

## *The Northumbria and Newcastle Universities Martin Luther King Peace Committee*



### **December 1914 Christmas Truces–themed school carol service**

*This is a text document of the text for the WWI Christmas Truce-themed carol service printed in the 'Teaching the 1914 Christmas Truces Resources Pack' for schoolteachers, available at [www.mlkpc.org](http://www.mlkpc.org)*

*This file is made available in this format to help teachers easily copy, paste and modify an order of service for their school event. It also includes the Lord's Prayer in French, German and English, as well as the text of Silent Night/Stille Nacht in English and German, for use in modern languages themed-lesson plans.*

*Please see the Resources Pack for additional information, instructions and PowerPoint slideshows.*

**Carol 1** *Procession: white flags could be paraded in at the start of the service and placed prominently to preside over the service. It would be best to explain them as flags of truce rather than surrender; a sign that this service is one of peace. National flags of Britain, Imperial Germany and France could also be used. Traditionally 'Once in Royal David's City' is sung at this point.*

### **Opening Prayer, Welcome and Soldier's recollection**

Children, parents, staff and guests, year by year we gather for the remembrance of Christ's birth. When we do, we recall together his title as Prince of Peace, we imagine the angels' song of 'Peace on earth and goodwill to all people' and we remind ourselves of the mission of the Messiah to 'guide our feet into the way of peace'.

This year we also remember that one hundred years ago our nations began a war so terrible that it was called the War to End all Wars. Tonight [as our flag(s) of truce reminds us] we also remember that one hundred Christmases ago, in no-man's land on the western front, peace broke out spontaneously. They sang songs of Christ's birth, enemies briefly became friends, festive gifts were given, and addresses were swapped with promises to write after the war. These truces are not myths, they are well-attested by first-hand accounts and occurred right down the Western front from the North Sea to Switzerland. Though their truces were short and broken by those in command, yet they remain a hopeful reminder that we human beings are not born to war and that the Prince of Peace still works in this world by the Spirit of holiness.

So, in a few moments of quiet now, pray with us for the peace of the world, for fairness and justice; that wars may cease and negotiation replace fighting to resolve conflicts. *[a time of quiet recollection and prayer may be kept]*

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.

Before singing our first carol, we listen to the first-hand account of the beginning of the truces as recorded by Sergeant Frank Sumter, London Rifle Brigade:

After the 19th December attack, we were back in the same trenches when Christmas Day came along. It was a terrible winter, everything was covered in snow, everything was white. The devastated landscape looked terrible in its true colours -clay and mud and broken brick- but when it was covered in snow it was beautiful. Then we heard the Germans singing 'Silent night, Holy night', and they put up a notice saying 'Merry Christmas', and so we put one up too.

While they were singing our boys said, 'Let's join in,' so we joined in and when we started singing, they stopped. And when we stopped, they started again. So we were easing the way. Then one German took a chance and jumped up on top of the trench and shouted out, 'Happy Christmas, Tommy!' So of course our boys said, 'If he can do it, we can do it,' and we all jumped up. A sergeant-major shouted 'Get down!' But we said, 'Shut up Sergeant, it's Christmas time!' And we all went forward to the barbed wire.

**Carol 2** Many of the accounts of the Christmas Truces mention hearing singing, and *Stille Nacht* is one of the songs mentioned, it being familiar to both German and British troops. The basic idea here is to sing some, at least, of the carol in German. This might be done by singing one of the verses in German all together (perhaps a bit of help with pronunciation might be needed) or to invite those who can read German to sing one or more verses in German. In a school, perhaps part of the rehearsal could be to have some sing in German. It might be effective to light the tree lights as this is sung, to remind us that in many places the truces began with the singing of *Silent Night* and the lighting of candles on little Christmas trees.

#### Guide to pronunciation

Silent night, Holy night,  
All is calm, all is bright;  
Round yon virgin mother and  
child.  
Holy infant so tender and mild,

Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht,  
Alles schläft; einsam wacht  
Nur das traute hochheilige  
Paar.  
Holder Knabe im lockigen  
Haar,

Shtiller nakht haye-ligger nakht  
Ahl-erz shlefft, ayenzam vakht  
Noor das trouter hokhayeligger  
Par  
Holder k-nahber im lokiggen har

Sleep in heavenly peace,  
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, Holy night,  
Shepherds quake at the sight:  
Glories stream from heaven  
afar,  
Heav'ly hosts sing Alleluia:  
Christ the Saviour is born,  
Christ the Saviour is born!

