

IN TOUCH

Winter 2025

THE PRINCE OF PEACE

‘For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders, And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.’

Isaiah 9:6

www.saint-johns.org.uk

SIMON'S SCRAWL

by Simon Gales

I am writing this a couple of weeks after a memorable farewell weekend and a couple of days after moving out of the vicarage, our home for the last 28 years! Thank you to all who came to both the farewell tea and our final Sunday service - it was certainly a wonderful send-off, and we are especially grateful to all who travelled to be there, and to all who contributed in many different ways, including a generous farewell gift. St John's is a very special church family, and we will miss you all greatly in the months ahead, but look forward to hearing of your future progress, and the appointment of a new vicar before too long, we pray!

The theme of this magazine is 'The Prince of Peace'. That was one of the titles for Jesus foretold by the prophet Isaiah, some 700 years beforehand, in a passage which is often read at Christmas services:

***'For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called . . . Prince of Peace'***

Isaiah 9 verse 6

This stunning promise of a ruler who would be the source of peace was confirmed by the announcement of the angels to the shepherds of Bethlehem, when Jesus was born:

***'Glory to God in the highest,
and on the earth peace to those on whom his
favour rests'***

Luke 2 verse 14

What good news this is in a world where there is so much hostility and suspicion, where so many are restless and wandering. In Jesus, God gives us peace!

This is how it works: Through Jesus we can have a personal relationship with God, as our loving heavenly Father. When we make Jesus our King, God is no

longer a stranger, no longer the unknown maker of the universe, but now our heavenly Father. And that means that our most basic needs - to be loved by and safe with God - can be met, both now and forever!

There are two sides to the peace Jesus offers.

First, there is what he takes from us. He washes away our sin, along with all the shame, pain, hurt, regret, brokenness and guilt that goes with it. He takes the punishment from God that it deserves. Just as his title said he would.

Secondly, there is what Jesus gives to us. Through Jesus, God gives us his favour and forgiveness. We are reconciled to the God who made us. We get to enjoy a restored relationship with him, seen and loved by him for ever.

This is not yet 'peace on earth' in the sense of an end to all war and hostility, and all the pain that brings (see the helpful article on page 3). Rather it's peace on earth (as the angels said) 'to those on whom his favour rests'. When you know that Jesus has taken your sin so that you now enjoy God's favour, then you can navigate the wars and pain and whatever else this broken world throws at you, and you can do it with a sense of peace because you are now at peace with God!

May you know the peace of God this Christmas, and beyond.

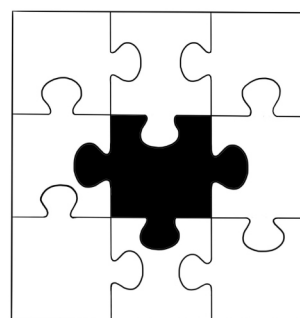
Dede joins me in continued love and thankfulness to the family of St John's, looking forward to that day when our peace will be shared perfectly forever!

Simon



Sketchy theology

By Ben Hollinshead



The missing peace?

THE PARADOX OF PEACE



Dimitri, in Dostoyevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, affirmed that: "If God did not exist, everything would be permitted". The widespread intuition - that God is the moral Governor of the universe - would then have no meaning. There would be no final reckoning against human sinfulness and particularly the actions of despots from Mao Zedong to Vladimir Putin. Yet even our atheist Prime Minister implied the contrary in his expressed desire to "smash the gangs!"

This expression suggests several key points

(1) evil is an objective reality - in this case an aspect of people trafficking;

(2) most 'normal' human beings wish for an 'avenging angel' to compel evildoers to desist and to establish justice, or even to act in that capacity;

(3) this desire is widely unfulfilled, although in some cases criminal acts receive due punishment through the courts. But generally, the judicial process is fraught with difficulty because, at some level, evil desires run through all human hearts including judges and other officers of the law.

(4) We all feel this inability to establish a just society, which is deeply troubling. It underlies the global popularity of Lee Child's *Jack Reacher* novels, where local justice is meted out by a 'semi-messianic deliverer', expressing 'an American dream'. Meanwhile, our news bulletins major on a litany of horror and tragedy, ranging from child abuse to tribal wars.

