

**2016 Christmas Message of Cardinal Charles Bo**  
**PEACE IS THE CRY FROM THE MANGER – IS THE WORLD LISTENING?**  
**Message of Hope and Peace to People of Myanmar.**

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Around the Globe today – there is an explosion joy. Humanity is united in Hope. World is celebrating one of the greatest events of human history. Today a child is born to us. He is called Immanuel. God with us.

God did not send an email, did not appear in a face book. The Bible says when the fullness of time came, God sent his son (Gal 4:4). God send his son to meet us. : God came to meet us! Rejoice. Christmas is a message of redemption, a message of liberation. Rejoice.

Merry Christmas my dear brothers and Sisters and the people of Myanmar.

When we go back to 2000 years ago – We see a star has risen in the East, We see the angels singing “ Glory to God and Peace on Earth”. We have come together this night to see own stars of hope, listen to the message of the Angels: Glory to God and peace on Earth – become a reality in our life and life our country.

We have come to celebrate what Isaiah prophesized long before Jesus was born: “The people who have walked in darkness have seen a great light.” (Is 9:2). We have come today around the crib to see that God child will dispel all darkness in our lives: the darkness of hopelessness, the darkness of poverty and suffering, the darkness of all our spiritual and physical illness.

Christ is the light of salvation (John 8:12) that shines in the darkness. We come to adore that Light.

***What is the message from the crib?***

As Christmas gets commercialized business people send wrong signals. In countries like America and Singapore Christmas is a mad shopping season. Even in our country Christmas season is fast becoming a shopping season. Christmas trees, Santa Claus, lights and other Christmas merchandise. I really wonder when I pass through our shopping centers, what message our non-Christian brothers and sisters are getting? Christ is disappearing from

Christmas in many countries. Even the word Christmas is missing from many Greeting cards and shopping centers. : It is just Seasons *greetings* or "Happy Holiday"

Church struggles to bring back Jesus and his message back to Christmas Celebrations. In Myanmar it depends on each one of you, to pass on a sincere meaning of Christmas. Christmas need not bring to us stars, lights, Christmas trees and Santa Claus to our imagination.

Christmas should take us back to the real Christmas. The angels, the dreams to Joseph, dreams to Zacharias, the journey of Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, their rejection by all, Christ born in a manger, the shepherds, the three wise men. All these were real people. It was also the time Israel was looted by foreign powers, cronies and Roman power was wiping out.

### **What message do they bring to us?**

In the darkness of spiritually and politically oppressed Israel, the angels bring simple message. LET THERE BE PEACE ON EARTH. Christ is the prince of Peace.

God is Good News. God identifies with our human vulnerability. God brings Peace.

- God is Good News because God did not abandon us. The first Adam turned against God. Humanity chose death over life. God did not allow humanity to perish: John says in the Gospel: God so loved the world that he sent his only son, not to condemn but to redeem. (John 3: 16). Today the assurance comes that we will be saved not by gold and silver, but by the direct love of God. Are you anxious, are you afraid, are you depressed, are you worried, " Be not be afraid" says the angels ` to you a Savior is born in Bethlehem".
- The child Jesus brings the message, he is not only a savior, He is Immanuel. He is not a God of myth, a God who stayed in skies and sent only prophets. He is God himself. God who lives in you and me. He is a God who identifies totally with us. He suffers, he like us, chooses a family poor like many of our families. Child Jesus comes from families similar to many in Myanmar – people without power, people without great connections, poor people, migrant people, landless people, daily wage people, people

who are living in the margins. The holy family was a family from the margin. Christ appears in that family. He puts on the skin of those for whom life is not easy. This is the Immanuel in our lives. We are not forsaken but God comes to dwell amidst us. He knows our sorrows, our vulnerabilities. He has come to save us.

- But the greatest message that comes from Angels and Christmas night is this: **Peace to all people of good will.** This to me is the core message of Christmas year after year: Peace to each one of us – inner peace, peace from all anxieties, and peace in our families.