Silent night, Holy night,  
Son of God love's pure light;  
Radiance beams from thy holy  
face,  
With the dawn of redeeming  
grace,  
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth,  
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh!  
Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh!

Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht,  
Hirten erst kundgemacht  
Durch der Engel Halleluja,  
Tönt es laut von fern und nah:  
Christ, der Retter ist da!  
Christ, der Retter ist da!

Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht,  
Gottes Sohn, o wie lacht  
Lieb' aus deinem göttlichen  
Mund,  
Da uns schlägt die rettende  
Stund'.  
Christ, in deiner Geburt!  
Christ, in deiner Geburt!

Shlaff in him-lisher roo  
Shlaff in him-lisher roo

Shtiller nakht haye-ligger nakht  
Heer-tun ainst koond-gemakht  
Doorkh dair engle Halleluyah  
Ternt ez lout fon fairn oond nah  
Khris-t dair retter ist da  
Khris-t dair retter ist da

Shtiller nakht haye-ligger nakht  
Gott-us zone, o vee lakht  
Leeb ous die-num gertlikhen  
moond, /  
dah oons shlekt dee rettender  
shtoont.  
Khris-t in diner geboort  
Khris-t in diner geboort

Words: Joseph Mohr, 1816

### **Reading 1: Isaiah 9: 2,6-7 The prophet foretells the coming of the Saviour.**

**Soldier's account**, Company-Sergeant Major Frank Naden of the 6th Cheshire Territorials:

"On Christmas Eve as each fireball went up from the German lines our men shouted 'Hurrah' and 'Let's have another'. They also sang Christians Awake and other Christmas hymns. On Christmas Day one of the Germans came out of the trenches and held his hands up. Our fellows immediately got out of theirs, and we met in the middle, and for the rest of the day we fraternised, exchanging food, cigarettes and souvenirs. The Germans gave us some of their sausages, and we gave them some of our stuff. The Scotsmen started the bagpipes and we had a rare old jollification, which included football in which the Germans took part. The Germans expressed themselves as being tired of the war and wished it was over.

### **Carol 3**

### **Reading 2: Isaiah 11: 1–3a; 4a; 6–9 The Prophet foretells the peace that Christ will bring.**

### **Carol 4**

### **Reading 3: Luke 1: 26–35; 38 The angel Gabriel visits Mary**

**Soldiers' account: 19 year-old Arthur Pelham-Burn, a lieutenant in the 6<sup>th</sup> Gordons who was planning to study to become a church minister after the war, took part in a joint service on Christmas Eve, and wrote home that:**

The mass burial of the dead was 'awful, too awful to describe so I won't attempt it,' but the joint burial service was 'most wonderful. Chaplain Adams arranged the prayers and the twenty-third psalm etc and an interpreter wrote them out in German. They were read first by our Padre and then in German by a boy who was studying for the ministry. It was an extraordinary and most wonderful sight. The Germans formed up on one side, the English on the other, the officers standing in front, every head bared. Yes, I think it was a sight one will never see again.

### **Prayers**

*Not all carol services include prayers, but for those that do there is a form of prayer given below. However, you might like to consider other ideas instead or alongside. For example, placing decorations on the tree representing prayers, lighting candles with prayers (perhaps in front of a nativity scene), or something like placing flowers (poppies?) in the barrels of symbolic rifles.*

*At the end of each section, it may be appropriate to use a brief response such as*

*"Lord, in your mercy; **Hear our prayer**"*

Jesus said: 'Blessed are the peacemakers'. As we remember the Christmas Truce of 1914, let us ask God to bless all those who work to bring peace in our world and to give that gift of peace wherever it is lacking in the world.

Let us pray for ourselves. Give us the imagination, the words and the gestures which can bring peace where there is none, even in our own families and school.

We ask for making friends where there is conflict; for peace where there is fighting. We remember today especially [name situations of oppression or violence in the news at the moment ...]

We bring to mind all who work for peace and justice and take risks for peace. We ask God's blessing today especially on the work of Peacemakers working in places of danger. May they have good ideas, courage, and success in their efforts to help people understand one another and make a way together without fighting and killing.

If your school uses the Lord's prayer in collective worship, now might be a time to do so. You might consider tutoring some pupils or classes to say it in German or French:

Vater unser im Himmel.  
Geheiligt werde dein Name.  
Dein Reich komme.  
Dein Wille geschehe, wie im Himmel, so auf Erden.  
Unser tägliches Brot gib uns heute.  
Und vergib uns unsere Schuld,  
wie auch wir vergeben unsren Schuldigern.  
Und führe uns nicht in Versuchung,  
sondern erlöse uns von dem Bösen.  
Denn dein ist das Reich und die Kraft  
und die Herrlichkeit in Ewigkeit.  
**Amen.**

Notre Père, qui es aux cieux,  
Que ton nom soit sanctifié,  
Que ton règne vienne,  
Que ta volonté soit faite sur la terre comme au ciel.

