we see in our homes, communities and around the world is that we think we can have peace without God.

Thirdly, once mankind is reconciled to God this has an impact on how we live our lives. We hear of people describing themselves as being stressed out. Worry is a constant ingredient in everyday life. We are consuming record

amounts of anti-depressants, painkillers, amongst a whole array of other drugs. All of these are symptoms of a world that doesn’t know a day-to-day peace.

The book of **Philippians 4v6-7** says this; *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

Christmas is all about bringing peace between God and man, and so entering into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, we can enjoy peace on a day-to-day basis. So as we walk in obedience to Jesus we experience a peace that is beyond human comprehension.

In essence, Christmas is about not only a positional peace in Christ Jesus, but also a practical peace that can only be described as a work of God. Such peace is beyond human capability and comprehension.

What a wonderful set of gifts for Christmas – peace with God and daily peace within. So despite the condition of the world we can look away from it and experience peace with God and peace within. This is what the angels meant when they announced peace on earth to the amazed shepherds.

May I take this opportunity on behalf of the Challenge team to wish all of our readers and users of Challenge a wonderful Christmas, and a fruitful and peaceful 2020.

{ CARL CARMODY  
EDITOR CHALLENGE }

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- Spiros Zodhiates

### **PRAYER** needed for:

- ★ Every newspaper distributed over this Christmas period, that God will open people’s hearts and minds to their need of Jesus.
- ★ The Challenge team as they take a couple of weeks off to refresh for 2020.
- ★ The need for finances to expand our projects around the world. Recently we received interest from the following countries – Philippines, India, Ethiopia and Sierra Leone.
- ★ Local churches to catch the vision for their local community and how they will share the gospel with them
- ★ Increased effectiveness of the paper within Australia. We would love to see our distribution double.

## **Ongoing supply of testimonies**

If you would like to share your testimony through the printed page please email [carl@challengenews.org](mailto:carl@challengenews.org) for further information