GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN

In the first World War, nine million soldiers were killed, and twenty-three million wounded. Five million civilians were killed by weapons, disease, and hunger. The soldiers were from France, Belgium, England, and Germany, India, and Nepal. Because of the devastation, some believed no one would ever desire war again, so they called the war, 'The War to End All Wars.' In that great conflict, Wilhelm II, German Emperor and King of Prussia, fought against his cousin by blood, George V, King of the United Kingdom and the British Dominions, and Emperor of India, and against his cousins by marriage, Nicholas II, Emperor of Russia, and Ferdinand I, King of Romania. The soldiers, too, were cousins, all having descended from the first man, Adam. Three months after the war began, Pope Benedict XV lamented the hostility, saying "Who would imagine, as we see them thus filled with hatred of one another, that they are all of one common stock, all of the same nature, all members of the same human society? Who would recognize brothers, whose Father is in Heaven?" Yet, one occasion, some of the soldiers did recognize each other as such, and they made peace with each other. On Christmas Eve in the first year of the war, one-hundred thousand German and British soldiers temporarily laid down their arms, and made a truce with each other. For three glorious days, they enjoyed peaceful fraternal relations. Concerning the occasion, aa Belgian soldier wrote,

> Christmas in the trenches. It must have been sad do you say? Well I am not sorry to have spent it there and the recollection of it will ever be one of imperishable beauty. At midnight a baritone stood up and in a rich resonant voice sang, "Minuit Chretiens." The cannonade ceased and when the hymn finished applause broke out from our side and from the German trenches! The Germans were celebrating Christmas too and we could hear them singing two hundred yards from us. Now I am going to tell you something which you will think incredible but I give you my word that it is true. At dawn the Germans displayed a placard over the trenches on which was written Happy Christmas then leaving their trenches, unarmed they advanced towards us singing and shouting "comrades!" No one fired. We also had left our trenches and separated from each other only by the half frozen Yser, we exchanged presents. They gave us cigars and we threw them some chocolate. Thus almost fraternising we passed the morning. Unlikely indeed, but true. I saw it but thought I was dreaming. They asked us to spend Christmas without firing and the whole day passed without any fighting. At eight o'clock in the evening we were relieved by other soldiers, and returned to the rear without being disturbed. Was it not splendid? Think you that we were wrong? We have been criticised here; it is said that we ought to have fired. But would it not have been dastardley? And then, why kill one another on such a festive day?"

There were a few dissenters, like German Corporal Adolf Hitler, who said, "Such a thing should not happen in wartime. Have you no German sense of honor left at all?" The soldiers understood that the meaning of Christmas, the meaning of the Incarnation, is reconciliation; reconciliation of men to God, and of men to men.

When God made the first man, Adam, and Eve, his wife, He gave them a special command: "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." (Genesis 2:16, 17) The serpent led the woman to violate the command, and the woman led her husband to do the same. As a result, Adam and Eve lost their innocence, and all mankind became corrupt. This means that every man comes into the world hostile toward God. Saint Paul wrote to the Romans, "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to

the law of God, neither indeed can be." (Romans 8:7) Moreover, every man comes into the world hostile toward other men, because every man is made in the image of God.

God would not leave man alone, however. He would redeem man, and end the hostility. He said to the serpent in the garden of Eden, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." (Genesis 3:15) God would redeem some of mankind, and make them His people, and He would put enmity between them and the rest of mankind. There would be two people in the world, the people of God and the people of the devil, and the two would be in perpetual conflict. So, there is not only a hostility between men because all men are sinners, but there is an enmity between the people of God and the people of the devil. Yet, God told the serpent that the seed of the woman would crush his head. A child of the woman would undo the work of the devil. He would remove the enmity between God and men, and between one man and another, thereby making peace for all.

God began making a special people for Himself when He called Abraham, and made a promise to him, saying:

> And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. (Genesis 12:2, 3)

God would make of Abraham a great nation, and would through Abraham make every nation His own.

God did indeed make of Abraham a great nation, the nation of Israel. He did not make a covenant with them, as He did with Israel. Those nations had neither the promises, nor the obligations that Israel had. Although God did not ignore the other nations, He allowed all of them to go their own ways. (Acts 14:16) He would not forever allow them to be independent, however; He would make every nation His people, and make every nation submit to Him.

When David was king in Israel God made a covenant with him concerning his dynasty. He said:

> And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. (2 Samuel 7:12–14)

David was a good man, and a good king, but he was not perfect, and he would not live forever. So, God would give David an heir who would be perfect, and whose dominion would have no end. This heir would be the son of David, and the Son of God. He would be the God-man, and would forever rule in righteousness. David's son, Solomon, did inherit the throne of his father, but Solomon was far from perfect, and he died as his father did. Solomon's successors were not different from him.