Enter: Jesus of Nazareth, the promised "Prince of Peace"!

What did our Lord have to say? Any interpretation of Jesus' sayings must reckon with God's 'dual stage' plan, as revealed in the New Testament. We can expect some progress '**already**', since the advent of Jesus and his "...making peace by the blood of his cross" (*Colossians* 1:20). But the ultimate outworking

is '**not yet**'. That awaits the return of Christ in glory, the general resurrection, the final judgement and the establishment of God's kingdom of *Shalom*, in a "new heaven and new earth".

At present, therefore, as Christians, we must live and work with the tension between 'already / not yet'. Our prayer remains: "Thy will be done *on earth*, as it is *in heaven*". This helps us understand Jesus' paradoxical statement in the Gospels:

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother."

Matthew 10: 34ff. (Luke 12: 49-53).

Jesus sometimes gets his point across by extreme contrasts: "*Whoever loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me*". This is not a mandate to hate one's parents, which would contradict the Fifth Commandment, but to establish the **priority** of commitment to Jesus Christ.

Presently, the establishment of peace on earth is neither instant nor total. The reason is that transforming justice is also required. This is often resisted within a family when one member commits to Christ and abandons incompatible familial lifestyles and values. In some cultures, such as the militantly Islamic, persecution can be severe and eventuate in social ostracism and even martyrdom. Generally, western societies are nominally tolerant, and the cost of discipleship may be lessened. Nevertheless, there remains a cost to Christian discipleship. This can be experienced even in historically 'Christian nations' and, sadly, for faithful Christians, even within some Church denominations - whenever there is departure from Biblical truth and tolerance of secular ethics.

BY DAVID WATTS

CHAT FROM THE CHAIRS

Marc Hollinshead talks to: Josephine and Frank Mok

Marc: When did you move to Wilmslow?

Josephine: We arrived in Wilmslow on 21st August 2021, and before that, we had never been to the UK! An agency introduced Wilmslow to us and said it is a good area. We then rented a house for one and a half years until we finally bought our house.

Marc: How did you settle after such a big move?

Josephine: We were very lucky to choose Wilmslow after all sort of consideration about places such as Reading, Nottingham, or Sale. It was a huge decision for us and the family did struggle at first because we were sad to leave. Especially everyone needed to adapt to the environment as everything is new to us. We do feel very settled now, though.

Marc: Moving is definitely a hard thing to do. What do you and Frank do now?

Josephine: A year after moving, I got a job in the kitchen at a primary school as I've been a kindergarten teacher for more than twenty years. Frank is an IT Programmer, and after working remotely, he is now working at Media City for a Hong Kong based company.

Marc: I imagine you're also very busy with the kids?

Josephine: Yes! The biggest challenge was that our sons couldn't go to school at first. Joshua has autism so it was a big change to Hong Kong but they all eventually felt comfortable. My niece, Jamie, also came one year after we settled and is currently studying Psychology at Nottingham. There's a lot to do each day as all the kids have different hobbies, too.

Marc: It sounds like you and Frank are kept very busy! How did you both meet?

Josephine: We went to the same church in Hong Kong which was very big with around 800 – 1200 people. I was a pianist and choir member while Frank playing drums as he liked it so much, then we were in the worship team as well as the same fellowship group.



Marc: What was it like moving to St. John's after your big Hong Kong church?

Josephine: We actually started in a Chinese & Cantonese church, but then we attended a holiday club at St John's and the kids really wanted to come along permanently. The people here are so nice and welcoming and the church is very calm. They even helped us with moving and we could tell it was from the heart.

Marc: That's lovely to hear! How is church life now that you're settled?

Josephine: God gave me the opportunity to worship him through the gift of music, so I am in the music group. Frank and I also went to the English conversation classes, and they have been super helpful. The difference in culture here surprised us but we can feel more comfortable because of how welcoming and helpful everyone is.

Marc: We love having you here and it's really encouraging that you feel comfortable after such a big life change.

