

Peace now?

MEN WANT WORLD PEACE, but peace eludes them. War is settled in one spot only to break out in another.

As the Bible says, "The ambassadors of peace shall weep bitterly" (Isaiah 33:7).

In their disappointment, men ask whether the promise of "peace on earth, good will toward men" will ever be fulfilled. How do you reconcile the angel's promise with the hostility, fighting, selfishness, and lust for power to be found everywhere?

Perhaps peace means something other than what we thought. If so, it is not the first time human concepts have misinterpreted God's meaning.

For example, the Old Testament prophets announced a kingdom with Messiah as its head. The religious leaders concluded this would be an earthly kingdom and almost entirely overlooked the concept of a spiritual kingdom. Even the disciples of Jesus asked, after His resurrection, "Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).

Men still think of peace in terms of national peace, world peace, friendly relations between nations—and this is the ultimate plan of God—but Christ's birth at Bethlehem did not concern peace between nations. It had to do with peace between man and God.

In fact, Jesus said, "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division" (Luke 12:51).

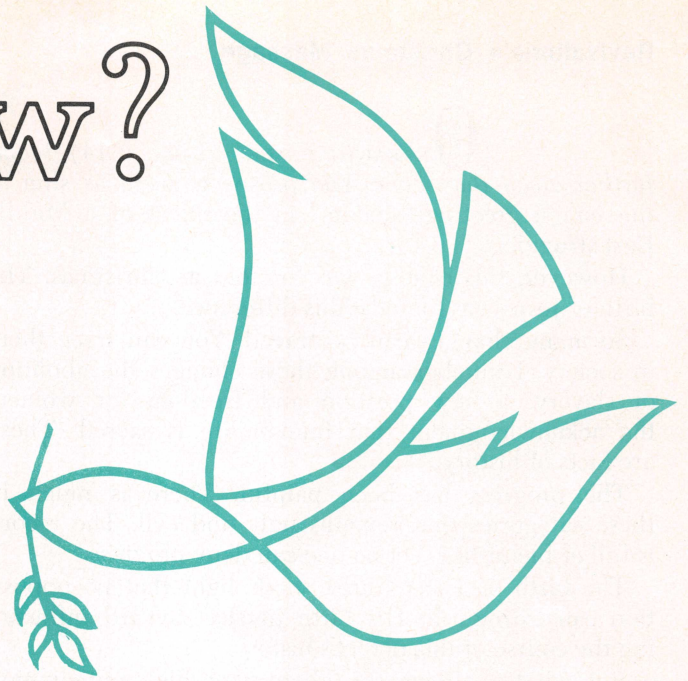
He also said there shall be wars, not peace, for "there is no peace . . . unto the wicked" (Isaiah 48:22). "When ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars, be ye not troubled: for such things must needs be. . . . For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (Mark 13:7).

Yet He desires that all men should enjoy peace. Therefore He came to reconcile men to God through the forgiveness of sin, to remove enmity from their hearts—both enmity toward God and enmity toward their fellowmen.

Sin is the enemy. Sin must be overcome to achieve peace. Man's immediate need is not world peace but heart peace.

So the angel sang, "Good will toward men." God extends goodwill toward sinful men. It was His goodwill that prompted Him to send the Saviour. It was His goodwill that made salvation available through faith. It was His goodwill that provided opportunity for men to have peace through the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God.

"Good will" is translated elsewhere in the Scriptures as desire, gracious purpose, and good pleasure. These were the motivations that sent the Saviour. God's



By MAXINE WILLIAMS

desire for us is that we should be saved. No wonder the angel said it was "good tidings of great joy."

It is good news indeed, repeated by Paul: "Jesus is our peace. . . . We were afar off . . . but in His flesh He abolished the enmity . . . that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby . . . and came and preached peace to both Jew and Gentile." (See Ephesians 2:14-17.)

There are many by-products of this peace which reduce the many frictions and distresses of life. There is the elimination of fear of the hereafter; there is calm in life's frustrations; there is harmony in many human relationships that ordinarily would bring conflict. But basically the peace of Christmas is "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

*The angel said there would be peace—
And peace has come.*

*Not to this war-torn world of weary men,
But to my heart.*

*For there the Christ Himself now dwells:
My Prince of Peace!*

*And lo! the passion, doubt, and tumult
Of my sinful heart have ceased.*

*But not for me alone this message came;
It is for all;*

*If only each will hear and heed the message
Of His grace,*

*His peace will be outpoured in every heart
That bids Him in;*

*And o'er the world will echo wide
The wondrous truth:*

The Prince of Peace has come!

Peace now? Yes, for all who will take Christ into their lives there can be peace—now and forever, beginning today.

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