

**+ Luke 2:8-14 + Find Your Christmas Miracle<sup>1</sup> +  
+ Nativity of Our Lord: Christmas Day + 25 December 2012 +**

When war was declared, people danced in the streets of Europe. They had foolishly thought it would be a short war where heroes would be made and songs of bravery would be written, but they were wrong. Their dancing turned to mourning. The gallantry and glory they had envisioned turned to darkness and blood and battle in the trenches. In the fiercest fighting the world had ever seen, the battlefields of World War I saw destruction on a scale unprecedented in human history. In just one battle, over a million men were lost—just one battle in a war that lasted four years, much of which was fought along 460 miles of trenches. Each army dug their trench and stared at each other across a desolate, deadly place called No Man's Land. Stepping into No Man's Land meant facing machine guns, barbed wire, artillery, and counter attack. In that place hope withered and died.

By Christmas Eve 1914, only five months after the war had started, both sides had already reached a stalemate. The soldiers in the trenches weren't dancing. They no longer had any illusions of a glorious war. All they wanted was the shooting and shelling to stop, even for a few hours. Couldn't someone end the death and destruction? It was Christmas, after all, but peace in a place like that would take a miracle.

It did on the fields of Flanders. The trenches there were only 60 yards apart. You could yell across No Man's Land. You also had to always keep your head down, because if you didn't, your life was over. As night fell on that Christmas Eve, British soldiers peering over the trench noticed something very strange. German soldiers were putting little Christmas trees with candles clamped to their branches up on top of their trenches. The little, glowing trees seemed so out of place in such a dark, muddy place of death, but then the British soldiers heard something strange. The enemy soldiers were singing Christmas carols. Soon the British soldiers were joining in and singing their own across the 60 yards that separated them.

...And then it happened. The British couldn't believe their eyes as a German soldier stepped out of the trench with Christmas tree in hand and walked over to the British trench. With baited breath, everyone waited to see if he would be mowed down like so many others, but the night remained silent. Soon this crazy man's action made everyone think of crazier possibilities: Could this be the Christmas miracle that would bring peace?

For the shepherds of Bethlehem 2000 years before, their Christmas was filled with breathless hope too. They were out in the fields near Bethlehem **"keeping watch over their flocks at night"**. It was tough work, because you always have to watch the sheep. They had to watch out for predators and thieves and wandering sheep. There was little peace for sheep and even the shepherds. Surely those shepherds had known the pangs of hunger, the feelings of inferiority, the pain of families broken, the tragic loss of death. They knew to keep their heads down and hope for the best.

In the midst of another dark Judean night, however, they saw a strange light and heard a strange sound. An angel of the Lord stepped into the no man's land of this world, carrying the good news of the Christmas miracle—the promise of peace for a world at war. Of course, the shepherds were terrified as the holy glory of the Lord shone around them, but the angel calmed their fears. **"Don't be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."** What strange news! Could this be the Christmas miracle that would bring peace?

**"Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.'"** The angel hosts raised their joyful voices to the highest heights of the heavens because peace was finally coming to a world at war with itself and with the holy God. Sin had ruined everything, leaving only death and destruction and darkness in its wake as sinful mankind fought blindly against the holy God.

The shepherds wondered, "Peace on earth? Could it be? Could peace be possible? That would take a miracle!" With hopeful hearts, they ran through the darkness and found what the angel had said: a baby, wrapped in cloths and lovingly placed on a fresh bed of hay in a manger. They gazed at this little one, and their hopeful hearts breathlessly grabbed onto the angel's promise. This Child would bring peace to the world!

In the muddy fields of Flanders, the British watched as the German soldier with the Christmas tree came all the way across No Man's Land, stopped before their trench, and yelled in English, "Merry Christmas!" Then the unbelievable happened. Against the orders of their commanders, men from both sides climbed out of their trenches and gathered in No Man's Land. When the sun rose on Christmas Day, crowds of soldiers filled that place. They were shaking hands, exchanging gifts, sang more Christmas carols, and even had a soccer match. In this place of violence and

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the thoughts and language of this sermon were received with thanks from a Christmas sermon by Pr. Jonathan Schroeder.

death, peace spontaneously blossomed during that Christmas Miracle of 1914. For men so tired of fighting, that day of peace was like a taste of heaven. For a moment, they had their Christmas miracle of peace.

