



ADVENT THEMES

PEACE

INTRODUCTION

On 25th July 1741, John Wesley preached a sermon at St Mary's Church, Oxford, called "**THE ALMOST CHRISTIAN**," in which he described a person who, on the surface, had all the outward appearances of godliness. This person did all the basic things right: practiced decency toward others, went to church, abstained from bad behaviour, and sincerely tried to do his/her best. While such a person is to be commended, Wesley would describe him/her to be an "**ALMOST CHRISTIAN**". He then goes on to contrast such a person with an "**ALTOGETHER CHRISTIAN**". Such a person:

1. fully loves God.
2. fully loves others – including those who have wronged us and whom we have wronged.
3. has full trust and confidence in God, such that faith is not an intellectual conviction, but a total offering of mind, body and spirit.

Wesley concluded his sermon with these words:

'May we all thus experience what it is to be, not almost only; but altogether Christians; being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus; knowing that we have peace with God through Jesus Christ; rejoicing in hope of the glory of God; and having the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given unto us!'

While acknowledging that Wesley's sermon was not written with Advent in mind, we are going to look at the four themes of Advent – Peace, Joy, Hope, Love - from a Wesleyan perspective.

In Advent we experience a tension. We know we can feel God's Peace, Hope, Love and Joy, in this life; yet we know that we do not experience them to the fullest.

What do you see as the difference between Wesley's use of the words *almost* and *altogether*?

PEACE

In the first two chapters of both Matthew and Luke's gospels, what examples are there of the absence of peace in the Christmas story?

[Read John 14:27 and John 16:33](#)

What was Jesus' understanding of peace?

What are the characteristics of the peace that Jesus gives us?

Where does the world say we will find peace?

What does it mean that Jesus has 'conquered the world'?

How might that encourage you?

Shalom

Shalom is a Hebrew word often translated 'peace'. However, like many Hebrew words, English does not capture all its nuances. It is much more comprehensive in scope than feelings of serenity or contentment or lack of war and conflict. The root of the word means to 'be completed', to be whole and full. **Shalom** envisions the complete restoration of all creation. Jesus, though, goes one step further and offers part of himself as a way to help the disciples through troubled and challenging times.

What kind of peace do you long for?

How might you begin to seek **shalom** for yourself? With another person? For the world?

[Read Ephesians 4:25-32](#)

Which of Paul's practical instructions for peace-making are hardest for you?

What can you do to begin practicing them regularly?

[Read the hymn: Silent Night - "Stille Nacht"](#)

What are your favourite images in this hymn?

Why are they meaningful for you?

What do you understand by the phrase 'heavenly peace'?