

My Word ... by Les Lofquist

Self-made Christmas cards with goodwill texts have been sent by hand or by mail for centuries. The first that's recognizable as what we now think of as a Christmas card (i.e. a printed card sent by mail) was sent at Christmas 1843. Sir Henry Cole, founder of London's Victoria and Albert Museum, had sent many handwritten cards previously. But that year he commissioned John Calcott Horsley to paint a

card showing the feeding and clothing of the poor. "A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to You" was printed on the first Christmas card. Since then billions of Christmas cards have been sent.



Here are some expressions about Christmas from various people (one well-known, three unknown to me).

"Happy, happy Christmas, that can win us back to the delusions of our childish days; that can recall to the old man the pleasures of his youth; that can transport the sailor and the traveler, thousands of miles away, back to his own fire-side and his quiet home!" (Charles Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers*, 1836) This quote goes to show that sentimentality about Christmas is centuries old. I can relate to this emotion. I love this time of year!

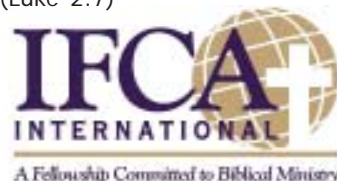
"Christmas is a time when you get homesick - even when you're home." (Carol Nelson)

"Isn't it funny that at Christmas something in you gets so lonely for - I don't know what exactly, but it's something that you don't mind so much not having at other times." (Kate L. Boshier) These two quotes demonstrate how those who do not know the Savior feel empty with a heartache they cannot understand. They need Christ!

"There has been only one Christmas - the rest are anniversaries." (W.J. Cameron) This quote points all of us back to Bethlehem and our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our only hope! May you have a blessed CHRISTmas.

C is for the Child born that night to be our light. (John 8:12)
H is for holy is His name. (Rev.4:8)
R is for rejoice with gladness & joy. (Luke 1:14)
I is for Immanuel, God with us. (Is.7:14, John 1:14)
S is for the star that led the Wise men to Him. (Matt.2:2)
T is for the truth & grace that was sent our way. (John 1:14)
M is for Mother Mary laying Him in swaddling clothes in the manger. (Luke 2:7)

A is for angels bringing news of joy. (Luke 2:14)
S is for salvation. (John 3:16,17)
- DesRochers



Joy To The World, Indeed!

Isaac Watts, "the father of the English hymn" wrote hundreds of hymns, many of which will never be forgotten. Few people know that Watts was frequently deranged for extended periods of his life when he wrote nothing and did nothing (apart from survive in the care of a kind family that protected him) as he waited until sanity returned.

What did Watts write when sanity caught up to him and his suffering abated?

"Come, let us join our cheerful songs with angels 'round the throne; ten thousand thousand are their tongues but all their joys are one." or, *"Jesus shall reign where'er the sun doth his successive journeys run."*

As ill as he was for so much of his life, Watts could still write from his heart, *"My God, how endless is thy love!"* Perhaps he is best known for *"O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come."* Certainly we've all sung what may be his greatest hymn, not written specifically for Christmas but, nevertheless, associated most commonly with that season: *"Joy to the World!"*

In this hymn, Watts articulates the blessed work of God as He restores a fallen world; a disfigured creation.

"No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground", cries Watts. Plainly it is a reference to Genesis 3, the old, old story of the man's fall. Sin opened up a great gulf between God and His creation. Into the gulf there poured all sorts of evil, marring the creation that was once perfect. Now, "thorns and thistles" infest the ground, as the story in Genesis tells us. Thorns and thistles infesting the ground speak of frustration. Anyone with even a small backyard garden knows that only ceaseless labor and ingenuity stave off the frustration of having the flower and vegetable-enterprise end in utter futility.

As for "sins and sorrows", they are as present in a fallen world as thorns and thistles. Jesus says, *"Whoever sins is a slave to sin."* Since we all sin, we are all in bondage. Sorrows? *"Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows",* says the psalmist. The Hebrew verb can as readily mean, "run after" as "choose." *"Those who run after another god multiply their sorrows."* As fallen beings we do run after other gods; and just as surely do we multiply our sorrows.

Yet Watts can write, *"Joy to the world,"* because he knows that the coming of Jesus Christ means that the curse upon the world is overturned; it's reversed. He knows that the blessings of Christ



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Last month's Vision World column featured Evergreen Bible Church of Vancouver, Washington. Their Pastor Toby Beck shared with us how their congregation responded to the challenge of Vision World. First, Pastor Beck shared the challenge with his

How have you responded to the call for IFCA Vision World prayer warriors? We are calling for 100 churches to rise up and say they will pray to the Lord that He will send forth 100 new international missionaries from our IFCA churches. This is simply IFCA's response to the Lord Jesus' words in Matthew 9:38 "The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."

elders. They agreed to place the challenge before all the congregation. So the entire congregation viewed the IFCA Vision World video in one of their Sunday services, then Pastor Beck and the elders challenged the congregation to step up

Please don't shrug your shoulders and move along! Please don't ignore this challenge! Go to the [IFCA Vision World webpage](#) right now and see what this is all about! Then make the commitment and sign up! What a great service your church could have on the first Sunday of 2010, if you do something like our brothers and sisters at Evergreen Bible Church of Vancouver.



We at IFCA are praying that each of you who read this article will be challenged and you will also develop the vision the Lord wants you to have in sending forth workers into His harvest field. May the Lord bless you as you prayerfully consider your role as co-laborers with Christ in His mighty work.



and make the commitment to pray earnestly for Vision World. Pastor Beck also reported: "And I encouraged them as they signed to remember that God may call them in answer to these prayers!"

