

## 2024 Christmas Day

1914 and the world is at war.

The rallying cry for enlisting was “sign up – it will all be over by Christmas!”. But it was not and it was nowhere near being over. Years of fighting were yet to come.

But that year something unusual happened. A cease-fire occurred starting Christmas Eve night. From a military point of view, it was a complete disaster. From a humanitarian view point it was a huge success.

German and United Kingdom forces were in their trenches separated by no-man’s land. One of the most dangerous places to be. Normally those caught in that space were doomed – wounded or dead stayed there since they could not be reached by their comrades. Rescuers would be easy targets for enemy fire. The warring sides were too close, and it was literally worth your life to venture there no matter how much you wanted to.

But the night of the truce was different. Something strange occurred. In the silence, singing could be heard. Silent Night being sung in German. Whether the western troops responded then or the next morning, their curiosity drew them out of the trenches – and their German counterparts did the same.

The result was unprecedented. Gradually they came together and discovered something very important. When you took away the guns and the uniforms, each side became human beings – men with more similarities than differences.

As the day progressed – food and drink were shared. Soccer games sprung up. Despite the language barrier, friends were made, photos of home and family were shared. Maybe mementos were exchanged. Trenches were repaired. The wounded and dead were retrieved from no-man’s land without fear of death. Warring armies became human beings with similarities that outweighed differences.

Strip away the trappings and we will find those similarities in others. Skin color, politics, religion, economic differences, education – none of these keep us from what we share as humans. That underneath the external we are basically the same.

The Christmas cease-fire could never be repeated. How could men open fire on the friends they had made. Their commonality could not be erased because on Christmas they had experienced their shared humanity. Troops needed to be deployed differently to overcome this problem.

But now? What does Christmas hold for us?

Humanity and what we hold dear is the bottom line for this time of year. Christmas is about being human. It is about what we share.

It is when the divine becomes human. When the son of God can be born into this world, grow up and eventually change the world.

His coming is heralded by angels who attend the birth with humans. Animals bow in the presence of the holy. Shepherds enter the stable with their sheep. Kings arrive from the East - kings in royal robes and bearing gifts. Shepherds and royalty are side by side – shoulder to shoulder in the stable. All are there with one purpose - to witness the miracle of Jesus' birth and to pay homage.

Yes, he was and is human, and he dwells among us and is always nearby. Remember that. Honor him every moment of every day. Hold your humanity dear. For what we share is greater than what separates us.