

THE GRAPEVINE – Issue 40:17th Dec 2020

Dear Friends,

In the winter of 1914, the First World War was only five months old and already about 800,000 men had been wounded or killed. On France's Western Front, British and German soldiers had been fiercely fighting. On Christmas Eve that year, they braced themselves for yet another day of bombs and blood. But that day would be different from all others.

British soldiers in the trenches raised signs reading "Merry Christmas" and sang Christmas carols. Soon, they heard Christmas carols coming from the German trenches. On Christmas morning, both sides rose from their trenches and met in the middle of No Man's Land. They sang songs and engaged in conversations together. They exchanged sweets and cigars. And in one spot, they played football. Along the front, the spontaneous truce continued into the next day, with neither side willing to fire the first shot. The truce ended when fresh troops arrived. Enemies, who only days before had been engaged in fierce combat, had acted as if they were brothers.

Nothing else could have inspired the Christmas truce. No secular sloganeering encouraging soldiers to stop worrying and enjoy their lives could have bridged No Man's Land. No politician's speech with a call to unity could have turned No Man's Land into a joyous-filled playground. Only the story of Hope's birth could do that, even if only for a moment.

Perhaps that's why Christmas does more than just punctuate winter's dreariness with a glass of cheer. If Jesus' birth was just the birth of another important historical figure, we might enjoy a day to reflect on his example, but that would be it. Christmas is so much more because Jesus' birth is **hope's** birth, which blossoms with glory at Easter. Perhaps the interaction of Christmas and Easter are hinted at in the carol O Holy Night:

*O holy night, the stars are brightly shining
It is the night of our dear Saviour's birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
Till he appeared and the souls felt its worth.
The thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.*

Christmas is not just the birth of someone whose example helped humanity - it's the birth of the one who saves humanity from itself. In a paradox of time, Easter's hope gives rise to Christmas's joy. It is in the manger where the vulnerable infant carried within himself the message that God so loves the world. All of our human expressions of joy, hope, and peace are footnotes to the embodied message of the Christ-child. This Christmas may you be inspired, in the midst of a world of injustice, violence and uncertainty to have joy because of the hope Jesus offers.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13

May you receive God's richest blessing this Christmas!




Nativity Scenes: Last call to create your own nativity scene for this Sunday. Take a photo of the scene and send it to Stan either via email or Whatsapp (07979652783) by Friday 18th December so we can show them on our weekly worship broadcast this Sunday, 20th December. Thank You!