

## On This Night

Brad Bailey – Christmas Eve 2018

(The following are notes which were too extensive to share completely for a Christmas Eve service... but were and can be shared more briefly.)

Intro

So good to share this time with you.

**I still can recall** the night of Christmas Eve when **I was 16 years old**. ... long after family gathering... driving down Sunset Blvd... near midnight.

I was **well aware** that the **world was not what it should be...nor was I**... but feeling that **quiet sacred sense**... of **what this night bore**...and seeing a sign ... Christmas Eve...Candlelight Service at midnight.

**That night I felt like the world stopped with a hush**... a quiet moment...in which **everything seemed different**... **something had crept into the world to set it right**.

**What I felt that night has never changed.**

**A night of peace** when the **worlds drama slows down**, and **we sense more not less is at hand**.

**A night that a presence entered our world... and took it back.**

**A night in which the eternal declares to this world** that it there is **a greater will and a greater work that will prevail**.

As was read at the start of our gathering tonight... the way Jesus' closest disciple explained it...

John 1:14

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

John had used the **phrase “Word”** to speak of **God's as the creating force** behind all. The source from which all was created... entered the creation.

God, who **knows no beginning**...and no end... **entered time and space**.

God, who is **Spirit** and **knows no boundaries** ... took on the shocking confines of a tiny baby... who entered the **nature of a human physical life**... whose physical life was dependent upon a teenage girl. [1]

I know that there **a trend in the past few years** for some to boldly believe that: **“This is all there is.”**

- Maybe it's a desire to express a type of **courage** to face what seems like a hard truth.
- Maybe it is deemed to be associated with being a person of facts over faith.

But it seems to me that there is reason to pause...and question the claim that there is nothing more... nothing outside us...nothing more central than us.

**It seems to me that if there is anything we have learned over time...it's that it we have a limited perspective. In the full scope of human history, it wasn't long ago that everyone believed that the world was flat...**because from a limited perspective... it seemed clear. Then we naturally believed that the **sun revolved around the earth** (after all...it appears to rise each day)... but again... we assumed we were the center.

> I believe if we can step back... a little further from ourselves...we will find that, more than that which suggests that this is all there is... we see the signs of a world that points beyond itself.

**Many engaged in the study of quantum physics...** describe an increasing way in which **what is being discovered** points to a **another dimension** that must **exist outside the dimension of time and space that we exist in.**

**And our most defining longings point beyond this world as well.**

For on this night... long ago... what entered the world pointed to the way things should be.

What came into our world that night... was like the answer a problem we could never find...that has always eluded us.

Like a song we could never rightly sing... and then we heard the right note.

Like a light piercing darkness... not complete but clarifies what is not yet fully seen.

**Tonight, I invite us to consider what that night brought...**

**Perhaps the most captivating aspects of that night... was the choice of who was at the forefront.**

**It took place among a people** so common...yet so unique.

They were part of a people who began as a small nomadic tribe... who had grown and become known as a people who had been called out by God...not the common myths of gods that were simply deified versions of humans...but One who claimed to be the source and center of all existence... and who declared he had called out these people because through them...he would bless all nations... all people...the whole earth.

Now they had become dispersed... and living under the oppression of the Roman Empire.

**Centuries of prophets had been raised up... and prophecies given... now waiting in the silence.**

And now the time begins. But **not among the elite... nor the educated.** Not from the **prestigious...but common peasants.** Far in the backwoods of these people...the Creator of all existence as we know it, comes to a young woman Mary...pledged to be married...to a working class villager.

**The world has long decided who matters...** the elite, educated, the popular and power-brokers.

But on this night, God had come to a young teenage girl... from Nazareth (Barstow... hicks I tell you)... poor... **and as powerless** a position as anyone on the planet. And having chosen her... he provides no comforts...no travel plan... not even a room to birth the child. All of this may be a source of sympathy...but not importance. And soon the world will know...but who should be told first... **shepherds. That might sound quaint... but they were the lowest of the working class. We should consider the whole reference to them... they were “shepherds ...living out in the fields nearby.” And they were viewed as those who should stay outside.**

**And so amidst a world that always seems to leave some out in the cold...**

On this Night, God reveals...

**Everyone Matters (God comes to the “least” and left out.)**

Many would say that God favors the poor... the least and left out it. But it's not a matter of God simply choosing some.

Look more closely and we will find that God is very clear. He is not choosing one class of people over another.

What God declares is that he will raise up the humble... those who have no pretense...and he will bring down the proud...those who remain defiant.

What we see on this night, is not a separation of one class over another...but God meeting the human heart... and describing the consequences.

He is choosing the lost and least because we all are.

**In coming to the humble... he is coming to all who know their worth lies not in the pride and pretense.**

**For God knows what happens when human life tries to become more than human...** and no longer is rooted in him...no longer bound in identity with him. It will **try to become the center**... desperately searching. Human life... fighting the despair of it's lostness...and still trying to prove it can be in control...run the world.

