

## THE CHRISTMAS TRUCE



**The Christmas Truce of 1914 was every general's nightmare,  
and every pastor's dream.**

**We need to learn how to fight better; to disagree without destroying  
each other and to realize that we never fully agree on anything.**

*Scripture:*

**Matthew 2:1-12**

<sup>1</sup>In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup>asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.' <sup>3</sup>When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup>and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup>They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

<sup>6</sup>"And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel."'

<sup>7</sup>Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared.

<sup>8</sup>Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.' <sup>9</sup>When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup>When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. <sup>11</sup>On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. <sup>12</sup>And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.



### THE MAGI VISIT HEROD

The scripture is the story of the Magi and their visit to Herod.

#### HERODIAN

Near Bethlehem there is a flat topped mountain. It is not a natural mountain; it was built by Jewish slaves, and it was given the name "Herodian." This is one of a half-dozen fortified palaces that were used by Herod and his family to live in safety from the people in the villages below.

### HERODIAN FROM ABOVE

But this mountain was hollow. There is one trail leading up, and it was easily protected by soldiers from above.

#### HERODIAN INSIDE: REMAINS OF HEROD'S FORTRESS

Looking down from above, one can see inside the manmade mountain. Rooms, weapon storage, water cisterns, and accommodations are visible.

Many scholars believe that this is where Herod was staying when the Magi came to visit him, and the Magi said, "We have heard that a new king has

been born, and the signs and the charts all point to Bethlehem. Can you help us find him? We think he may be the Messiah.”

So here is where that international conference, round-table, and dinner may well have taken place. This was very possibly the place where Herod looked down from his mountain over the city of Bethlehem. From this location, after the Magi left, this is where Herod gave the order that soldiers kill every child under the age of two, in order that the Prince of Peace would never have a chance to replace him.

The simplest way I can put this lesson is that Herod heard that there was a new idea in town, and his first response was that he needed to kill it.

If it is possible that someone from among us might offer a new idea, a new thought and new example, it is my responsibility as King to make sure that nothing new ever happens.

“I’m sure you all agree with me,” said Herod. And who could refuse?

Herod wanted to be certain that they destroyed the message, and killed the messenger.

### **DO BETTER**

We need to do better than that. More often than not, Jesus’ teachings as a rabbi brought together two unlikely forces, and helped them negotiate.

- The Jews and the Samaritans were historic enemies. That is the background for parable about The Good Samaritan.
- A prostitute came to Jesus seeking another life. He made that happen.
- Tax collectors became disciples.
- And fishermen became philosophers.
- And the “least of these” became the greatest example to others.

### **WE NEED TO LEARN HOW TO FIGHT BETTER THAN HEROD.**

**We need to learn how to disagree without being disagreeable.  
We need to find a way to have a truce even in the middle of conflicts that are dear to our hearts.  
We need to learn to negotiate.  
We need to learn how to give a little in order to get a little.**

If we can’t learn to disagree with anyone who might feel otherwise, then God save us as nations. God save us as political parties. And God save us for whatever group we are part of.

### **FAMILIES NEED TO LEARN TO ARGUE**

One of the most important lessons a family can learn is how to argue. The only way your relationships will ever last, is if you can learn how to keep your eye on the important things, and overlook the trivial things.

When you pick your friends, the most important thing to ask is, “Can I live with the annoying things about my friend, in order to preserve the relationship?” I hope by now, I’m getting close to home with at least some of you.

We need to learn how to fight fairly ... that is without destroying the person who does not share our viewpoint.

### **THE CHRISTMAS TRUCE**

A sobering example of this lesson in seeing your enemies as human beings is the story about the Christmas Truce. Do you know this story? It is the true story of an unofficial Military Truce in World War I. This story caught my attention before Christmas, and I wrote a letter to Jeannie Schulz about it. Here’s my letter.

Jeannie,

After Christmas, December 27, is often a challenge for me to find something that is still Christmas, but reflects upon the meaning and interpretation of the Christmas events. There is a story of the Christmas Truce between the Germans and the British/French troops in 1914 which is every general’s nightmare, but every preacher’s dream. The two opposing sides stopped shooting for a while, and celebrated Christmas together. There have been some short stories written about this event.

As luck would have it, I think Sparky did some cartoons in which Snoopy and the Red Baron stopped their fighting one Christmas and had a similar cease fire for a while. I have been told that this was Sparky’s version of real events, in which enemy soldiers set down their guns and celebrated Christmas together.

Do you remember these cartoons, and when they were printed?

Do you remember discussing this idea with Sparky?

Do you remember the song that was popular by the Royal Guardsmen called, "Snoopy's Christmas," based upon the cartoons?

Jeannie, I have grown weary of fighting — abroad, and at home — and I think others have too. So I would probably include a few *Peace on Earth* sentences to end my sermon.

Do you have any thoughts on any of this?

By the way, Merry Christmas.

John Cushman

### HERE IS JEANNIE SCHULZ'S REPLY:

Of course I know about the Christmas truce (my father was in WWI, in the British army and he told me about it when I was a young adult - maybe 21). And I know the Royal Guardsmen's song very well.

I am not sure if "the truce" appeared in the comic strip. ... but there is a book that I would swear Sparky and I talked about it. I know that we talked about the absurdity of it all (going back to shooting each other after a night of camaraderie). Sparky used to believe that "we" were getting better (i.e. we didn't make people sacrifice their daughters to the Gods). But I am not sure that gang wars aren't the same thing.

