**St John’s Bourne End**

**Wednesday morning at 9.30 on 23 December 2020**

**Readings**

***Isaiah 9:6 “Prince of Peace”***

*Psalm 98*

*Isaiah 2:1-5 and 11:6-9*

*Luke 2:8-20*

*Some reflections on these passages.*

\*I was leading a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and we had arrived at Bethlehem. As we got out of our coach, we were greeted with the smell of tear gas. Bethlehem was far from being “a little town” in fact it’s a city of 60,000+, and “how still we see thee lie”, today the situation is worse with the city being surrounded on 3 sides by a wall 25 feet high. Isaiah’s message that “a child is born” and a “son is given” who would be called a “Prince of Peace”, whilst having been fulfilled in the birth of Jesus 2,000 years ago, the message has still not been received and acted upon by many.

\*The prophet Isaiah did give a message of peace, Isaiah 2:1-4 (often read at Remembrance Sunday services) is a vision of the “last days” of “swords being turned into ploughshares”, and “spears into pruning hooks”. It’s a great vision of peace, and we need to hold on to visions like these today, but the key to this vision is “to walk in the light of the LORD”

\*In Isaiah’s great Messianic vision of peace, Isaiah 11, (often read at Carol services), he sees the “wolf living with the lamb”, and “the calf and the lion together” and “a little child will lead them”, and this will come because “the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD”.

\*After the “tear gas” in Bethlehem we went a few miles down the road to the Shepherd’s Fields. Here the shepherds were terrified with the vision that night, when the glory of the LORD shone around them. They heard the promise of the Saviour born in Bethlehem and the great company of the heavenly host saying “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests” (Note, this is a more correct translation of the original Greek).

\*For many this Christmastide will be far from peaceful but it’s important for us to hang on to the vision of Jesus as the “Prince of peace”. It’s only at the end of time that there will be complete peace on earth, but today we can know the peace of God in our hearts and minds because the “Prince of Peace” has come into this world, born at Bethlehem.

*A final thought*

The shepherds said to one another “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened which the LORD has told us about”. Let us go with the shepherds on their journey and may we glorify and praise God for the gift of the child who has been born and is the “Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”

*Collect for Christmas Eve*

Almighty God

You make us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of your Son Jesus Christ;

grant that, as we joyfully receive him as our redeemer

so may we with the sure confidence behold him

when he come to be our judge;

who is alive and reigns with you

in the unity

 of the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever. Amen

**Intercessions**

At Christmas we particularly remember…

…The Church, especially in places of conflict

…The Holy Land, for peace and justice and reconciliation

…Refugees and asylum seekers.

…Homeless people

…Families with young children

For the situation as we are now in Tier 4, especially the effect this will have on families this Christmas.

The Government as they plan the future arrangements to combat the virus

The vaccination programme and how the vaccine can be used in the poorer countries of the world

All in medical and caring professions with the extra load and problems because of the virus

For all who are working this Christmas

This week let's pray for all who live in Bourne End, particularly those who are new or who will find this Christmas particularly difficult. May they experience the joy of God with Us this Christmas.

For those who have been affected by the virus.

For the final negotiations over our future relationship with the EU.

*A Christmas Blessing*

May the joy of the angels

the eagerness of the shepherds

the perseverance of the wise men

the obedience of Joseph and Mary

and the peace of the Christ child

be yours this Christmastide

and the blessing of God almighty,

the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be upon you,

now and for evermore. Amen.

 *John Kirkby*