This response was such a blessing, and inspiration, that we wanted to feature it again, only this time also include the photos from this Vision World Commitment Service.



Visit the [IFCA International VISION AMERICA web page](#) to learn more about how your church can become a Vision America Church

A Soldier's Christmas

by Chaplain Jeff Herden

"It's the most wonderful time of the year" as the old song goes. Every Christmas, along with choruses like these, the common refrain resounds in households all over the globe, "Peace on earth, good will to men." The yearning for peace rings loud and rises to a crescendo whenever the trees and lights and wreaths go up and the eggnog and hot chocolate go down. But, peace is elusive in our world and can come only at great cost and sacrifice. That cost is paid in part by the tens of thousands of U.S. soldiers who spend their Christmases 4,000 miles away from home to help bring peace on earth.

Last year was my first Christmas away from family. I arrived in Kandahar, Afghanistan two weeks before Christmas. I remember the ache in my heart that every warrior feels when yearning to be with the ones they love at Christmas time. I knew also that whatever holiday cheer my family had back home was mingled with sorrow and anxiety as their thoughts so often turned to me and my welfare. Yet along with the grief from my bereavement, I also felt a great satisfaction at knowing just how precious and costly our sacrifice was. We were there to end global terrorism and make life safer for the ones we love.

Our Christmas experience last year in Afghanistan was not without the customary glitter and sparkle. The ceiling dangled with paper snowflakes. Every table in our chow hall was decorated with red ribbons and candy canes; indeed the whole facility looked like it was gift wrapped. And then, there was the food-enough to feed an Army! We had all the holiday fixins- turkey, ham, mashed potatoes, stuffing, green beans, fruit salad, apple pie, pumpkin pie, hot cider and much more. I was privileged to serve chow on Christmas day, alongside my fellow officers and senior NCOs, an old tradition in our military. It was a time for strangers in a far away land to band together as brothers and sisters; for we only had each other to celebrate with.

When I arrived at my duty station near Kabul, Afghanistan I hit the ground running. Operations tend to slow down some when Christmas comes around, but not for chaplains. I and my fellow chaplains can always count on double or triple chapel attendance at Christmas time. At our Christmas Eve service, soldiers packed into chapel, stomped the snow off their combat boots and settled in to pick their favorite Christmas songs from our old hymnals. We sang together and shared a favorite memory from Christmases past or prayer requests for loved ones. One of our Air Force sergeants tearfully asked prayer for herself and her dad as this was the first Christmas they would celebrate without her mother, who died of cancer earlier that year. A Navy officer gave thanks to God for protecting he and his fellow warriors from a suicide bomber that had attacked their convoy the week before.

I got the feeling last Christmas that while we fought the Taliban on the roads and in villages of Afghanistan, in our hearts we were battling the dull ache of loneliness that becomes especially sharp this time of year. Many warriors felt something not too far distant from what the people in Israel felt 2,000 years ago when they waited for a long expected Messiah to break Heaven's silence and bring hope to a dark world. I had the privilege of reminding our warriors in chapel that we were celebrating God's gift to us. Emmanuel did come to make all things new by dying for us to break the curse of sin and death for all who trust in Him. We were reminded that knowing Christ means knowing He is our Good Shepherd who understands our loneliness and gives us the grace to persevere and the guarantee of His presence to see us through.

Some day, Jesus will return and bring with Him everlasting peace on earth. Until then, many heroes in uniform will be without their loved ones at Christmas. The song echoing in their hearts before they drift off to sleep will remain "I'll be home for Christmas, if only in my dreams." - Chaplain Herden has 9 years of military experience; 6 prior service active duty as Medical Service Corps Officer; 3 years as chaplain in the Army Reserve; he was recently deployed for one year in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan



Joy To The World, Indeed! (Continued from Page 1)

are as far-reaching as the curse has been. It was Jesus who said, "If the Son makes you free, you are free indeed." While those who run after other gods unquestionably multiply their sorrows, those who trust the Lord will multiply their joys.

"No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground. He comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found."

"He rules the earth with truth and grace." The same Lord who restores the world now rules it, and rules it with truth and grace. Rulers we are acquainted with rule, to be sure, but they don't rule with truth. They rule with disinformation, duplicity, propaganda and spin or they rule with sheer, simple, self-interest and self-enrichment. Rulers rule, to be sure, but they don't rule with truth.

Neither do they rule with grace. Our Lord, however, does. He rules with grace. Grace, throughout Scripture, is God's faithfulness to His own promise to always be our God. Grace is His unchangeable resolve never to quit on us in anger or abandon us in disgust or dismiss us in impatience.

When God's grace is confronted with our sin, it takes the form of mercy. And since mercy, is effectual in dealing with our sin, mercy results in salvation ... peace with God. For

this reason the threefold "grace, mercy and peace" is found over and over in Scripture.

Watts did what he did, not because there was nothing else to do besides fall into total despair. Watts did what he did because he foresaw the day when he, like the deranged man in the Gospel accounts, will be found seated, clothed and in his right mind.

This is more than merely trying to put a happy face on a monumental misfortune. We are anticipating the day, says Watts, when our Lord "makes the nations prove the glories of His righteousness and wonders of His love."

In the light of all of this, what are we to do at this moment? Watts knew what we are to do: "let every heart prepare him room." We are to receive, or to acknowledge afresh, Him whose blessings flow far as the curse is found. We are to receive, or to acknowledge afresh, the One who rules with truth and grace now and who is going to make the nations prove the glories of His righteousness and wonders of His love. We are to receive our Lord, by trusting Him as the Savior that He is. We are to acknowledge Him by bowing in worship and obedience.

This Christmas, "Let every heart prepare Him room."