

Facta est cum Angelis 'Gloria to God in the highest: and on earth peace to men of good-will' — the message of the angel-chorus for the first Christmas.

We concentrate maybe a bit more on the second half of that proclamation — and have turned it around a bit in calling this time (as is done commonly enough) the 'season of good-will': perhaps 'Gloria to God' gets largely left to people who pray (or try to) and sing in this season because we welcome God among us, and His gift which the gifts we've been giving a receiving these days take their meaning from. Like very many biblical couplets, 'Gloria to God' and 'on earth peace' do more than just happen to go together — they're one message really, different aspects of the same thing. So in this still Christmastime, let our prayers today be prayers of praise and thanksgiving, with music to help: for that too is in the tradition of the celebration of Christ's birth. 'Today Christ is born' — 'Hodie Christus natus est' — the angels' message, and their song

MUSIC (Hodie) 4:00
PRAYERS (Xmas Blessing)

(It is one of the paradoxes of Christmas that we proclaim Peace on earth — and many people feel cynical about what they see as hypocrisy in this. A recent TV message (using a technique from the protesting 60s) combined the singing of "Silent Night" with snatches of a typical news-report and images of war, injury, suffering. Perhaps it may have shocked or offended some — presumably it was meant to do so: at least it did highlight the paradox, and maybe made some people think a little more seriously about that peace of Christmastime.

In his play "Murder in the Cathedral", T.S. Eliot gives a Christmas sermon to Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury who was murdered in his cathedral on this day, 29th Dec. in 1171. He talks of peace: "Does it seem strange to you that the angels should have announced peace, when ceaselessly the world has been stricken with war and the fear of war? Does it seem to you that the angelic voices were mistaken, and that the promise was a disappointment and a cheat? Reflect now, how our Lord himself spoke of peace. He said to his disciples: 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you'. Did He mean peace as we think of it: the kingdom of England at peace with its neighbours, the barons at peace with the king, the householder counting over his peaceful gains, the sexton hearted, his best wine for a friend at the table, his wife singing to the children? These men his disciples knew no such things: they went forth to journey afar, to suffer by land and sea, to know torture, imprisonment, disappointment, to suffer death by martyrdom. What then did he mean? If you ask that, remember that he said also 'Not as the world gives, give I unto you'. So then, he gave his disciples peace, but not peace as the world gives."

From T.S. Eliot's "Murder in the Cathedral", An old medieval English carol now "Tomorrow shall be my dancing day" MUSIC

Christmas at Kings
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And to end today I'd like to play Handel's Gloria in Exaltis, better known as a brass carol.

MUSIC
[Trumpet = Org. 15]