In the **desperate search to truly matter...to truly belong....** God shows that everyone matters...that any life can be united again with Him... and be united with the true source and center of all.

On that night...the **popularity contest being run on earth is over.**

Everyone matters.

And all who are prepared to give up demanding their will to be the center of life...will find that they can be united with the true center and source of all.

And so the song is sung... **“O Holy Night”**... from a French poem that means [2]:

*Long lay the world in sin and error pining.*

*'Til He appeared and the soul felt its worth.*

In sin and error we are pining... til he appeared ...and the soul felt it's worth.

On this night... heaven declares that everyone matters... every man, woman, and child living on the streets...in the cold... the least and left out...are seen for who they are... those who bear God's image... those who he loves...those he comes to.

And to that part of each of us that wonders...Do we matter?...Do we belong?... on this night... the source of all existence... came to tell us we matter...we belong.

And what if the way lives are treated? What of the powers of this world that can crush lives in so many ways.... and crush the hopes of a better world?

This whole night is set up as a showdown between the powers of this world that bear oppression...and the power of God.

And...

On this Night, God reveals...

**All Oppression Ceases (God is in control.)**

It's hard to imagine a world where people do not want power...**not just power...but more power than others have... power over others.** That is the nature of oppression.

**That is what oppression is...using power against another... to take from them.** This is what the people longed to see end. [3]

**On this night God stirred up all powers of this world that can oppress.**

What we see is the powers of this world rally against the presence of God in this child.

There was the **social oppression** of a young woman.

There was the **political oppression** of an insecure local ruler in Herod.

There was the **religious oppression** that sought to keep control of their roles.

**Every power is stirred up to raise up against God.**

And the powers of his world were confronted... and subverted.

**Naturally we see** a world where **oppression continues**... and may wonder what really changed.

And this is where it is so vital to understand that **on that night**,

God was entering the world **not simply to fix it...but to settle His sovereign rule.**

Naturally we just think of this world as broken and that God should "fix" it...not realizing that God is resolving what separates us... in order to make redemption possible.

Jesus was quite clear from the start...he had come to bring that change... a change that will become fully realized when God fully unites heaven and earth.

**And the Book of Revelation** describes such a time...

**Revelation 21:3-4 (TLB)**

*I heard a loud shout from the throne saying, “Look, the home of God is now among men, and he will live with them and they will be his people; yes, God himself will be among them. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, nor pain. All of that has gone forever.”*

This is what Jesus began. He declared in word and works that he was revealing that God is greater than the powers of this world... and pointing to what was to come.

Again, the song “O Holy Night” declares rightly...

***Chains he shall break, for the slave is our brother.  
And in his name all oppression shall cease.***

And...

On this Night, God reveals...

**Peace Prevails (God brings peace)**

Peace is Made Possible on Earth

**God has been clear...** what **he declared** through the **prophet Isaiah hundreds of years before** that night in which Christ was born was that the rule of peace would be with them...and prevail.

**Isaiah 9:6-7 (NIV)**

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, **Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end.***

We may recall that this when Christ was born, this is what the angels declared was at hand.

Luke 2:14 (TLB)

***“Glory to God in the highest ...and peace on earth ...”***

Peace on earth... it **rings out** like a **call to the whole of creation.**

But is not simply a call to peace. It is a blessing that God is bringing a peace to earth.

I sense that every culture and corner of this world hears hope of “peace on earth”...and stops...because one wants to stop at the very sound of that hope.

We live in a time in which we may find great pride in knowledge and technology...and want to presume that humanity is naturally progressing.

Yet peace seems to elude us. We seem to have a hard time There is more division...and more destruction. [4]

The war of terror... **since 9/11**...has involved 480,000 death, including 244,000 civilians...and a cost of 6 to \$7 trillion.

And an estimated **350 million children** are now living in conflict zones...which is one in six worldwide - an **increase of 75 percent** since the **early 1990s**.

**Some may be familiar** with the **song: "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day"** which is a Christmas carol based on the **1863 poem "Christmas Bells"** by American poet **Henry Wadsworth Longfellow**.

The song tells of the effects of hearing Christmas bells that represented the blessing of peace on earth. [5]

Longfellow's personal peace was shaken when his wife of 18 years, to whom he was very devoted, was tragically burned in a fire. Then in 1863, during the American Civil War, Longfellow's oldest son, Charles Appleton Longfellow, joined the Union cause as a soldier ...and later that year was wounded and nearly paralyzed.

So **Longfellow wrote** the poem on **Christmas Day in 1863**.

