

Not the Vicar's Letter

Dear All,

What do we wish others at Christmas?

Were we in Bethlehem this year we would say “Christmas Shalom” or “Christmas Salaam”. Here, it is often the greeting; Happy Christmas, or Merry Christmas..

Shalom is the Jewish word for peace. Salaam is the Arabic. Both have the same root – a peace that comes from God. For the Christmas season, what richer greeting could there be than wishing ‘Peace’ for family, friends, and neighbours?

And yet we know that peace is still some way from a world wide reality. That isn't something peculiar to 2018, the centenary year of the ending of the Great War. Everything at the time of Jesus' birth, just as now, was as far from Christmas peace as we can imagine. As we look around we see busy streets and markets; pubs overflowing; shoppers and party-goers. Back then people were gathering for a census; the inn was full, the journey fraught with danger. The worries and pressure for Mary and Joseph was not dissimilar.

For some, Christmas is not Happy – or Merry. This year we have lost many friends from our communities and our prayers are with those who are bereaved; for others there can be a loneliness to the season; others will miss distant relatives; Christmas can bring financial concerns too; and then there is the long list of tasks to be done and the never ending busyness; all making it hard for so many.

Yet we all have a gift that we can pass on – ‘the peace of God which passes all human understanding’. Peace, Shalom, Salaam is not a wish for a good rest (although it might include it!) It is a deep prayer that others may know – and we with them – that in all the pressures of life, God is with us. Shalom is not the absence of worry, it is a prayer – that all things may become fruitful, generous and loving, as God intended His world to be.

A perfect Christmas may be beyond us – but God in human form, the Christmas Child – Jesus Christ - brings something even better; a love and a peace that is overflowing and waiting to be discovered.

May I wish you all a very Peaceful Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Revd Anthony Giles

Area Dean