

21

FOR CHRISTMAS AND ALL THROUGH THE YEAR
MAY YOU ALWAYS HAVE AN ANGEL BY YOUR
SIDE.

May you always have an angel by your side-Watching
out for you in all the things you do-Reminding you to
keep believing in brighter days-Finding ways for your
wishes and dreams to take you to beautiful places-
Giving you hope that is as certain as the sun-Giving you
the strength of serenity as your guide-May you always
have love and comfort and courage-And may you always
have an angel by your side- - -

May you always have an angel by your side-Someone
there to catch you if you fall-Encouraging your dreams-
Inspiring your happiness-Holding your hand and helping
you through it all

In all of our days, our lives are always changing-Tears
come along as well as smiles-Along the roads you
travel, may the miles be a thousand times more lovely
than lonely-May they give you the kind of Christmas
gifts that never ever end: someone wonderful to love and
a dear friend in whom you can confide-May you have
rainbows after every storm-May you have hopes to keep
you warm-

And may you always have an angel
by your side.

(EMILIA LARSON)

This, tonight, is the meeting place.

This, tonight
is the meeting place
of heaven and earth.

For this, tonight,
is the stable
in which God keeps his appointment
to meet his people

Not many high are here,
not many holy;
not many innocent children,
not many worldly wise;
not all familiar faces,
not all frequent visitors.

But, if tonight
only strangers met,
that would be enough.

For Bethlehem was not the hub of the universe,
Nor was the stable a platform for famous folk.

In an out-of-the-way place
which folk never thought to visit -
there God kept and keeps his promise:
there God sends his son.

(Taken from 'Cloth for the Cradle' Wild Goose Worship Group, Iona)

These words may be helpful as a prologue to a midnight mass where those attending will not all be regular churchgoers.

Why do we fight?

In December 1914 German and British forces stood facing each other, separated by a strip of flat ugly land intersected with barbed wire. Now and then shadowy figures crept across the waste of "no-man's land," but most of the soldiers kept well down below the skyline, enduring the mud and water that seeped into the trenches, intent only on avoiding firing from enemy lines opposite.

On Christmas Eve, the air was cold and frost-filled. Suddenly, amazed British soldiers saw lights come on along the line of enemy trenches. Then came the unbelievable sound of singing – German soldiers singing **"Silent Night, Holy Night."**

(Sing verse one in German)

When the sound died away, the British soldiers replied with "The First Nowell."

The singing on both sides went on for an hour and was followed by invitations to cross over to enemy lines. One German with great courage began to walk across to the British trenches, followed by other Germans, hands in pockets, to show that they had no weapons.

"I am a Saxon, you are Anglo-Saxons. Why do we fight?" he asked.

(Sing the same verse in French)

When Christmas Day dawned bright and cold there was no sound of rifles or gunfire. The men had agreed among themselves to declare peace.

"A spirit stronger than war was at work that night," one onlooker commented.

(Sing the same in Irish followed by English.)

SEEKERS OF HOPE

It's the whole world
that comes with the wise men to the crib
drawing close to the Infant God
That they might find in him
meaning in life and light for living.

We draw close, Lord,
with all those who have lost hope,
all those for whom faith is nothing more
than a long night to be got through,
all those who have lost the taste
for seeking and struggling...

We draw close, Lord,
with all those who are handicapped in body or mind,
with those who are paralysed in their suffering,
with those left to their loneliness,
whom nobody ever comes to console...

We draw close, Lord,
with all those who've had their place taken,
with those living in poverty and hunger,
with whose dignity has been trodden on,
with those who have forgotten the colours of peace...

We draw close with confidence
to you, Child of the crib.
Look: we've come seeking hope!

Help us to see God's smile
in the face of a child.

Give us a new heart,
so that we may receive the divine Child,
understand his message,
and bear it in our everyday lives.

Give us the strength to accompany the Lord
throughout the year ahead,
and to follow in his footsteps.

- Cardinal Suenens

The Present

The poor little boy was as sad as could be.

He had no little present for under the tree.

Oh, my mum and dad work so hard for me,

I have nothing to give them to thank them, you see.

But later, alone on his small little bed,
He took bright coloured paper

And long bits of thread.

And he tied up a parcel

With nothing inside,

And he crept down the stairs

With the parcel he tied.

When he woke the next day

He went down to the tree,

He saw Mum and Dad

As glad as could be.

'We got perfume, a tie,

And a clock for the shelf,

But your present was special,

You made it yourself.

And your bright little parcel

All tied up so small,

Was filled up with love,

The best present of all.'



Christy Kenneally

A Christmas Prayer

Give us, Lord Jesus, the eyes of children,
To see your birth with Christmas wonder. //

Help us to share in the songs of the angels,
The gladness of the shepherds,
and the worship of the Wise Men.

Close the door on hate,
and open the door of love, all over the world.

Let kindness come with every gift,
and blessing with every greeting.
Deliver us from evil, by the blessing Christ brings,
and teach us to be merry with clean hearts.

May Christmas morning
Make us happy to be your children,
And Christmas evening
bring us to rest with grateful thought,
Forgiving and forgiven. Amen.