**From this peace for individuals and families, we need to turn our attention what is the message of Christmas for our country leaders, the world leaders.**

Why the angels sing that great song: **Peace on Earth.**

The world was never at peace. You open the first five pages of Bible. Blood there. Cain kills his brother Abel. History's first steps were filled with blood. Animals do not kill thousands. Once their hunger is satisfied wild animals do not disturb others. Human beings were perpetually in war. In the recorded history of 3500 years, human beings were at peace less than 100 years.

Millions have been killed. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century nearly 135 million people were killed. Atom bomb was thrown on Japan. Hitler killed, Stalin killed millions. Mao killed millions in China, Pol Pot killed millions in Cambodia. Many great leaders of history waded through blood to reach their throne.

Today Syria, Iraq continues to kill thousands. War industry is booming gulping down blood of innocent. War is a huge, huge business to rich countries.

Why is it that peace is so elusive in our day? First, peace is so elusive because of the unrighteousness of **a deep-seated racism in our world.** No city, no state, no country can have peace until it resolves the question of race. Our greatest threat is not bombs or arms, **but racism.** Nothing has done more in the twentieth century to kill, destroy, inflict pain or suffering than racism. We will never see peace in Kachin state and Rakhine state, until we conquer that

battle and allow God's love to prevail in our lives. For man, racism is a spiritual problem. We must, at all costs, guard against such divisive, racial attitudes.

According to the wisdom of this world, we might first try a "Peace through Strength" approach. One person can threaten the other with physical abuse or emotional abuse, or financial ruin, or whatever weapon he or she has to use and thoroughly cow the other person into submission. The other person doesn't dare continue the argument for fear of the consequences.

But "Peace Through Strength" isn't really peace, is it. It isn't peace between nations and it isn't peace between people. When one party uses overwhelming power to win a "victory" like this, **the result breeds anger or retaliation, but never peace.**

Look back for a moment at the Christmas scene. There was only one message from Angels of heaven: Peace on Earth to all men of good will.

2000 years history does not show man has a capacity for peace making.

Man started wars to end wars. Hundred years ago, First World War was started to end all wars. Iraq and Syrian wars were started for "war for peace". Hundreds of peace treaties were signed in the last two centuries, only to be thrown into fire of hatred.

Thomas Hardy, the English poet, wrote after World War I,

*We sing the Christmas song 'Peace upon earth'. And pay a million priests to bring it. After two thousand years of mass. We've got as far as poison gas. Poison Gas to Nuclear bombs, nuclear bombs to hydrogen bombs.*

What is happening to Christ message of Peace? Why so much of war when the Prince of peace came as Emmanuel?

The UNESCO charter of the United Nations states flatly, "Wars begin in the minds of men." The bomb is a product of selfishness and sin. War is in the mind of people. Herod looks at a child he thinks "he is my enemy, Kill! There was a genocide. He killed all the children. Even after the death of Jesus nearly a million people were massacred by the Romans.

We Myanmar, a small country, we are soaked in the tears of war and hatred. Just sixty years of history – more than 22 wars and now three wars going on. In the last sixty years, we have buried thousands in these wars of mutual hatred, displaced millions. War has produced drugs, drugs that make our youth walking corpses without any spirit. Wars have exported our girls to modern forms of slavery.

Yet war continues. At this very moment, thousands are refugees – they have no home like Jesus. They are in camps. They are already told: there is no place for you. In Rakhine, in Kachin, In Shan, in border camps, the story of Christmas is repeated. A poor family has no place to go and in the huts children are born. How can we celebrate Christmas justly when thousands of our brothers continue to languish in the camps at this very moment, because of our wars? Like the Holy family, in these camps children are born in utter poverty.

Governments continue war. Armed groups continue war. This happened not today even during the Old Testament times. God showed himself as a God of Justice and peace. Like we dream, prophets dream of a day there would be no war. Only peace. The prophet Micah declared,

*In the days to come ... God will settle disputes among the nations, among the great powers near and far. They will hammer their swords into plows and their spears into pruning knives. Nations will never again go to war, never prepare for battle again. Everyone will live in peace .... -- Micah 4:3*

Will that day come for Myanmar? How much weapons are used by both state and non state actors in these decades of unwinnable wars when our mothers and children die without proper medical care, when thousands of our children drop out of primary school without proper education support? When can we bring back millions of our youth from awful condemnation as modern day slaves? Genuine peace has great dividends for this nation.