*I heard the bells on Christmas Day  
Their old, familiar carols play,  
and wild and sweet  
The words repeat  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!*

*And in despair I bowed my head;  
"There is no peace on earth," I said;  
"For hate is strong,  
And mocks the song  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"*

*Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:  
"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;  
The Wrong shall fail,  
The Right prevail,  
With peace on earth, good-will to men."*

That is the message that this world is reminded up on this night.

The Wrong shall fail,  
The Right prevail,  
With peace on earth, good-will to men."

**[ One could very naturally include the powerful illustration of the 1914 Christmas Truce  
[6] [7] ]**

On that night... God brought the power of peace to ultimately prevail.

Again, the song "O Holy Night" declares rightly...

*Truly He taught us to love one another,  
His law is love and His gospel is peace.*

The peace that heaven bring this night... is the peace that begins within us. Peace is a wholeness that is personal and social.

**Only when we find peace within...can we find peace with others.**

### **Closing...**

This is the ultimate peace that comes to earth on this night. It is the peace of our Creator coming to a world that has rebled...far more the defiant that we realize... defiant to the end...claiming we are our own... destined to be consumed into the outer darkness. But he comes... to bring peace.

Tonight ...some of us might just be weary enough to say, 'I want to stop fighting God. I want to stop pushing away the tug I feel from him now and then. I want to raise the white flag of surrender and say, 'Oh, God, I want peace to reign in my heart. I want to be reconciled to you through Christ. I want to have the spirit of reconciliation at work in my heart so that I can be engaged in loving, bridge-building relationships now and forever.'

### **PRAYER**

And having received him... we discover that...

On this Night, God reveals...

**God is with us (God has come to reunite us)**

God is here ...nit metaphorically...not symbolically... but actually here.

### **Notes:**

1. Philip Yancey refers to a concept called, "thin places," where the natural and supernatural worlds come together at their narrowest, with only a thin veil between them ("Rumors of another World," Page 45). As we read the Christmas story, there are many of these thin places, particularly when messengers from the angelic world make an appearance into our world.

2, The lyrics of "O Holy Night" are based on the French poem "Minuit, chrétiens" (Midnight, Christians) by Placide Cappeau. For a more complete assessment of the words to the Christmas song "O Holy Night"...see "O Holy Night": are the lyrics biblical? by Jeffrey Kranz | Nov 29, 2016 - <https://overviewbible.com/o-holy-night-lyrics/>

3. The people could only see this in the more extreme nature of their own enemies. They could only see the oppression of Roman rule.

Indeed God chose to come during the time of an empire that would remain the most defining of all human empires to this very day...the Roman Empire.

And this is what become so significant... while the people focused on how a savior would free them from Roman rule...Jesus did not simply defeat such an empire.

For it was merely one manifestation of the powers of oppression.

It is all which uses others... the poor...those in debt... the slave...the refugee ...women ...children... every form. Something bigger was at hand.

This what emerged from his life. As he comes to Jerusalem... the powers of both the Roman Empire and the religious rulers converge. The hand of oppression could not have been more horrific...and more deflating. As the one who embodied God being with them was arrested... mocked... beaten...and crucified.

But all the while... saying watch what happens. In the end...the powers of this world could not stop the will and work of God.

God's wrath against oppression is notable, in that it identifies it as human caused, it is what God says will bring judgment but the last prophet (Malachi), and is what Jesus said he was confronting when he declared his ministry.

Jeremiah 5:25-29 ESV

Your iniquities have turned these away, and your sins have kept good from you. For wicked men are found among my people; they lurk like fowlers lying in wait. They set a trap; they catch men. Like a cage full of birds, their houses are full of deceit; therefore they have become great and rich; they have grown fat and sleek. They know no bounds in deeds of evil; they judge not with justice the cause of the fatherless, to make it prosper, and they do not defend the rights of the needy. Shall I not punish them for these things? declares the LORD, and shall I not avenge myself on a nation such as this?"

Malachi 3:5 ESV

"Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.

Luke 4:18-19 ESV

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

spoke against oppress

4. War

The war of terror... since 9/11...has involved 480,000 death, including 244,000 civilians...and a cost of 6 to \$7 trillion.



And an estimated 350 million children are now living in conflict zones...which is one in six worldwide - an increase of 75 percent since the early 1990s.

For more statistics on world conflict, see

<http://www.systemicpeace.org/conflictrends.html>

Global Conflict Tracker - <https://www.cfr.org/interactives/global-conflict-tracker#!/>

[The Costs of War Project](#) at Brown University's Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs

[Budgetary Costs of Post-9/11 Wars Through FY2019: \\$5.9 Trillion - NOVEMBER 2018](#)

[Direct War Death Toll Since 2001: 480,000 - NOVEMBER 2018](#)

A New Map Shows the Alarming Spread of the US War on Terror

*American counterterrorism forces are in far, far more countries than you realize.* - By [Tom Engelhardt](#) - JANUARY 4, 2018

<https://www.thenation.com/article/a-new-map-shows-the-alarming-spread-of-the-us-war-on-terror/>

More than 350 million children living in conflict zones, says charity

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-global-war-children/more-than-350-million-children-living-in-conflict-zones-says-charity-idUSKCN1FZ00M>

at least 357 million children - or one in six worldwide - were living in conflict zones, an increase of 75 percent since the early 1990s.

