Merry Christmas 2017 **[1]**

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Sometimes we do not feel like being here. By "here", I mean in this world; on earth. Sometimes we are distressed about big, insurmountable things, like war and famine. Other times, we are personally wronged. These things can make us want to flee; whether to a desolated island, another planet, or even depart this realm completely for heaven.

A long time ago, God made a perfect world, and created special creatures to rule over His creation. He had a special affinity for these creatures, and loved them deeply. But He suffered their betrayal. The sharp sting of this made Him distance Himself from the world completely, and it has been groaning ever since.

When God dwelt with His nation Israel, it was in a very specific place under particular circumstances. He was not easily approachable: the pomp and rituals surrounding the Holy of Holies of the Tabernacle and the Temple were symbolic of how there still existed a dividing chasm between God and His people (this being their sin).

After hundreds of years of approaching Israel and Judah, desiring to have a mutually loving relationship with them, but each time being slighted by them, God sent Judah a "letter of divorce", in the book of Malachi. He had promised that He would return and be their King (Jeremiah 32:37–41), but for now He was leaving once again.

Imagine the apprehension of returning to see someone who had abused you, who neglected you, and whom you are expected to love. The stomach turns; the anger wells up; there is a desire to run away as far as possible.

But this is not what we saw from God. On one evening in Israel, the countryside was lit up with an angelic choir singing praises and bringing blessings upon the shepherds in attendance. The arrival of a baby Boy was met with tears of joy by a first time mother and father. In a politically turbulent time with many anxieties and concerns, there was the peace, joy and immense contentment that only the birth of a child can cause.

But this particular peace was intended for the entire world.

God has come back. As subtle as His letter of divorce which He sent through His prophet Malachi, so He quietly stole back into the world in the person of Jesus. And He remains as the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers.

I pray that this Christmas, you will be celebrating this most glorious of homecomings, and that you will drink up the restoration which Jesus offers. Jesus's mission only began on that quiet night. And

when Christmas 2017 has passed, so we continue on our mission. May God give each of us the strength to joyfully continuing to live out His Kingdom here on earth!

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