Even from the Bible times, those who ruled have failed to believe in peace. Violent solutions are offered by world governments even today. Prophets foresaw that a new type of government.

Christ's birth, is portrayed as an antidote to a world at war. Isaiah rightly foretells:

For a child be born to us, a son will be given to us: And the government will rest on his shoulders. His name shall be called Prince of Peace. (Is 9:6)

When God's government comes, there will be only peace. That is the message of Christmas. Come Lord Jesus, Maranatha!

When Jesus begins His ministry, He says, Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the children of God. When he was threatened and come into conflict with Pharisees and Herod, He said, love your enemies. When He heads to the cross He weeps over Jerusalem because they do not know the things that make for peace. He forgives even from the cross those who persecuted him. He refused to have hatred in his mind.

The divisions in the world are the divisions within our hearts. Out of the over flow of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man brings good things out of his good heart. (Luke 6:45) We will not be at peace with the world until we are at peace with ourselves. All 'Pinlone' meetings, all international peace meetings, all conflict resolution trainings are suspect when the heart refuses to recognize the dignity of the other as the image of God.

So Myanmar sees so many cease fire agreements. CEASE FIRE is a misnomer. It is no wonder it often collapses. Martin Luther King, Jr., defined it well when he said that real peace is not just the absence of hostilities or tension: real peace is the presence of justice. Real peace is the removal of those underlying conditions of injustice and exploitation which fan the flames of resentment and which finally lead to war. Church always insisted: If you want peace, work for Justice. Justice and righteousness should flow like a river to reach the shore of peace.

Real peace is recognizing all the citizens of this rainbow nation are brothers and sisters. Seven tribes and 135 tribes. They must be equal. But the strong and mighty feels it is their birth right to exploit the resources of the ethnic communities. It assumes that is acceptable to wipe out their cultural and social history. This nation has enough resources for all citizens. When that is forgotten and resources are surrendered to cronies and companies and countries nearby, peace would never come.

Bible brings the notion of Shalom. Shalom is more than the absence of conflict, shalom is harmony, wholeness, health, and well-being for the whole universe. Not just for some of it, but for all of it. Not just here, but everywhere, in every nation. All over.

Isaiah declared that "righteousness will yield peace" (Isaiah 32:17 NEB). Regardless of what has happened or what is happening now, peace for our world is possible because the Holy Spirit is ever working for peace in our world. It is God's will for this world. The prophet Micah declared,

In the days to come ... God will settle disputes among the nations, among the great powers near and far. They will hammer their swords into plows and their spears into pruning knives. Nations will never again go to war, never prepare for battle again. Everyone will live in peace....  
-- Micah 4:1-

The Bible gives us the assurance that there is within this troubled world and behind the mysteries of time and space a sovereign God who is on the side of justice and on the side of peace.

While appealing to all the parties for a meaningful just peace in this season of Christmas, I call upon Christians and my country man, without our effort there will not be any peace. Those who believed in arms did not bring any results. As people of faith, we can move mountains. Working for peace is a moral obligation.

I do hope the new government, the army, the armed groups make war a history. Peace will bring prosperity. Once we were the richest country in the region. Now we are one of the poorest. Our spiritual wealth is known to the world. I do hope this may the last Christmas when we need to pray for peace in Myanmar. Let the Holy Spirit inspire all our leaders.

The shepherds, the three wise men were given this message of peace. Neither Herod nor the Roman Empire heard this message. All of them have become part of history. But the hymn of the angels continue to echo and reecho in our hearts persistently

Glory to God in the highest -Peace to People on Earth

MERRY CHRISTMAS. CHRIST IN YOU IS HOPE OF OUR GLORY