*Luke 2:8-20* Wellers Hill-Tarragindi UC / 25 December 2015
**+** **PEACE ON EARTH**
Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men (Luke 2:14) … or goodwill to all people, to be inclusive!

That's the translation I grew up.

**+** Modern translations all start the same ... Glory to God ... Peace ... but none of them seem to talk about good will ... They all talk about "peace upon whom God's favour rests, or similar.

Mmm. Interesting. I've always liked this notion that the Christ event we celebrate this and every Christmas was, is, and ever shall be about God's peace and its good will byproduct being, well, for everyone ... that to put it bluntly, when it comes to God entering our humanity in the babe of Bethlehem, Jesus Christ, in the squalor of a cattle feed trough ... **+** God was clearly doing anything but play favourites ... that the peace of the Christ child was, is and ever be for all, whether they please him or not ... that in Christ, God welcomes all ... that no one, absolutely no one is outside the embrace of God's love, of God's redemption.

**+** And besides, I go back just a few verses to the Angels' words to terrified shepherds, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy to all the people." There it is ..."All the people".

"Have I got it wrong? What's going on here," I ask.

I’ve found myself with a quite-unexpected Christmas gift in recent times … some extra time for personal reflection and to reflect on my own well-being.

But not just David MacGregor's well-being, but the well-being of my family, of those I love ... In fact, the well-being of this world has weighed heavily on my heart.

You see, I have not liked what I've seen as I've turned on my television and seen horror upon horror across this planet - this world God created out of God's great love.

I have not liked scenes of terror on the streets of Paris or Beirut or Kabul or San Bernadino or the West Bank.

I have not liked stories of violence coming from home after home in our own city, our own country.

I have not liked the fact that over 350 mass shootings have happened across the USA so far this year.

**+** Is this what God dreamed of when he formed and shaped creation. How far from God’s dream have we got?

I've reflected some more. In a quiet time with God, I found myself reading again, verses from Isaiah 11. It's the prophet's vision of what scholar's call God's "peaceable kingdom" ...

6 The wolf will live with the lamb,

 the leopard will lie down with the goat,

the calf and the lion and the yearling together;

 and a little child will lead them.

**+** And a little child will lead them.
Who is this Saviour, Christ the Lord, announced to earthy shepherds?

A little child. God announces Godself - gifts Godself anew to humanity, to creation, as Prince of Peace, in a helpless, newborn baby.

And what will be the purpose of this newborn Prince of Peace? Nothing less than to bring us back to God.

This is not some sort of soft inner-glow, warm fuzzy sort of peace. No, this is a peace of cosmic proportions, of world-changing proportions, and through a trajectory all the way in time to the scandal of a cross and the glory of an empty tomb, to a peace of you-and-me-changing proportions.

What is it we read in 2 Corinthians 5:11?

that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

**+** Reconciliation. That's a problematic word right now across this planet. Problematic because our first instinct seems to drop more bombs, to send more troops, to ramp up the rhetoric, to go into our well-defined "trenches" against whatever ... whoever the opposition seems to be; to (excuse the pun) "Trump" the other person, to tarnish all of a particular race, religion, group or ethnicity with the same unpleasant-coloured brush.

**+** Reconciliation. That means peace-making for me. God is more than anything interested in peacemaking, in reconciliation, in harmony, in people coming together ... not being torn apart.

**+** The sort of coming together, the sort of welcoming with open arms we have seen so demonstrably this past year as Germany, so counter to the Germany some of us knew about in our younger years … this Germany, acting on the audacious and compassionate leadership of its Chancellor Angela Merkel … opened its doors to one million Syrian refugees. One million - that’s half the population of Brisbane!

**+** You know, that's why Jesus enters this humanity we're so caught up in ... this so-mixed-up bag of humanity ... at its compassionate best one day, raising its evil, violent head the next.

Friends, Jesus enters this. Enters it as Emmanuel - God with us. In Jesus, God gifts himself - his very being to us. God with us, as Jesus enters the failure, the hopelessness, the alienation, the violence, the lovelessness, the horror that is life for so many - in homes, in lives not only far away, but in our own communities ... and among us, God proclaims joy ... good news ... a Saviour ... the Lord ... and peace to all who God favours ... all who please him ... and as I like it, goodwill among all people.

**+** Sure. Sure. Who pleases God? Surely those who bring peace.

Starting back in 1955 in the California mountains with a group of 180 teenagers of many different races and religions locking arms together in a circle in song, a song of peace began to be sung.

In time that song would take an amazing global journey - at homes, churches, schools, graduations, Christmas and Easter churches, public holiday gatherings - in more and more countries and languages. The message of the song a simple, direct one: "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.".

The song continues to be sung. I hope it keeps on being sung, because anything that causes humankind to be peacemakers is surely a good thing.

Trouble is - and forgive me for going all "Ah, humbug" on Christmas Day - while I totally get the sentiment behind the song, I really do, the peace doesn't actually begin with "me" or "you" at all! It doesn't.

Who does the peace begin with? That's right, God. God. God who so longs that creation might be reconciled one with another and once again with God, that God comes among us - as peacemaker, as Saviour, as friend to the outcast, as liberator, as freedom to the oppressed, as the way, the truth and the life - through Christ our Lord. The Christ of Christmas.

**+**"My peace I give to you, not as the world gives," says Jesus, well-aware this world is downright clueless when it comes to getting a handle on this thing called peace.

And this thing called peace, this peace that ultimately begins with Jesus, it's then on to us to live that peace ... that reconciliation ... that inclusion ... that compassion ... that hope out ... in our families, our work and friendship groups, our neighbourhood, our world.

**+** That's what God in Christ commits each one of to. To be peacemakers. Among the gifts you give this Christmas, give peace. Give peace.

**+** A hand, a heart, a smile, a hug, a listening ear - all reached out in love. What a Christmas gift - the gift of peace; for the sake of a world that needs peace as perhaps never before.

**+** *Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace among all people.*

May the peace of Christ be yours and those with whom you share it, this Christmas. Amen.