US intel chief says risk of global conflict highest since Cold War By [Zachary Cohen](#), CNN

February 13, 2018 - <https://www.cnn.com/2018/02/13/politics/worldwide-threat-assessment-hearing/index.html>

US Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats warned Tuesday that the current risk of a global conflict is higher than at any time since the end of the Cold War.

Also...from Tan Illustrations: #7148: A "Canadian Army Journal" article says historians calculate since

3600 B.C., the world has known only 292 years of peace.

During this period there have been 14,531 wars, large and small.

3,640,000,000 people have been killed.

Since 650 B.C. there have been 1,656 arms races, only 16 of which have not ended in war.

Those 16 caused the economic collapse of the countries concerned.

5. More about The True Story of Pain and Hope Behind "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day"

DECEMBER 21, 2014 | Justin Taylor - <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/the-story-of-pain-and-hope-behind-i-heard-the-bells-on-christmas-day/>

A nice version of the song is

Caroline Cobb and Sean Carter I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJL3ODIQWYU>

Video – good intro of background and then songs with WWI images - I Heard the Bells on

Christmas Day (Civil War background) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZtNIZmnEMU>

Weaknesses of his one – long at 5:12...and does not show lyrics in text...so easy not to hear clearly.

Did not find any others yet that were not just concert pieces or single image

## 6. Christmas Truce

Some info about the The Christmas Truce

Perhaps you've heard of the famous Christmas truce that occurred during World War I, on Christmas Eve of 1914, that first year of the War. German and British forces were facing each other on the battlefield, each in their muddy trenches, separated by a strip of flat, ugly land intersected with barbed wire. The air was cold and frosty, of course, because it was winter, and things were very quiet. Both sides had to keep alert, however, as there was the odd shadowy figure creeping across the no-man's land. Suddenly, the British soldiers were amazed to see lights coming on, along the line of then enemy trenches. Then came the unbelievable sound of singing— German soldiers raising their voices to "Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht" — the familiar verses of "Silent Night" ending in "...sleep in heavenly peace". When the sound died away, the British soldiers replied with "The First Noel".

Back and forth, the singing went on for about an hour. Then there were voices of invitation to cross over to enemy lines. One German with great courage started walking across the "no man's land", and was soon followed by some of his buddies, all with their hands in their pockets to show that they had no weapons.

When they'd crossed over to the enemy trench, one German soldier said, "I'm a Saxon, you are Anglo-Saxons. Why do we fight?"

The soldiers on both sides started to talk together and decided to declare peace for one day, beginning in the morning, Christmas morning. As Christmas Day passed, without the usual noise of gunfire and mortar-fire, even the wild birds returned, and the soldiers fed them.

The high commanders on both sides were very displeased. They knew that friendships formed between declared enemies would hinder the business of warfare.

What the English would have heard...phonetically: Steela Noct Hailie anoct  
From a review of video's and potential best scenes:

VIDEO – 1914 | Sainsbury's Ad | Christmas 2014  
needs end removed (from ad)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWF2JBb1bvM>

Video made from Salsbury add but with appropriate end... 3:30 -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6I09SVRuSOM>

BBC - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-ws4mbUFzI>

00:05 – 00:35

14:40 – 16:55

History - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGO9Q1vI-iM>

00:00 – 1:01

History Channel – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WcoNbzHhaWM>

13:46 - -

14:06 – 14:45

15:07 – 17:42

7. Similarly, Travis Tritt is a famous Country singer, but before he made it big, Tritt spent years playing in small out-of-the-way bars and taverns. He said that (as you might expect) these were dangerous places. His fans were mostly drunks who had a hard time controlling their tempers. Thus... bar fights would break out, and even entertainers were in danger. How did he handle those risky crowds? (He wrote:)

“Just when [bar fights] started getting out of hand, when bikers were reaching for their pool cues and rednecks were heading for the gun rack, I'd start playing 'Silent Night.'

It could be the middle of July -- I didn't care. Sometimes they'd even start crying, standing there watching me sweat and play Christmas carols.”

The singing of a few Christmas carols brought peace to a bunch of drunken men in a tavern. And you know, Christmas Carols can do that, because original Carol promised exactly that: “Peace to men.” Luke 2:14 tells us the angels sang a carol nearly 2000 yrs ago. And that carol declared:

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

Peace To Men - that was the promise of that first carol.

And without God's peace, the world can be a very violent place.