

PEACE ON EARTH TO PEOPLE OF GOODWILL

A MEDITATION FOR CHRISTMASTIDE



One of the four stained glass Rosary windows in the Church of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady, Penzance.

This window illustrates the five Joyful Mysteries.

This Nativity scene is dominated by a large star. At Jesus' birth this light from Heaven reveals God's message of love, joy and peace. In the violent, troubled world of 2000 years ago and in our own time, that message is: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to people of goodwill." This "Gloria" is part of our Mass.

All people long for peace and unity. Every year, whatever their beliefs, they talk of "the season of goodwill," a faint echo of the real message of Christmas. At Christmas 1914, British and German soldiers fighting in the trenches during World War I made an unofficial truce. They exchanged gifts and played football. Yet a few days later they were at war again, just as many will quickly forget the message of "peace and goodwill," and rush on with their daily lives.

Look closely at this Nativity scene. The Infant Jesus is pointing towards a lamp near the crib. This gesture looks forward to the time when He will say: "I am the Light of the World." (John 8:12) It is only the Light of Christ that will help us to be "light for the world" (Matthew 5:14) and "ambassadors for Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:20) wherever we are.

By following Jesus our Light we will receive through His grace the main fruits of His Holy Spirit: love, joy and peace. We cannot love unless we are first loved. "We love because He first loved us." (1 John 4:10) And so God who brought the world into existence through love, has given us a way back to Him despite the sin which separates us from Him and from one another. And that way is love. Perhaps the best known verse in the entire Bible tells us that "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son so that whoever believes in Him may not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

Two of the fifty titles of Mary are: "Cause of our Joy" and "Queen of Peace." The five Mysteries of the Rosary shown in this window are called Joyful. Mary's acceptance of a lily from the Angel Gabriel symbolises her purity and her trust in our Heavenly Father. Because Mary brought Jesus into our world as one of us – true God and true man – we can be joyful. Faith, hope, love and joy lead us to true peace, the "peace of God which is beyond our understanding." (Philippians 4:7)

Notice that there are several green planks near the crib. They are a warning to us. Jesus founded a Kingdom of love, justice and peace: all the good things we need so much. But love can never be imposed on anyone. Those green planks remind us that evil and hatred will keep fighting against love and peace. Jesus "was despised and rejected of men." (Isaiah 53:3) and died on the wood of the Cross. Yet despite the world's worst efforts, the wood of the Cross became a green Tree of Life for us.

Our Father's love is endless, and one day He will be "all in all." (1 Corinthians 15:28)

"On Christmas night, all Christians sing
To hear the news the angels bring,
News of great joy, news of great mirth
News of our merciful King's birth."

The Sussex Carol

Recommended Reading

1. Isaiah 7:14	2:1-5 and 11:6-9	Peace on earth Prophecy of Messiah's birth
Luke	2:1-7 2:8-20	Jesus is born in Bethlehem The message of the angels
John	1:1-18 esp. v.14	The Word became flesh
Ephesians	2:13-18	Christ is our peace

2. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)

Paragraph 422	The essential Good News
452	Jesus: His Name and Mission
Jesus became man...	
457	...to bring us back to His Father
458	...so that we might know God's love for us
459	...to be our model of holiness
460	...to make us sharers in the divine nature
464	Jesus: true God and true man
490-491	Mary made worthy to become the Mother of God