Robert Louis Stevenson
(1850 - 1894)

**God,
our hope and our desire,
we wait for your coming,
as a woman longs
for the birth,
the exile for her home,
the lover for the touch
of his beloved,
and the humble poor
for justice**
[Janet Morley, Christian Aid]

**What if the Christmas Story
Happened in Our Day?**

What if the Christmas story
happened in our day.
Mary and Joseph might well have been
on the motorway.
Instead of a bright and guiding star,
Lights from car after car after car.

The night was foggy, wet and cold,
The bus in which they travelled
was rickety and old.
Joseph was a worried man full of fear,
For Mary his beloved wife's time was near.

He consulted the driver, a very kindly man,
"Don't worry mate", he said, "I'll do what I can."
He left at the next exit and set them down
At the hospital in a very busy town.

The lady at the desk sadly shook her head,
"Due to NHS cuts, I regret we have no bed
Perhaps you could go private
at the Nursing Home."
Joseph and Mary then began to roam.

Searching for shelter from door to door,
Just when time was running out
and they could walk no more
They came upon the shelter
of a homeless group
Who smiled at them
and offered to share their soup.

The story is different, there's no ass or ox,
This time the Son of Man
lies in a cardboard box.

(Written by Sr. Julian Burrows)

REFLECTION

What good is it to me
if the eternal birth of the divine Son
takes place unceasingly
but does not take place
within myself?

And

what good is it to me
if Mary is full of grace
and if I am not also full of grace?
What good is it to me
for the Creator to give birth to
his/her Son
if I do not also give birth to him
in my time
and my culture?
This, then, if the fullness of time:
When the Son of God
is begotten
in us.

All are sent
or no one is sent,
into all/or into nothing.
For the kingdom of heaven,
is all in all,
all is one
and all is ours.

And

in the kingdom of heaven
everything is in everything else.
All is one
and all is ours.

We are all in all
as God
is all in all.

(Reflection from Meister Eckhart)

WILL YOU SAY YES?

The annunciation was really a question to Mary. "Will you bring Christ into the world?" Mary said yes.

Today each of us is called to friendship with Christ, and are challenged by the same question Mary was asked: "Will you bring Christ into the world?"

(Do you know its Advent? - C.Y.C.)

LIGHTING A CHRISTMAS CANDLE

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light

ISAIAH 9:1-2

Lord Jesus

In the lighting of this candle
Enkindle in my heart
A flame of hope and love.
Bring light and warmth to the
Famished places of my heart.
Help me to enter into the real
Experience of Christmas,
To let go of needless anxiety and stress
To feel peace and healing enter my tired spirit.

With this candle I pray this Christmas

- For peace in our family
- For children and young adults in broken families
- For couples going through the pain of separation
- For those who dread Christmas, because they have lost a loved one.
- For those who are more lonely at Christmas
- For families who are fearful of violence because a father or mother drinks too much
- For those who are losing faith and hope
- For those who have to spend Christmas in hospital
- For those who suffer from depression
- For those worried about their children, about binge-drinking, drugs or violence on the streets
- For those who cannot come home for Christmas
- For those who find it difficult to come home to God, to faith and to the church.

Be my light, my guiding star towards the wonder and the peace of Bethlehem
Lead me home to love made flesh in Jesus. AMEN.

A Christmas of Contrasts

I receive cards and letters from dear ones.

... There are many who have no one to love them.

I sit down to a Christmas dinner, a table of abundance.

... There are those who long for just a small portion of food and find none.

I feel love and goodness from those around me.

... There are people terrorized by death squads and tortured in prisons.

I open my many gifts, most of which are not needed.

... There are those who have no gifts to give or receive.

I move freely from home to home choosing whom I see and visit.

... There are visually impaired, physically challenged, chronically ill persons who cannot move easily.

I am welcomed by friends, family, and acquaintances.

... There are persons who are mocked, ridiculed, disdained, or ignored because of their race and religion.

I return to the security of my home.

... There are countless homeless who have no dwelling place to which they can return.

This Christmas, will I recognize God's presence in my world? Will I look beyond my own comfortable, cozy space and find God dwelling among the many who are lost, lonely, ill, neglected, forgotten? Will their presence in the world make any difference in how I celebrate the Holy One's coming to dwell in my midst? Will I see the love of God shining through the windowed hearts of Earth's people? Will I hear the truth told long ago of this Beloved's kindness toward all? Will I hold these people in my heart this Christmas? Will I let them touch my prayer and my celebration?

Joyce Rupp

A Christmas Blessing

—May there be harmony in all your relationships. May sharp words, envious thoughts, and hostile feelings be dissolved.

—May you give and receive love generously. May this love echo in your heart like the joy of church bells on a clear December day.

—May each person who comes into your life be greeted as another Christ. May the honor given the Babe of Bethlehem be that which you extend to every guest who enters your presence.

—May the hope of this sacred season settle in your soul. May it be a foundation of courage for you when times of distress occupy your inner land.

—May the wonder and awe that fills the eyes of children be awakened within you. May it lead you to renewed awareness and appreciation of whatever you too easily take for granted.

—May the bonds of love for one another be strengthened as you gather with your family and friends around the table of festivity and nourishment.

—May you daily open the gift of your life and be grateful for the hidden treasures it contains.

—May the coming year be one of good health for you. May you have energy and vitality. May you care well for your body, mind, and spirit.

—May you keep your eye on the Star within you and trust this Luminous Presence to guide and direct you each day.

—May you go often to the Bethlehem of your heart and visit the One who offers you peace. May you bring this peace into our world.

—Joyce Rupp