

Peace: The Essence of the Christmas Message



Christopher News Notes

“PEACE IS THE ESSENCE OF THE MESSAGE OF CHRISTMAS...

for Christ came to bring His peace to every man,” said Father James Keller, the founder of The Christophers. “He came as the Prince of Peace.

And the word ‘peace’ was closely identified with both the beginning and end of Christ’s life on earth. In Bethlehem at His birth, the angels sang ‘Peace on earth to men of good will.’”

Father Keller continued, "Thirty-three years later, [Jesus] rose from the dead and spoke these words: 'Peace be to you. As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.' Here, then, is the sublime commission that has been given to each of us: to take Christ's peace into our hearts and our homes, so that it will radiate from there to every part of the world."

Christ's peace is special. We know that from Jesus Himself who told His followers: "My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you." (John 14:27)

How does Jesus give? Totally, completely, fully. He gives Himself. He gives love. And—again from John—we know that God is love: "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him...should have eternal life." (John 3:16)

Christmas, then, is about peace and giving and love—God's love for us and our love for Him and for each other. Here is the way Irenaeus expressed that idea: "The word of God, Jesus Christ, on account of His great love for mankind, became what we are in order to make us what He is Himself."

We approach what He is when we observe Christmas in the spirit of self-giving.

This Christmas...

- Give time: Remember an old friend. Share a meal with someone lonely.
- Give hope: Live joyfully. Raise the spirits of a child.
- Give peace: Forgive an enemy. Set differences aside.
- Give of yourself: Perform acts of kindness.
- Give love—And Christmas will be forever!

"Today, eternity enters into time. And time, sanctified, is caught up into eternity." —Thomas Merton

Charles Fluty lives in cheap hotels out of necessity. A cook when he is able to find work, he relies

mostly on a small veteran's pension. But wherever he is, Fluty always cooks a big Christmas dinner for tenants who would otherwise be spending a lonely day in their rooms. "I do it for the ones who can't afford to go out," he says.

Give hope...

The darkest time in the year,
The poorest place in the town,
Cold, and a taste of fear,
Man and woman alone,
What can we hope for here?

More light than we can learn
More strength than we can treasure,
More love than we can earn,
More peace than we can measure,
Because one Child is born:

As though a single flake
Of snow touching the earth
Would all our thirsting slake
And turn all death to birth,
Bidding our spirits wake

To what makes the many one.
The deep solicitude
Which bred both star and bone,
Claiming, by stable and rood,
God's will to be our own.

—Christopher Fry

One Christmas Eve in Melbourne, Australia, radio announcer Norman Banks caught the strains of a carol coming through an open window. Stopping, he saw an elderly woman holding a candle and singing joyously. He spoke to her and learned that she was celebrating what she knew to be her last Christmas. Inspired by the faith of the dying woman, Banks invited his listeners to join him in caroling at the city's riverfront park. The candle-light sing has since become a Melbourne tradition, with some 300,000 people participating each year.

All year long, Tony Gruttadauria of Casselberry, Florida, visited flea markets and garage sales, buying up old toys and Christmas items. A retired novelty salesman who lived in a sparsely furnished apartment, he enjoyed stacking the brightly wrapped gifts almost to his ceiling and then, dressed as Santa, distributing them to poor children on Christmas day. Said a neighbor: "He enjoyed making kids happy."

Give Peace...

"When this greeting (Merry Christmas) was originally used, the word 'merry' did not mean 'joyful, hilarious,' as it does today. In those days, it meant 'blessed, peaceful, pleasant,' expressing spiritual joys rather than earthly happiness.

"The well-known carol 'God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen' is an excellent example of the original meaning of 'merry.' The position of the comma clearly shows the true meaning (the word is not an adjective describing 'gentlemen') and therefore is not 'God rest you, joyful gentlemen,' but 'God rest you peacefully, gentlemen.'"

—Frances X. Weiser, *Handbook of Christian Feasts*

Father Anthony Kardas escaped from his native Lithuania in a hay wagon when Russian religious persecution there was intensified. He served many years as a missionary in Chile and then was assigned to Holy Cross Church near New York's Times Square in 1973. On Christmas night, 1980, as he left the Times Square subway station, he was attacked and brutally beaten by two youths who took his watch and \$100. From his hospital bed, the aging priest said, "It was cruel, but I...forgive them."

The year was 1914; the place, Flanders; the day, Dec. 24. Allied and German armies faced each other across a hostile No Man's Land that reeked of death. Standing guard duty at midnight in the British sector was Pvt. Peter Goudge, 23. Alert to every sound, he was startled to hear the strains of "Silent Night" drifting across the lines.

He started to sing to himself, softly. Others joined. Then the whole British line took up a carol of their own. The Germans cheered and joined with a joyous Saxon hymn. The singing continued. Before dawn, Goudge was startled again when he saw a glimmer of light move out of the German lines toward his. A German soldier was picking his way across No Man's Land holding aloft a small tree with flickering candles. Leaning over the barbed wire, he shouted in English, "Merry Christmas!" As dawn broke, men on both sides of the lines emerged, shook hands, embraced and exchanged cigarettes and chocolate.

Upon learning of the unauthorized "truce," the generals on both sides transferred their troops. On Dec. 26, the killing resumed. But on Christmas Day, in Flanders, there was "peace on earth."

Give of yourself...

Jesus came from Jewish roots. He frequently taught in the temple and would have participated in the Hanukkah celebration with His parents.

"These lights we now kindle...' These words accompany the lighting of Hanukkah candles in the home, and in the heart, to commemorate the eternal bridge of light which reaches from Creation itself to the radiant spirit of free men. In this spirit is celebrated the Festival of Hanukkah—the Festival of Light—wherein the candle that gives its light to the others is called 'the servant candle.' You too


**"It's better to light one candle
than to curse the darkness."**

A non-profit, founded in 1945 by Father James Keller, M.M., The Christophers encourages people to change the world for the better. Donations are tax-deductible. News Notes are published 10 times a year. Single copies are free.

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are strongest...when you serve."

—*Fellowship*

On a raw December day in Anderson, South Carolina, a shopper paused on her rounds, touched by the sight of an unshaven old man sitting on a bench, his jacket threadbare and a paper bag about his neck to keep out the cold. As she sorrowed for the man, a girl of 11 or 12 came by and stopped also. From around her neck she took a bright red woolen scarf. Silently, she wrapped it around the man's neck and slipped away.

It was three days before Christmas. Seven-year-old Richard Baillargeon's mother was busy with seasonal chores. She asked Richard to shine her good shoes for her. Shortly after, with the prideful smile that only a child can muster, the boy presented the shoes for inspection. Pleased with the results, his mother rewarded him with a quarter.

On Christmas Day, as she put on her shoes to go to church, she noticed a lump in one shoe. Taking it off, she found a quarter wrapped in paper. Written on the paper in a child's scrawl were these words: "I done it for love."

Christmas is forever...

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost, to heal the broken,
To feed the hungry, to release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations, to bring peace
among brothers,
To make music in the heart.

—*Howard Thurman*

This is an edited version of the classic Christopher News Note, "And on Earth, Peace..."