

God doesn't lie—but He sure says some funny things. When we hear the angels—God's messengers—tonight, we get them announcing, "Peace on earth, good will toward men!" And I don't know about you, but it hits my ears as kinda strange. I mean, "Peace on earth?" . . . "Good will toward men?" . . . *Where?* They're talking about earth, right, but it sure doesn't sound like *this* planet! With the nuclear threat from North Korea, police in riot gear facing off with political activists of either extreme, the potential of terrorism anywhere you go—and that's just to name a few—I think you'd agree that the message tonight seems a little out of place. As General Waverly said in the movie *White Christmas*, "There's no Christmas in the army!"—well, there's no Christmas in the warfare we see every day.

I think the Shepherds might've agreed—at least at first. When they were out tending their flocks by night, and heard, "Peace on earth, good will toward men!" they must've thought, "You've got to be kidding me!" Their land, after all, was still under Roman occupation, they were forced to live under Gentile rule. And even within Judaism, there was lots of infighting between various sects. And when the Magi would visit Herod, Herod got so spooked that this "King of the Jews" might pull out the kingdom from under him, that he'd have every boy under two slaughtered just to secure His throne. And that's just Palestine—they didn't have global news the way we do now! "Peace on earth, good will toward men" must've been a bit off to the shepherds when they first heard it. Like we know today, "There's no Christmas in the army."

Except there is. I heard a story recently that I think is nothing short of a Christmas miracle. Apparently, on a crisp, clear Christmas morning, just over 100 years ago, thousands of British, Belgian, and French soldiers put down their rifles and stepped out of their foxholes. Nobody knows exactly where it began or how it spread, but it broke out simultaneously across the trenches. Extending a hand, they made peace on earth with their German enemies along the Western front. And wishing each other "Merry Christmas," there was good will toward men. They broke out into carols together; exchanged gifts of cigarettes, food, buttons, and hats; even kicked around the soccer ball. It has become known as the Christmas Truce of 1914.

Now, how do you explain something like that? Not sure that you can, except that the Christ child indeed brought about a kind of peace on earth and good will toward men, one that runs deeper and is more lasting than anything we might expect. It's true, that the Truce lasted but a day, and then it was back to fighting, but as one British soldier, Murdoch M. Wood, said later, "I then came to the conclusion that I have held firmly ever since, that if we had been left to ourselves there would never have been another shot fired." See, these men knew that beyond these wars, higher than any conflict, all men are ultimately in the same boat. Before the almighty God, we are all dead in our trespasses and sins, all deserving of everlasting condemnation. But even more, they understood that each of us has received good news of great joy that is for all people. That unto us is born in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Everybody, no matter our differences, is equally precious in the sight of God. "For God so loved the *world* that He sent His one and only Son." There's not a single person who isn't that loved, isn't that saved, doesn't receive that kind of gift of peace and good will with God. And a message that funny—even in the midst of war—can do some funny things.

One of my favorite photographs of all time is a bombed out church after World War II. It's of St. Paul's Cathedral in Münster, Germany back in 1946. And the picture shows a priest, a deacon, and a subdeacon, all standing before a grand altar complete with ornate reredos; two acolytes stand off to the side, hands together in prayer; Holy Communion is set before them. Only thing is, all the windows are missing, and a giant wall is just gone—nothing between them and the outside—and rubble lays all around. And what makes this one of my favorite photos is that it reminds me that General Waverly was wrong—there's always, always, *always* Christmas in the army! Not Romans, not Herod, not even bombs, can stop God from being united with His people. It's *always* time for peace on earth, and good will toward men—even during times of war and ill-will. Because our Savior has been born, we have a peace and good will that transcend all circumstances.

I'm not sure what kind of battles you're facing in life right now. But no doubt, you and I are all entrenched in some kind of war zone—whether struggling against ourselves, or contending with others, or even wrestling with the world. No matter what it is, the angels' message is for you—"Peace on earth, good will toward men!" And whether you rush with the Shepherds to the crib of the Christ child tonight, or arrive fashionably late with the Magi, it is in Jesus that you ultimately find the Prince of Peace. He is the reason why the angels' funny message can strangely make sense. Because when you have a God who loves you like that, a God who saves you like that, a God who throws open the doors of eternity to you like that—how can you *not* have peace? I mean, with a God like that, what's there to possibly be afraid of?

At the museum of the concentration camp at Dachau, hangs a moving photograph of a mother and her little girl being led to a gas chamber at Auschwitz. This girl, who is walking in front of her mother, has no idea where she's going. But the mother, who's walking behind her, does know. And what's absolutely heartbreaking is how she knows there's nothing—absolutely nothing—she can do about it. In her helplessness, she does the one thing she can do, her last act of love for her child—she places her hand over the little girl's eyes, so at least she won't have to see the horrors that await her. Now, when people see this picture in the museum, I've heard that they don't move too quickly or easily on to the next one. It's as if you can feel the emotions swelling up inside them, hear the cries about to break forth—"O God, don't let that be all there is. Some way, somehow, don't let that be all there is!"

The angels' message to us tonight is that God *has* heard those prayers. And that it is in just such situations of turmoil and chaos that God's peace enters in. It's as if He's added a new photograph next to that one in the museum—one that shows that that's not all there is, but so much more! And here's what that picture looks like—into this warring world, on a dark night in Bethlehem, inside a feed stall, the Prince of peace is born. The Romans, and the Herods, and the warmongers can do their worst, but you and I we can have peace no matter what comes our way! For it's to folks like us that the angels say, "Fear not, [*fear not!*] for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that's for all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord!"