

Prayer for Peace, Hope and Justice  
Christmas Day 2021

Every Christmas...

if we see beyond the sentimental  
and try to engage the heart of it all,  
we must wrestle with the contradictions and paradox  
of a fallen and redeemed world:

A faraway colonial ruler forcing vast numbers of people to  
trek into the freezing winter just so that he can know  
how many bow the knee to him.

A poor couple desperate to find a safe place for giving birth to one  
who they have been promised will bring down rulers like that.

Angels chanting peace-songs over an oppressed and occupied land  
that is still oppressed and occupied today.

A ruthless tyrant jealous for his crown and willing to murder children to hold on to it,  
and a vulnerable, freshly-born baby - the focus of his fear  
and the hope of the world.

Such are the contradictions, the paradox.

And the heart of our faith is about the invitation to choose where we place ourselves within them.

Every Sunday...

in this sacred space we come to this dead wax candle  
imprisoned in cruel barbed coils,

Reminding us of our world still held in ransom to poverty, injustice, suffering and war.

Then we light the dead wick and bring it to life,

its flickering flame a thing of fragile beauty,

yet strangely empowering, expelling some of that darkness  
before our eyes.

And in the warmth and light of that flame we quietly declare

peace and hope and justice to be alive

always struggling in every generation to be set free in the world.

And the heart of our faith is about choosing where we place ourselves:

Deciding between the cruel barbs and the healing light,

between scarring our world with wire barricades

or building brick by brick the peace of the angel-songs.

Between the thunder of marching feet and the cry of a child.

God bless Africa and all the world,

Guard our children

Guide our leaders

And give us peace. AMEN.

Peter Storey