In the days of the divided Monarchy of Israel, the kings, with few exceptions, were wicked, and led the people into wickedness. Isaiah the prophet prophesied concerning the true heir to David's throne. He said:

> The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. Thou hast multiplied the nation, and not increased the joy: they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian. For every battle of the warrior is with confused

> noise, and garments rolled in blood; but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire. For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counseller, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this. (Isaiah 9:2–7)

When the Messiah would come, the people of God, indeed, all the nations would be in darkness. Their lands would be lands of sin and death. The Messiah would, however, be a great light illuminating the darkness. The people would be in ignorance and sin, but the Messiah would bring wisdom and righteousness. God prospered Israel, but they were miserable because of their sin and God's punishment. They would have joy, however, when the Messiah would appear to deliver them from sin and death. They would be as joyful as farmers in the time of a bountiful harvest, or as soldiers when they divide the spoils of war. (Judges 8:24–26) The Messiah would deliver men from oppression, as Gideon delivered Israel from the Midianites: not by superior military force, but by spiritual power. He would free them from their sins, and so liberate every man from himself. He would make men good, and so men would make peace with each other. Gideon and his small army won the victory against Midianites by causing the Midianites to fight against each other; the Messiah would win the victory by causing men to be reconciled to each other. (Judges 7:19–23) The weapons of warfare would be destroyed, and the chaos and carnage of war would give way to peace and tranquility. God would give His only-begotten Son to become incarnate, and to be born a child like every man is born a child. He would be heir to the throne of David, and His rule of righteousness and justice would have no end. His domain would be a domain of peace, because He is the Prince of Peace. When Jesus began His earthly ministry, He left Nazareth for Capernaum in the region of Zabulon and Nephthalim, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah. (Matthew 4:12–16) Then Jesus began to preach to people, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:17) Jesus is heir to the throne of David, and He calls men to repent of their sins, and to swear allegiance to Him.

Saint Luke recorded the events surrounding the birth of the great king. When Augustus ruled the Roman Empire, he issued a decree that everyone should be taxed. So, Joseph left the city of Nazareth, in the region of Galilee, and traveled to Bethlehem, in the region of Judea, and he went to that city because he was a descendent of King David, and that was the city of David's birth. He traveled with Mary, to whom he was pledged to be married, and who was with child by the Holy Spirit, according to the word of the angel Gabriel. While she and Joseph were in Bethlehem, Mary gave birth to Jesus. The only place they could find to stay was a stable, and, when Jesus was born, Mary wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger.

Saint Luke wrote of the annunciation of the birth of Jesus:

> And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. (Luke 2:8–14)

Such was the birth of the world's one true king: not in a palace, but in a stable, and not with pomp and circumstance, but humbly and quietly. His birth was announced, not to royalty, not to dignitaries, but to lowly shepherds who watched over their flocks just as the Messiah would watch over his. Such also is the nature of his kingdom: not one of physical force and military domination, but of spiritual power and humble service. Yet, His birth was announced with fanfare, and celebrated by luminaries. One angel announced His birth, and then a host of angels praised God for what He would do through His Son.

As the Israelites were afraid when the glory of the Lord descended upon Mount Sinai, so were the shepherds afraid when the glory of the Lord shone around them. As Moses told the Israelites not to fear, so the angel told the shepherds, because he brought them good news which would bring great joy, not only to the Jews, but to the whole world. The good news was that, on that day, a savior, Christ the Lord Himself, was born in Bethlehem, the city of David. The angel that they would know the Christ child from others because He would be wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger.

The angel with the heavenly host praised God, and said, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." The host of heaven gave glory to God because God would bring peace on earth, and He would bring peace on earth because of His good will toward men. Men are hostile to God, and God has every reason to be angry with them, and even to destroy them. Yet, because God is merciful, He has treated men with good will. By giving His own Son a sacrifice for sin, God has made to man a good faith gesture with a view to reconciliation. God in sending His Son into the world is reconciling men to Himself, and to each other. Saint Paul, concerning his ministry of reconciliation, wrote to the Corinthians, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation." (2 Corinthians 5:19)

Saint Paul wrote to Saint Titus:

> For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. (Titus 2:11–14)

God by Christ not only forgives men their sins, but demands that they be righteous. He has taught them to deny ungodly behavior and worldly passions, and to act with temperance, righteousness, and godliness. The Christian is to look forward to the return of Christ who is our God and Savior, the incarnate deity. He sacrificed Himself, not only so that men might be forgiven, but also that they might be changed. The Son of God appeared so that He might possess a people whose sins are forgiven, and who are zealous to do good.

If nations are to cease warring with each other, then men must cease warring with each other. Saint James wrote, "From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." (James 4:1–3) Conflict comes when selfish men cannot have what they desire. They cannot have what they desire, so they lie, steal, and kill to get it. A sinful man desires a sinful end, or he uses sinful means to achieve a good end. A righteous man desires a good end, and he uses good means to achieve that end. If a man cannot find a good means to an end, then he must ask God to help him.

Saint Paul wrote to the Philippians, "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also

on the things of others." (Philippians 2:3, 4) The Christian must not have selfish ambition or be conceited. He must be humble, thinking of others as more important than himself. He must look out, not only for his own needs, but also for the needs of others. Although Jesus is the Son of God, He served mankind, even sinful mankind, because it was for their good. He has given mankind a perfect example to follow.

In the Christmas Truce of Nineteen-hundred and Fourteen, Christian men did not follow selfish ambition. They sang praises to God, and did good to each other. If men can have good will toward each other on Christmas Day, then they can have it every day. Christ is gradually winning the hearts and minds of men, so that, in future, every day will indeed be like that Christmas Day. Frederick Niven's poem, "A Carol from Flanders,' which he wrote to commemorate the Christmas Truce, ends with these lines:

Not all the Emperors and Kings,
Financiers, and they
Who rule us could prevent these things—
For it was Christmas day.

O ye who read this truthful rime
From Flanders, kneel and say:
God speed the time when every day
Shall be as Christmas day.

Let us recognize Jesus as the ruler of the world, the Prince of peace. Let us have grateful hearts for God's good will toward men. Let us seek to be at peace with all men.

Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us; unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.