Josephine: God really gave us a great chance to settle here, and it's Him who gave me the ability to do it all!

Marc: An amazing truth to end on. Thank you Josephine for sharing this with us.

Solina's Story

"I had a quiet and peaceful upbringing in Cambodia, but the Khmer Rouge changed everything.

When I was twenty-one years old, my city came under attack. My family was rushed out of Phnom Penh into the countryside. The journey was difficult. My mother died on the side of the road, but we had to continue on. Eventually, separated from my father and sisters, I was forced into a labour camp. I was beaten, tortured and starved. On multiple occasions I thought I would be executed.

In the midst of my suffering, God touched my heart. I was harvesting rice and glanced up at a mango tree. I began wondering who created the first crop. Though I claimed to be Buddhist like my mother, I began believing there must be a Creator God.

“

**In the midst of my suffering,
God touched my heart.**

When the war ended, I escaped and was reunited with my family. We stayed in refugee camps in Thailand where I met some missionaries. One woman shared the Bible with me

and told me about Jesus. When I heard how Jesus had forgiven those who mistreated him, I was deeply moved. I accepted him as my Saviour straight away.

In 1992, while living in Canada, I got connected to a ministry that shared the gospel with Cambodians through radio. I harboured bitterness toward Cambodia and never wanted to return. But God made it clear he had plans for me there. I've now been living in Cambodia and serving in gospel radio ministry for twenty years. The Lord has given me strength not only to forgive my persecutors, but also to love my country. After all God has done for me, I consider it a privilege to spend my life serving him here."

We had the privilege of serving alongside Solina with OMF Cambodia in the city of Phnom Penh between 2008 – 2017. In our second term we regularly attended her church called, Faith in Christ, that met in a building at the end of her garden; amongst the mango trees. Her radio ministry still goes on throughout Cambodia and has been presenting the Cambodian people with the hope of Jesus Christ for many many years.

Please pray for the people of Cambodia, Solina and the radio ministry this Christmas time, that God would even now be made known to the peoples of Cambodia in their heart languages. That the good news of Jesus Christ would be clearly explained and that many would respond in faith and know Him, the prince of peace, as their Saviour this year.

**Shared by Paul Robinson,
our OMF Mission Partner**





Verses of Peace

As this edition of In Touch explores the issue of Peace, we asked some of our church family to share their favourite Bible verses that give us strength and comfort

Psalm 46

God is our refuge and strength, An ever-present help in trouble (v1). Be still and know that I am God (v10).

For me, these two cover all the issues and "stuff" that often crop up each day or creep up on us when you least want them to!

Psalm 23:4

Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

This passage always brings me peace as it assures us that even in life's bleakest days, God walks beside us with comfort and protection.

I love Isaiah 53:5

But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.

For me its such a moving reminder of what Christ did for us and that this was God's plan from the beginning!

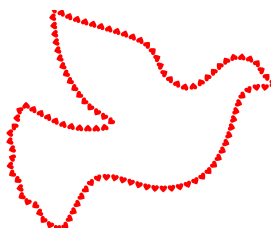
Isaiah 26:3

You will keep in perfect
peace, those whose minds
are steadfast, because they
trust in you.

This verse reminds us of God's promise to keep in perfect peace those who trust Him and fix their minds on His steady, unchanging presence.

John 14:27 "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

This offers Jesus' own calm and steady assurance, a peace the world can't give or take away.



Colossians 3:15

"Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful."

This brings me peace by urging believers to let Christ's peace rule in their hearts and shape their relationships.

One of my favourite verses regarding peace is found in Philippians Ch 4 v4-7. They follow on from a dispute going on in the church but could apply to any difficult circumstance. Paul's response is to focus on Jesus 'Rejoice in the Lord always'; be considerate to others; remember that the Lord is near; and bring all anxieties to God in prayer. Then that "peace" which passes all understanding will be ours.

Doing things God's way works !!

Matthew 11:28

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest"

brings peace by inviting the weary to rest in Jesus, who lifts burdens we can't carry alone.



