



GLORY to God in the highest, and PEACE on earth to those in whom God delights.

*A Pastoral Letter for Christmas from the Rt Revd Gregory K Cameron, Bishop of St Asaph, December 2021*

The opening words of this letter are a well known verse from the story of the birth of Jesus in the Gospel according to St Luke. We are nearly all familiar with the story of the shepherds who are out on the hills minding their sheep when they are suddenly confronted by a choir of angels, and told about the birth of Jesus. The message is made quite plain in the words of the angels: the new birth is an occasion promising “Glory to God in the Highest, and Peace on earth to those in whom God delights” (Luke 2.14 - an older but less accurate translation says “to men of goodwill”).

These are words of consolation for us in these days of Covid and international tension. The message of Christmas is that God intends Peace for those in whom he delights, and since God loves each and every one of us, that message is for all who will receive it. The first thing to note is that the Christian faith teaches that each one of us is a unique and special creation in God’s eyes, of infinite worth, and the object of God’s delight. Yes, that means all of us. Nor is his gift of Peace a light thing. When the Bible speaks of Peace, it means not just the ending of conflict or the absence of noise and commotion, but of a richness of life and blessing, pressed down and running over. To know Peace in God’s terms is to know completeness and fullness of life.

This may seem an optimistic and even foolish thing to say in the light of our circumstances. The Omicron variant poses a new threat to our lives, and just as we are getting ready for Christmas once again, a note of further uncertainty has been introduced. We may still be feeling bruised and even bereaved following the events of the last eighteen months. However, the point of Christmas for the Christian is that God has given us the gift of his Son in the birth of Jesus, giving the Word of God to be born in Bethlehem so that he might dwell among us and take upon him all the troubles and pain of the world. It is this message that God is on our side that teaches us that even in the midst of darkness we might find strength and hope and reassurance that there is an unconquerable element to life in God that even surpasses the boundaries of death.

The teachers of the early Church used to say something like this: In Jesus, God has drawn close to us in order that we might draw close to him. The real invitation of Christmas therefore is to ask whether we will make space for God in our lives – to give glory to God in the highest – so that the space he makes for us in Jesus, the gift of eternal life and the hope of heaven, peace in all its fullness, may be grasped and embraced in our own lives.

My prayer for you this Christmastide is that the gift of God’s peace may be real for you, and that in him you may find blessing and hope and love, so that we may join in with the message of the angels, and make their song our own. Happy Christmas!

*+gregory kameron*