

**Greetings from God our Father and from Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
and from the Holy Spirit. Amen**

Silent Night: Better Than a Truce

Luke 2:1–20

At Ypres, Belgium, on Dec. 24, 1914, the world stood at war on the Western Front. On one side of this bloody conflict huddled the British and French armies; on the other side, the Germans. As the sun began to dip, German soldiers set to decorating their trenches with *tannenbaums*. Then just before nightfall, signs appeared from the German trenches: “You no shoot, we no shoot.” Not long afterwards, the Germans began singing Christmas carols. One of them, in particular, would have a profound meaning:

Silent night, holy night!

All is calm, all is bright

Round yon virgin mother and child.

Holy Infant, so tender and mild,

Sleep in heavenly peace,

Sleep in heavenly peace. (*LSB* 363:1)

Many years have passed since that Christmas Eve in 1914, and even more have passed since the night our Savior was born. But

*In the Christmas Truce of 1914,
We See a Picture of What God Did for Us
That First Christmas Eve
When He Called Off
an Even Greater Destruction of Human Life
for All Who Would Believe in the Christ Child,
Then and Now.*

In order to understand fully what happened in 1914, we need to turn back the pages of history. It's said that World War I began as a result of a single shot. Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated as he left the town hall in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914. This "shot heard 'round the world" caused a series of domino events. When Germany offered to help Austria-Hungary take revenge on Serbia (also known as "The Blank Cheque"), diplomacy spiraled out of control. In just over a month, Europe became a continent at war. Eventually it became the First World War. That one shot led to millions of soldiers losing their lives in the war to end all wars.

The so-called “Great War” cost many their lives. But there was another war going on—one that had been going on much longer. Like World War I, it began with a single action. That action took place in the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve disobeyed God. Before that day, God and man had been friends. God even walked with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day in their paradise garden. But all of that was destroyed in one disobedient action against God.

The result of that one single action is that the entire human race was now at war with God. While millions of soldiers lost their lives in World War I, the fact is every human being born since Adam has been under a death sentence. That’s why the Scriptures tell us, “For as in Adam all die” (1 Cor 15:22a). If you had been a soldier in World War I, the odds of your dying were about one to three. But in this battle against sin, the odds of you dying are one to one. Sin has made us enemies of God. Apart from his grace, it is completely hopeless. We’re left in no-man’s-land—where death is certain.

As World War I raged into December of its first year, each side sustained heavy casualties. But on Christmas Eve 1914, a miracle of sorts took place. Soldiers in Ypres called a Christmas truce. The sound of gunfire was replaced by the sound of Christmas carols filling the night air. Just one

night earlier, soldiers tried to sleep as bullets whistled over their heads. But on this night, the soldiers heard these words fill the night air: “Sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.”

The truth is that only God could have worked in those soldiers’ hearts that Christmas Eve to bring about a silent night filled with praises to him rather than gunfire. But just over 1,900 years before that, a group of shepherds were keeping watch over a flock of sheep. Listen again to what Saint Luke tells us happened on that evening:

And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” . . . 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 among those with whom he is pleased.” (Luke 2:9–11, 13–14)

On two nights when a battle was raging—one between God and man, and the other in World War I—God was glorified in spite of it. When Jesus was born on that first Christmas Eve, the glory went to God. The Great War

made men enemies. On this night in 1914, God worked in their hearts through the remembrance of the birth of Christ to put an end to the hostilities for a time.

The Christmas truce of 1914 lasted in some areas only a day and in others up until the New Year. But Christ has done something greater than that Christmas truce. Jesus was not just born, but he died in order to bring us one thing we cannot get on our own—peace with God. That’s what the angels’ words were pointed to—not a truce, but a cross. There at the cross, Jesus stepped directly into no-man’s-land on our behalf. His suffering on the cross repaired the breach that was created in the Garden of Eden by our sinful parents. His death on the cross paid the price for all injustices we have done toward God and his Word. At his death, Jesus did not call a truce to this battle—He ended it, once and for all. “It is finished!” and it has been ever since that moment! His resurrection assures us that instead of being God’s enemies, we now have peace through the cross of Christ.

The story of the Christmas truce is almost one hundred years old. The story of the manger and the cross is much older. How can these two events that happened so many years apart—and seemingly a world apart—have meaning for us today?

The first meaning is This Christmas night is all about God offering you His love, His acceptance, and His forgiveness in Christ. All God asks is that you believe that in Jesus, your sins are forgiven—all of them. God does not want you to be at war with Him. He wants to be at peace with you. Would you like that as well? It's all yours! Take God at his Word tonight. Walk out of here tonight with the battle you've been in with God. It is finished because of what Jesus did.

The second meaning we can take away tonight from these two events has to do with our relationships with one another. Are you at war with someone else here tonight? Perhaps it's another church member or a family member. Maybe it's someone from whom you've been estranged for a while. Answer this question in your own heart and mind: "If God can forgive me all my sins, how can I not forgive?" Is whatever reason you're angry with another and unreconciled to him or her bigger than the reason Jesus died on the cross? Allow God to use this evening as the night where you stretch your hand and heart out to that person and offer forgiveness for the wrong done to you. By the grace of God, may it be a night that new relationships begin. If soldiers from that Christmas truce of 1914 could find

good in the soldiers they faced—and they did—can't we, by the grace of God, find the same in others tonight? God has done it with you!

The Christmas truce of 1914 was an unprecedented event that has not been repeated since in the history of warfare. The words of the third stanza of a hymn sung that night echo down through the years:

Silent night, holy night!

Son of God, love's pure light

Radiant beams from Thy holy face

With the dawn of redeeming grace,

Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth,

Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth. (*LSB* 363:3)

On that first Christmas Eve, the world saw “the dawn of redeeming grace” at the birth of Jesus. On this Christmas Eve, may God grant that you bask in the glow of Christ's redeeming grace accomplished for us in the manger, the cross, and the empty tomb. Because of that first Christmas Eve, God grant that you “sleep in heavenly peace.” Amen.

And may the peace of God, which is beyond all human comprehension, keep your hearts and minds through your faith in Christ Jesus. Amen