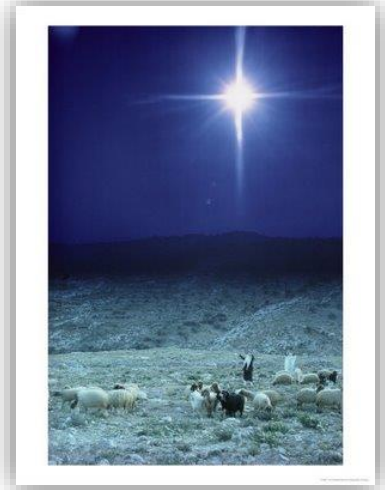


December 2014

Dear friends,

An angel appeared to the shepherds, saying,
'I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'
Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,
'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.'

Luke chapter 2, verses 10 - 14



Christmas is a time to celebrate again the birth of Jesus, bringing a message of love, new life, hope and especially peace...

This theme of peace has been with us over the past few months as we have been remembering the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War, with a peaceful truce descending on the first Christmas of the War. Late on Christmas Eve 1914, men of the British Expeditionary Force heard the Germans singing carols and patriotic songs and saw lanterns and small fir trees along their trenches. Messages began to be shouted between the trenches. The following day, British and German soldiers met in No Man's Land and exchanged gifts, took photographs and some played football. They also buried casualties and repaired trenches and dugouts.

Some officers viewed the truce as a chance to improve living conditions in the trenches, while others worried that such unwarlike behaviour would undermine fighting spirit. The High Commands on both sides took measures to ensure such fraternisation would not happen again and the 1914 Christmas Truce remained a unique event on the Western Front. The uniqueness of this brief truce helps us to know that peace is not only important, but vital in all parts of our lives.

At Christmas we celebrate the birth of Jesus, described as the 'Prince of Peace'. The whole of Jesus' life demonstrated the reality and importance of living at peace with each other. He showed the value of caring, with the certainty that genuine love can transform lives. We can experience for ourselves the change that Jesus can make and in turn make a difference in the world.

This is especially relevant in difficult times when we might experience uncertainty and little or no genuine peace. As we think about the birth of Jesus we are given the ideal opportunity to discover again the message of peace that Jesus brings, finding out how this peace can be a reality with a real sense of expectation and hope for the future. In doing so, we can then share this peace with those around us; family, friends, colleagues and neighbours...

As you celebrate Christmas this year I pray that you may know the love, new life, hope and peace that is to be found in Jesus.

May I wish you all a very Peaceful Christmas.

Yours in His love,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mike'.

**The Revd Canon Mike Lodge
Team Rector**