

## “Peace on Earth”

Of all the Christmas story passages, perhaps the most well-known is the proclamation of the angels, “*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.*” We see it on Christmas cards and from signs hanging from stores: “Peace on earth.” Yet, there is a dissonance between what we observe and what we read: nation against nation, brother against sister, and neighbor against neighbor. Studies reveal the alarming growth of suicide and depression over the past three years. Where is the so-called peace on earth proclaimed by the angels? It is enough to make one cynical of the Christmas message.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote about this dissonance during the Civil War. His oldest son, Charley, had left to fight in the union army. On November 27, 1863, Charley had been severely wounded at the battle of the Mine Run Campaign. So, on Friday, December 25, 1863, 57-year-old widowed Longfellow, father of six, wrote a poem as he sat at the bedside of his son, Charley. He observed the casualties of war and the great pain of loss as he heard the bells ringing and the choirs singing, “Peace on earth, good will to men” (Luke 2:14). He took to pen and wrote, “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day”, and, at one point, noting that dissonance, “*And in despair I bowed my head; “There is no peace on earth,” I said; “For hate is strong, And mocks the song Of peace on earth, good-will to men!”*”

While hate is strong, it does not negate the proclamation of the angels. Their message is true, and it only requires the skills of reading and thinking to understand what you believe. You see, not all peace is the same kind of peace. The assumption is that the angels proclaim peace among mankind or an inner peace. But Scripture is clear that the angels declare peace between God and His people. In Luke 2, Zechariah prophesies that salvation is now given to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, and the light will guide our feet into the way of peace (1:77,79). Peace is salvation for His people, including the forgiveness of their sins. This peace comes through the death of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins. The kind of peace proclaimed by the angles is the reconciliation between God and His people through the shed blood of Jesus. His death establishes the peace that declares you “above reproach before him” (Col. 1:22). It is this kind of peace we sing, “Hark! the herald angels sing, ‘Glory to the newborn king; peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!’”

Do not reject the message of the angels. Instead, rightly understand it. There is peace of earth because the prince of peace secured reconciliation between God and sinners through the blood of Christ. Glory to God in the highest!

Judson Marvel

Pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church, Sierra Vista, AZ