NEW FACES



Hi, we're Ben and Charlotte! We've recently moved to Wilmslow and are excited for this new chapter in our lives. We love hiking, travelling, and getting involved in music. You might have already seen Charlotte singing in a few of the services already!

We're so grateful for the warm welcome we've received at Saint John's. It's been amazing to feel part of such a friendly and supportive church community."

Hello everyone, we are a family from Hong Kong — Elvis, Natalie, and our two children, Asher (6 years old) and Avery (4 years old). We've been in the UK for three years, and we're very happy to have come to this church. Thank you all for your warm welcome.

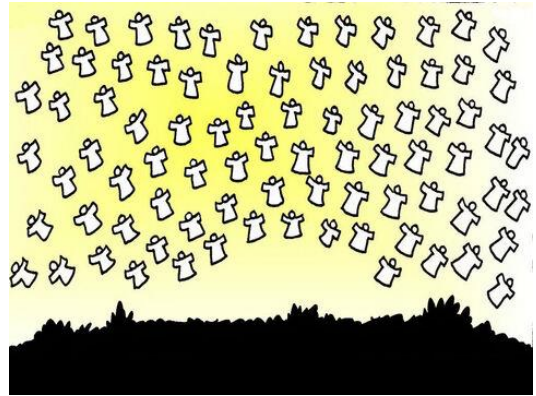


Hello, we are Ken and Sally and have recently joined St John's Lindow after travelling further afield to attend church. Ken, originally from Glasgow, works at the University of Manchester. Sally, who grew up in Wales, is a Welsh translator for the NHS. We have two daughters: Mari, studying at the University of Bath, and Bethan, currently on a gap year before starting at the University of Manchester. At home, we are joined by Morag, our Bichon Frise.

We are hosting Simon's House Group and enjoying getting to know the St John's family.

A Peaceful Christmas?

Have a look at these pictures from the first Christmas. How many things that make noise can you find? Do you think it was peaceful in Bethlehem?



Code A=1 B=2 C=3 D=4 E=5 F=6 G=7 H=8 I=9 J=10 K=11 L=12 M=13 N=14 O=15 P=16 Q=17 R=18 S=19
T=20 U=21 V=22 W=23 X=24 Y=25 Z=26

The new born baby in the manger had been given lots of names before he was born. Use the code above to work out some of his names. Can you think of any others? Isaiah 6v9
Matthew 1v21-23

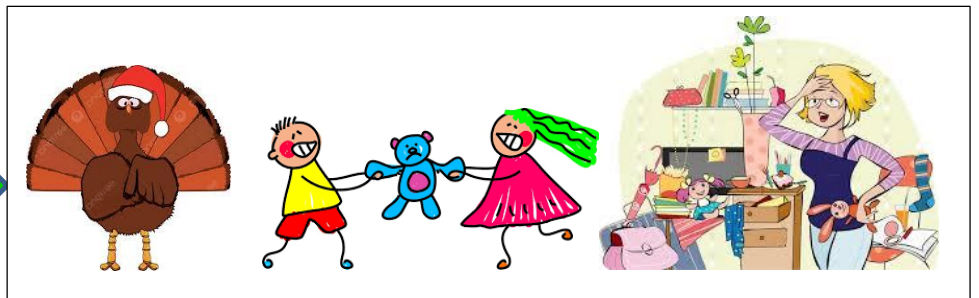
10-5-19-21-19 =

9-13-13-1-14-21-5-12 =

13-9-7-8-20-25 7-15-4 =

16-18-9-14-3-5 15-6 16-5-1-3-5 =

Yes, Jesus was given the name Prince of Peace. Look at the pictures: who do you think is feeling peaceful at Christmas time? Why are they not feeling peaceful? What needs to change?



Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests. Luke 2v14

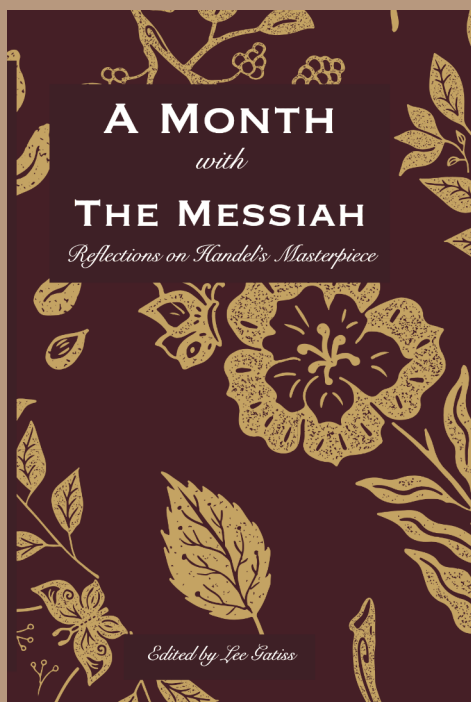
This is what the angel said to the shepherds on the night Jesus was born. This great news was the reason why the angels had a party in the sky!

Jesus' birth was great news because it was God's plan to rescue his enemies being put into action. Jesus was coming to earth so we could be at peace with God forever by having our sins forgiven.



If you are a friend of Jesus, you have this peace and can call God your father – why not speak to Him now

BOOK REVIEWS



Reviewed by Nigel Brooks

It's been a very long time since I sang Messiah as a choir boy at Ipswich School! It was no small undertaking for a school

to tackle a production of such epic proportion, and I remember very many hours of rehearsal before performance day. Now, several decades on I have enjoyed revisiting Messiah in the form of this 'book of reflections' about the masterpiece composed by Handel and based on scriptures selected by Jennens.

The book is engaging in the way its 30 contributors invite us on a journey through Messiah, each providing their thoughts on the historical meaning of Jennens chosen passages and how the music shaped their interpretation. Contributors have quite different backgrounds, and this helps to make each authored section somewhat different in style and substance. Contributions are relatively short and each can be read individually, much like a series of short stories. You don't have to know of or even like Handel's Messiah to enjoy this book. The theological interpretations of key bible passages are enough alone; written in a style that is easy to read and relevant to our lives today. I wasn't, for example, expecting the culmination of a Taylor Swift concert to be used to illustrate our pleasure experience and how God created

us to experience pleasure and joy in his truth and love; it worked for me. How Handel then took these passages and set them to music is a fascinating read, and you don't need to be a music scholar to understand and enjoy it.

So, whether you are a 'Messiah aficionado' or a 'complete novice', this is a book that you can enjoy. It's an accessible read. It can be dipped in and out of and appreciated for the theological reflections alone or with the bonus of learning about how one of our greatest composers created such an iconic piece of music.



Our Christmas give away this year is **The Missing Peace** by Sam Chan. This is a short, engaging and compassionate exploration of why modern life often feels restless and fragmented—and how the Christian message speaks into that longing. Chan blends personal stories, cultural insight, and gentle humour to show that peace isn't found in achievement or self-help, but in a restored relationship with God.

SAYING GOODBYE TO SIMON & DEDE



It was wonderful to see so many faces, both old and new to celebrate Simon and Dede's 28 years of service at St John's. We are so grateful that we were able to give them a proper send-off!

Simon and Dede have now moved to Northampton to enjoy their retirement and to serve Jesus in other ways. We are especially thankful that they will now be able to spend more time with their children and grandchildren!



Finding Peace

For many the run up to Christmas is one of the busiest seasons. In addition to our usual activities, we add the search for presents, shopping for food, and getting ready for family and friends to visit. “The most wonderful time of the year” can quickly feel like the most frantic.

But the Bible shows us a different way. The Bible says Christmas is about the arrival of a person, who is the **Prince of Peace** (Isaiah 9:6). Those words were written hundreds of years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem. They are a title or a name given about Jesus because of who he is and what he would do.

It is no surprise therefore, that as Jesus is born, the angels declare peace to all on whom God's favour rests (Luke 2:14). Some of Jesus' last words to his followers are 'peace be with you' – in fact this is repeated three times (John 20: 19, 21, 26). Later in the Bible we read:

*The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the **peace of God**, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:5b-7).*

These verses are a great comfort. The reason not to be anxious is that the Lord is near and that Jesus shares his peace with us. Peace with God has two dimensions.

