

Christmas Carol Service (Newman House) 2022

'Prince of Peace'

*[6] For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
[7] Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end. (Is 9:6–7)*

Just one of many beautiful and hope-filled passages, from the prophets and from the Gospel, that we have heard this sacred evening in our Advent reflecting on the Christmas mystery to be celebrated.

A year ago, we were mostly still taken up with Covid, keeping it at bay, isolating when necessary, testing incessantly, juggling ventilation, vaccines, & masks, and trying still to socialize, celebrate the liturgy, and just be a bit normal again. And then, just when 2022 had begun, and we'd got over the spikes in Covid of December and January, and thought it was safe to hope for normality to descend upon the world again ... we woke up on Feb 24th to find that Europe had its first all-out land war since the end of WW II. And promptly we more-or-less forgot about Covid, and our hearts and concerns turned to Kyiv,

to the Ukrainian people, to helping them in their hour of need, and to welcoming refugees here in the UK / here in London / here at the local Ukrainian-rite Cathedral. And far from the quick-fire overrun of the Ukraine that no doubt Russia's president had expected, here we are 9 months on, and both sides are dug in for the dreadful cold of a winter war. But not every day, any more, are the stories of the bombing raids in the Ukraine on our news front pages: again, our attention is moving on; mankind cannot bear too much reality!

But as *we* keep this Advent — as we at this happy Carol Service sing about the 'Prince of Peace' and prepare to welcome Him into our hearts and homes — I don't think we can do so without a timely reminder of our suffering brothers and sisters in the Ukraine, who are not at peace, who are not necessarily in heated homes, or safe from bombing. Our hearts go out to them; our hearts reach across the continent, from this safe western edge of Europe, to those in conflict zones on Europe's eastern edge. As our Christian kindred prepare like us to keep Christmas, how dismally for many of them can they face the celebrations; for so many, it's unlikely to be festive at all: many in bomb-damaged homes; many in exile across Europe; many without heat or light, electricity or running water. Not to mention the sheer horror of the loss of life: on top of Covid which hit Russia with 400k

deaths, and the Ukraine with 100k deaths, so Russian forces have now suffered maybe 100k killed & wounded, Ukraine forces about the same; and Ukrainian civilians maybe 40k killed & wounded. A huge and tragic wave of death and devastation.

How should we hold them close to us, as we here turn on festive lights and are keeping a Christmas that is, after Covid's retreat, a great and much-needed celebration? I think that we must remain acutely conscious of their plight; we must continue to commend them to the powerful protection of the 'Prince of Peace' — that they may have recourse to the weapons of God's love for assisting one another, and not to hatred or vengeance. May the brave defence of their country remain a 'just war' and stay that way, and as they keep their Christmas in such straitened circumstances, may they remember that Our Blessed Lord's beginnings were in situations of poverty and simplicity, and that He is utterly with them in their dire need. And that we are also with them, not forgetting them; not moving on to the next great news story to grab the headlines.

And one thing I'm going to do — and you might like to join me in it — is to make a further donation to the 'Help for Ukraine' that is being collected by the Ukrainian-rite Cathedral parish: QR code below ... I made a donation for Ukraine months ago, back in Lent, but feel duty-bound to contribute again at this

special time of year. We honour, we adore, we love, the Christ-child, Prince of Peace, and in His name, at this holy time of year, let's work for peace; let's support those suffering so badly from a lack of peace; let's help them overcome the awfulness of an absence of Christian love by our promise of love. And we hold them in prayer that these words of Isaiah may indeed come true in 2023, in the benevolent light of humane goodwill informed by divine grace:

*[4] For the yoke of his burden,
and the staff for his shoulder,
the rod of his oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.*

*[5] For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle
tumult*

*and every garment rolled in blood
will be burned as fuel for the fire.*

*[6] For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given.*

(Is 9:4–6)