What kind of peace are you looking for this Christmas? A little peace of mind from all the worrying you do? A little peace from all the guilt you carry? A little peace from the heartache in your home or so you can finally fall asleep? We all want peace—not just in places like Syria or Afghanistan or Connecticut, but in our homes, our families, our hearts.

...But peace is hard because of who we are—husbands and wives who hurt instead of help, who shout instead of support; children who don't listen; bills that aren't paid and jobs that aren't certain. Peace of mind? Come on! You look in the mirror and feel guilty knowing you're not half the person you should be. Then there's the inexplicable evil in the world that's all the more fearful because of its random nature. There's not much peace to go around, is there? Life too often feels like you're in the trenches, day after day, nothing changing, just trying to keep your head down and hope for the best.

So how can angels promise peace on earth when we live in a world like this? Peace of mind and heart and home in this sinful world is about as likely as the guns of World War I pausing for gift-giving and a soccer match. That took the miracle of 1914, but my friends, the angels that night in Bethlehem promise an even bigger miracle than that! The child in the manger meant God had put his peace plan into motion. God was going to win peace for a world at war. That's why the angels sang so joyfully! ***"Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."***

Too often people look at Christmas pictures of Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus in the manger, and think it's all so precious and cute, but they completely miss the point. God himself was born as a man to win peace for people who could not find it for themselves. That's why he's called the Prince of Peace, but God had to be born a human, because he had to win that peace at a dear price. Jesus stepped into the no man's land of this world knowing it would cost him everything—he had to die.

You see, peace never comes cheap. Peace with God means somebody has to pay for all the things I've done wrong in my life. It means somebody has to be punished for all the times you've shortchanged your loved ones and your God. It means someone has to destroy the enemies that hold us hostage—sin, death, and the devil. That kind of peace doesn't come cheap. After all, it did cost the life of God's own Son. He knew it was coming, but still Jesus came.

That's why Christ was born in Bethlehem. The Prince of Peace was also the Price of Peace. He shouldered your guilt. He picked up my failings. He carried them all to the cross and was nailed there in your place and mine, and there he died. This warrior, however, who walked into the no man's land of our world, was different from any other. Death could not hold him. Jesus rose from the dead, and when he did, he broke the back of death. He crushed the head of Satan. He destroyed the power of sin and hell. The Prince of Peace was the Price of Peace, and that price is paid in full.

Do you see what that means? No longer do you need to be afraid of God, because Jesus died for you. No longer do you need to be afraid of death, because Christ rose for you. No matter what evil occurs in this violent world, no matter what evil is in this world, God promises that the price of peace has been paid. Not even death can rob you of the peace he has waiting. That's the Christmas miracle God gives to each of us—peace that the evil of this world cannot touch! Real, lasting, eternal peace!

The Prince of Peace was willing to pay any price for you. Now he promises to be with you whether at home in bed or in the midst of tragedy. He will be with you whether you are full of strength or full of disease. He will be with you whether you're at life's dawning or its dusk. He died for you. He rose for you. Now he waits for you, and that, my friends, is real peace. That's the message God announced to the world through angelic lips. "Come and find your Christmas miracle: ***'Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord.'***"

As wonderful as the Christmas Miracle of 1914 was, it didn't last. Manmade peace never does. A day later, the truce was over, the war was on, and peace was just a memory. God's peace and favor towards you and me? Now that's a Christmas miracle that lasts forever. That's exactly what God wants to give you this Christmas—peace with him, peace of mind, peace of heart. We taste it here. We enjoy it forever with him in heaven. What a Christmas Day that will be! Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace! Amen.