Donne-nous aujourd'hui notre pain de ce jour.  
Pardonne-nous nos offences  
Comme nous pardonnons aussi à ceux qui nous ont offensés.  
Et ne nous soumets pas à la tentation,  
mais délivre-nous du mal,  
car c'est à toi qu'appartiennent le règne,  
la puissance et la gloire, aux siècles des siècles.  
**Amen.**

Our Father who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come.  
Thy will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us,  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever.

**Amen.**

*Final Prayer:* Lead us, Father, to the Great Feast of your Kingdom and help us to share that joy with all who are in need. Hear these, our prayers, which we make through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

**Choir** *Anthem, motet or other item*

**Reading 4: Luke 2: 1,3-7 the story of the birth of Jesus**

**Soldier's account:** Corporal Robert Renton, Seaforth Highlanders, in a letter to his parents:

“I never thought we would spend Christmas Day the way we did. On Christmas Eve, the Germans were in front of us started singing what appeared to be hymns. We were shouting out for encores - their trenches are only about 150 yards in front of us. They kept the singing up all night. On Christmas Day some of them started to shout across to us to come over for a drink. It started with one or two going over halfway and meeting the Germans between the two lines of trenches. Then it got that there was a big crowd of Germans and British all standing together shaking hands and wishing each other a merry Christmas. They were giving us cigars and cheroots in exchange for cigarettes, and some of them had bottles of whisky. They seemed to be a decent crowd, those in front of us. They were all fairly well dressed and the majority could speak broken English. Some of them could speak it as well as I can myself. They said they were not going to fire for three days. They kept their word too.”

**Sermon/message**

**Carol 5**

**Reading 5: Luke 2: 8-16 The shepherds go to the manger**

**Poem: We interrupt this war**

*This could be very effective as a dramatized reading.*

We interrupt this war to exchange Christmas gifts,

Sing carols, and play football in no-man's land.

We interrupt this war for doctors to heal,

teachers to teach, and students to learn.

We interrupt this war to marvel at sunsets,  
listen to music, and to laugh.

We interrupt this war for poets to rhyme, sculptors to  
chisel, and writers to paint pictures with words.

We interrupt this war to plant tomatoes, mow  
the grass, and to smell the roses.

We interrupt this war to feed the hungry, build  
new schools, and to stamp out ignorance.

We interrupt this war to clean up the air, save  
the whales and to find a cure for cancer.

We interrupt this war to wash the dishes,  
tickle babies and for world peace.

We interrupt this war for PTA meetings, band  
practice, and high school graduations.

We interrupt this war for Girl Guide cookies,  
church bake sales, and the Para-Olympics.

We interrupt this war for Legoland, the  
World Cup and the Great North Run.

We interrupt this war for bonfire toffee,  
Christmas crackers, and Bank Holiday barbecues.

We interrupt this war for office parties ,  
Advent Calendars, and silly Santa hats.

We interrupt this war to bring sons,  
daughters, sisters and brothers home.

We interrupt this war to decorate the tree,  
and welcome the babe in the manger.

We interrupt this war to hear a message from  
Our Sponsor: THOU SHALT NOT KILL.

We interrupt this war

- Based on a poem by cappy hall rearick – 2001 (modified to fit with the context)

**Soldier's account: *Sergeant George Ashurst, 2nd Battalion, Lancashire Fusiliers, wrote:***

Eventually, we got orders to come back down into the trench, 'Get back in your trenches, every man!' The order came round by word of mouth down each trench. Some people took no notice.

Anyway, the generals behind must have seen it and got a bit suspicious, so they gave orders for a battery of guns behind us to open fire and a machine -gun to

open out, and officers to fire their revolvers at the Jerries. That started the war again.

**Soldier's account: Lance-Corporal George Dyce, who participated in the truces:**

[The Germans] don't want to fight any more than we do; they are as fed up of this game as we are fit to be. They told us that they would not shoot if we did not, so we have had a holiday for the last two days we were in the trenches... I thought peace was proclaimed, but no such luck.

**Reading 6:** Matthew 2: 1-12 The wise men are led to Jesus.

*Blessing and dismissal*

**Carol 6** *(recessional: the flags could be taken out if they were brought in at the start)*

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