(Sometimes I have) Pessimism of the mind, but optimism of the will.

Jeannie

### CHRISTMAS, 1914

So here is the story of the Christmas Truce of December, 1914.

#### British and German troops meeting in "No Man's Land" for an unofficial Christmas truce.

The truce began on Christmas Eve, 24 December 1914, when German troops began decorating the area around their trenches in the region of Ypres, Belgium, for Christmas. They began by placing candles on trees, then continued the celebration by singing Christmas carols, most notably *Stille Nacht (Silent Night)*. The British troops in the trenches across from them responded by singing English carols.

The two sides continued by shouting Christmas greetings to each other. Soon thereafter, there were calls for visits across the "No Man's Land" where small gifts were exchanged — whisky, jam, cigars, chocolate, and the like. The soldiers exchanged gifts, sometimes addresses, and drank together. The artillery in the region fell silent that night. The truce also allowed a breathing spell where recently fallen soldiers could be brought back behind their lines by burial parties. Proper burials took place as soldiers from both sides mourned the dead together and paid their respects.

The truce spread to other areas of the lines, and

there are many stories of football matches between the opposing forces.

In many sectors, the truce lasted through Christmas night, but in some areas, it continued until New Year's Day. The truce occurred in spite of opposition at higher levels of the military.

### A SOLDIER'S LETTER TO HIS MOTHER

First thing this morning it was very foggy. A few of us that were lucky could go to Holy Communion early this morning. It was celebrated in a ruined farm about 500 yards behind us. I unfortunately couldn't go. There must be something in the spirit of Christmas as today we are all on top of our trenches running about. Whereas other days we have to keep our heads well down....!

We've had a few Germans over to see us this morning. They also sent a party over to bury a sniper we shot in the week. He was about a 100 yards from our trench. A few of our fellows went out and helped to bury him. About 10.30 we had a short church parade for the morning service, etc., held in the trench. How we did sing, "O Come All Ye Faithful," and "While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night."

... Just before dinner I had the pleasure of shaking hands with several Germans: a party of them came half way over to us so several of us went out to them. I exchanged one of my balaclavas for a hat. I've also got a button off one of their tunics. We also exchanged smokes, etc., and had a decent chat. They say they won't fire tomorrow if we don't, so I suppose we shall get a bit of a holiday -- perhaps ... for the last week or two -- it all seems so strange.

I never expected to shake hands with Germans between the firing lines on Christmas Day and I don't suppose you thought of us doing so. So after a fashion we've enjoyed our Christmas. ...With much love from your 'Boy.'

### WE NEED TO LEARN HOW TO FIGHT BETTER

Christmas spoke to the hearts of the soldiers on both sides of the lines, and touched something spiritual in them. This overpowered their commanders' orders to shoot to kill.

Christmas symbolized this inner human urge to see the humanity in each other, and they knew that someday people would have to learn to disagree without hurting each other.

This is a message we need to bring into our homes, church, neighborhoods and cities:

## **NEWSPAPER COLUMN - HOW TO DISAGREE WITHOUT HURTING YOUR RELATIONSHIP**

(By Lisa Merlo Booth, who writes an on-line relationship column for families.)

The presidential election has had a huge impact on our country due to it's historical significance, the sheer number of voters, age of voters, the overall passion so many people felt, and the risk so many took to fight for a change they hope will come.

This election has also been difficult for the couples who want change yet disagree on the best person to bring forth that change. Partners who have differing political beliefs can find themselves in very hot water if they're not careful about how they approach their differences. Below is a list of tips to help couples who struggle with differing beliefs on major topics such as politics, religion, child rearing, etc. If you're one of these couples then read on and make sure you differ...relationally.

### **THE ART OF DIFFERING**

**Accept the differences.** Too often couples try to argue their point in an effort to get their partner to come over to their side. This does little to foster closeness between partners, and seldom, if ever, works.

**Listen to understand why your partner believes the way she/he does.** Debate teams often have students argue whatever side they're given, not necessarily the side they believe in. This is because a good debater can argue any side of an issue since both sides have viable points to them. As partners, we need to stop being so sure our beliefs are the right beliefs and instead have faith that our partners actually have fairly intelligent brains that are capable of making remarkable decisions...such as choosing us for instance. Listen to why your partner thinks the way she/he does with an open mind; you may learn something.

**Respect your differences with your words, actions, energy, and heart.** Be careful not to make snide comments, or put your partner's beliefs down in front of others or in the privacy of your own home, or tell, imply, or insinuate that your partner is stupid in any way for thinking the way she/he does. Healthy relationships start minimally with respect...even in times of disagreement.

**Have an agreement that if it gets too heated you both will take a moment to get centered.** If necessary, take a time out until better able to discuss the issue respectfully. If unable to discuss relationally, agree to have the topic off limits if possible. If you need to talk about the issue, get help.

### **SO THAT IS THE STORY OF THE CHRISTMAS TRUCE.**

On the bulletin cover is the album art of the Royal Guardsman's hit record about Snoopy's Christmas Truce with the Red Baron. It's a good tune, but I don't think it would add much to our worship this morning.

I wondered if it would have made a better sermon today if the guy had not tried to blow up an airplane landing in Detroit yesterday. I don't think so. It only makes the point stronger.

**We need to learn to disagree with each other without killing each other.**

**That is the message of Christmas, of Christ, and of your pastor. Let's work on it in our homes, our families, and our social groups. And let's pray that nations will do the same.**



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