

New Year Resolutions

I wonder if you have made any New Year Resolutions. I have to confess that I have not yet made any specific ones. We could do no worse, though, than follow St Paul's advice to Titus in our Bible reading just now: to renounce impiety and worldly passions, to live lives that are self-controlled, upright and godly, and to be zealous for good deeds (Titus 2.11-14).

These are all qualities that contribute to peace, harmony and well-being. Indeed the world would be a far better place if that advice was taken seriously and everyone behaved in that way.

For Christians the imperative to live our lives in this way is especially important since we see those qualities in the incarnate Son Jesus Christ himself. We are called to follow and imitate his example in our own lives. We are to conform our lives to the values and demands of the God's kingdom. That is the Christian way, the Christian witness.

Yet surely the most important part of our reading is the first verse: "The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all". That is the true Christmas message. Behind all the many outward signs of Christmas that is the Good News. God's grace, his love, his generosity is shown in a small vulnerable baby. His love is revealed in simple and ordinary surroundings in a new life that gives us new life.

The incarnation brings reconciliation: reconciliation between humanity and God and between human beings. It brings salvation, freedom, liberation - and it brings that salvation to all, to everyone.

This is the message that our world needs to hear. There were many wars, conflicts, violent attacks in 2017, some quite close to home. Our hope and our prayer is that 2018 will be better, that peace and reconciliation will succeed, that justice and respect will gain the upper hand.

We have that hope for the coming year because of Jesus Christ, our Saviour, the Prince of peace and very ground of our hope. May that hope sustain and guide us in all that we think, say or do. May that hope guide our prayers for peace, for sensitivity and a willingness to listen at all levels: global, national, and individual. May that hope fill our prayers for the continuing task of peace-making, peace-keeping and reconciliation.

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