Firstly, there is **peace with God**. By believing in Jesus and turning to trust Him we are promised forgiveness and a restored relationship with God. Where we were once enemies of God, we are brought close, through Jesus, to be in his family. We now have an objective, reconciled relationship with God and peace with Him forever through Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

Wonderfully, there is more. We have peace with God, but also secondly, we have **peace from God**.



Philippians 4 above explains, that as we come to God in prayer and remember that he is near, we will experience an inner calm, joy and security that flows from that relationship. Even in the hard things – whether missing those we once shared Christmas with; family expectations not being met or something else – our relationship with God through Jesus leads us to a peace within that comes from God.

My prayer is that both these wonderful things – peace with God and peace from God – would bring you great joy in these cold and dark months. Whether Christmas is busy and memorable or not, may you know the peace with God and peace from God that is only possible through Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

If you'd like to know more about this, come along to St John's this Christmas time, I am certain you will find the same warm welcome I found on a recent visit.

Dave is married to Ali and is currently a minister at Emmanuel Church, Leftwich. Dave will be leading a team to start Grace Church Macclesfield in Sept 2026.

WINTER/SPRING PROGRAMME

Mornings 10am SUNDAYS Evenings 6.30pm			HOMEGROUPS
28 Dec	Motto Verse John 6:27		Meeting in various homes around the parish during the week (evenings and afternoons) to study God's Word and encourage and support one another.
4 Jan	God's New Community 1. A breed apart 1 Peter 2:4-10 Rt Revd Rob Monro	—	
11 Jan	2. We are family Ephesians 2:11-22 Rev James Doo	Homeward Bound 1. The certainty of heaven 1 Peter 1:1-12	
18 Jan	3. Which way is up? Ephesians 4:7-16 Rev Dan Young	2. Strangers in our time 1 Peter 1:13-21	During the spring, our homegroups are linked to our Sunday morning series. Meeting weekly, the groups begin on 8 th January and finish on 26 th March. Dates given are Thursdays but some groups meet at other times (full details on weekly notice sheet). In addition, a men's fellowship meets at 6.30am Fridays.
25 Jan	4. What does it mean 1 Cor 12:4-27 Rev Alec Ham	3. Live the new life 1 Peter 1:22-2:3	
1 Feb	5. Concrete Love Romans 12:3-21 Rev Joshua Tomalin	4. The very stones cry out! 1 Peter 2:4-12	
8 Feb	All Age Parade service	5. The injustice of it all 1 Peter 2:13-25	One week each half term will be a Prayer Evening.
15 Feb	6. All you need is love 1 John 3:11-24 Rev Dan Young	—	
22 Feb	7. Follow your Leader 1 Tim 3:1-13 Paul Robinson	—	
1 Mar	8. Unlikely converts Luke 5:27-32 Rev Lee Gatiss	6. To have and to hold 1 Peter 3:1-17	MONTHLY PRAYER EVENTS Sat 3rd Jan (church rooms) Prayer Breakfast 8.30--9.45am Thur 12 Feb (church) Prayer Evening 8-9.30pm Thur 19 Mar (church) Prayer Evening 8-9.30pm
8 Mar	Rev Dick Farr	Church weekend	
15 Mar	All Age Parade service	7. Suffering and fear 1 Peter 3:8-22	
22 Mar	9. Making it work Colossians 3:12-17 Rev Keith Sinclair	8. The reality of judgement 1 Peter 4:1-19	
29 Mar	10. Painting a picture Acts 2:42-47 Canon John Dunnett	9. Standing firm 1 Peter 5	
3 Apr	Good Friday John 19:1-16	2pm John 19:16-37	
5 Apr	Easter Age Parade service	Easter Praise	
SPECIAL EVENTS	Jan 17 10 am Who let the dads out?	Jan 24 10-4.30pm Northwest Gospel Partnership annual conference, Wigan.	Mar 1 12.15 pm Evergreens Lunch
	Jan 18 12.15pm Evergreens Lunch	Feb 28 10 am Who let the dads out?	Mar 21 10 am Who let the dads out?