

## December 2021 - Peace and goodwill

I am writing this as we are about to enter Advent. The season of chocolate calendars and frantic shopping for many in our nation. The season of additional burdens and heartache for those already struggling with poverty, loneliness and many other misfortunes. The season that for Christians is supposed to be a time for taking a careful look at our values and how we live, in the light of God's great love for us.

I am writing at a time when countries of the global south, environmental and climate campaigners are feeling 'thrown to the wolves' by the failure of the COP26 talks to take seriously the existential threat our planet faces; at a time when Covid cases across Europe are soaring; and a time when migrants fleeing horrors elsewhere are making the dangerous Channel crossing to the UK in ever increasing numbers. What on earth can a season of 'peace and goodwill' possibly have to say into such a situation?

If we look behind the pretty pictures on our Christmas cards, we find that the first Christmas had at its heart a young couple desperately searching for a roof over their heads before their baby was born, a young couple soon to be migrants fleeing to another country to escape from a murderous tyrant. Their young baby was welcomed into the world by a small band of shepherds, whose dirty labour and antisocial hours meant they were treated as outcasts by their society. And those who travelled for months to acknowledge him as king were not those who had been waiting centuries for his arrival, but nameless foreigners. That first Christmas tells me that God cares for those disregarded and unimportant in the world's eyes. I believe that if I am to remember Christmas in a way that honours God, then I must remember God's values; I must remember that true peace can only come when there is truly justice. So for me a 'good' Christmas must have at its heart something to help the poor and needy, something to support those facing injustice or oppression.

As I reflected on what 'peace and goodwill' might mean for Christmas this year, the phrase that kept coming to my mind was a line from Julian Lennon's song, *Saltwater*, 'What will I think of me the day that I die?' Many years ago, I read a survey asking people in their nineties what they wished they had done differently. Hardly any wished they had made more money, none wished they had worked harder. Most wished they had done something good that would outlive them, or wished they had spent more time reflecting on what really mattered. I wonder what your deepest wishes are this year? My prayer for us all this year is that the Christmas story might touch our hearts afresh to make us all kinder, more compassionate people, striving to make the world a better place for all.

Yours in Christ,  
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