"Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed." Psalm ii,1,2.

"And... the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt... for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him." Matthew ii,13.

Isaiah xi

Psalms 110, 111

Matthew ii,1-15

New Book of Worship, p.62

Again we celebrate the festival of Christmas. It is a time of the gathering together of families, when those away turn their thoughts toward home and seek to get back to their firesides. It is a time of good will and the exchanging of gifts.

Mary and Joseph, because of the decree of Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed, came to Bethlehem, their ancestral home, and there the Lord was born.

Our real home is not in this world but in heaven, and the Lord came into the world that He might become our Redeemer and Savior and show us the way to our heavenly homes. Heaven is a state of peace and good will, where there is the desire to help and to make others happy. The Christmas season embodies in a measure this spirit. The Lord continually works in us to lead us into that state of kindliness and willing helpfulness that is our heavenly home and which gives this season its special joy.

The first part of our text - "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed" - is a prophecy. Its fulfillment is seen in the second part of the text - "And... the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt... for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him."

The Incarnation of the Lord is the central fact in history. It was prophesied ages and ages ago when man ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil - when he began to look to himself for guidance rather than to the Lord. And this prophecy was handed down from generation to generation until it was fulfilled by the birth of the Lord in Bethlehem about two thousand years ago. The Lord came into a world hostile to Him. Even Joseph, the betrothed of Mary, thought of putting her away. At first only a glimmering of the truth is given. The full truth cannot be given. But it is necessary to stand by this truth, protect it, nourish it, and care for its growth until it shall be strong enough to care for itself.
Our hearts are the cradle of truth, and our minds should stand guard over the first beginnings of heavenly life. The nations of selfish desires, and the people of vain and false thoughts, the kings of pride, the rulers of self-will may rage, try to deceive, and seek to destroy the beginnings of heavenly truth.

The Christmas story is always applicable. The angelic message was, is, and always will be "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Today among the rulers of the nations are those who continue to ignore the Divine way of peace and brotherhood. Even peacefully disposed governments are still deluded by the notion that the way to secure peace is to prepare for war. And despite the war to end all war, we observe that vast armies continue in being, and increased and more deadly armaments. These preparations go on all over the so-called civilized world. Let us hope that during this Christmastide men everywhere will be led to see more clearly the meaning and purpose of the Lord's birth into the world and, turning their hearts and their thoughts to the Prince of Peace, will find in Him and in His Word an inspiration that will remove stupid rivalries, prejudice against other peoples, and greed and lust for world power.

The Lord came to reveal a way of life, and the way of life which He revealed is the only way of peace. Peace must have its beginning in individuals. The individual must have peace within himself, for peace in the world can be established only on the foundation of human brotherhood through men of good will who, because they are at peace in themselves and in harmony with the Divine, have the will for peace in all relationships.

The angelic message of peace and good will among men is not for the self-seeking, for they will not receive it, but for such as are men of good will. There is a war which must be waged, but it is a war on the evils of greed, pride, envy, and selfishness in the individual heart. If we wage this war, we shall make a contribution to the peace of the world. And let us know that the Lord alone is the author of peace. In Him alone is the power to overcome the evils that lead to conflict and war.

We hear people say, "I shall try to go home for Christmas." We should also say this spiritually. For where the Lord is there is our true home, and when it is Christmas within us, when the Lord's truth is born in us, when we love the Lord, seek to worship Him, and do His will, we are hearing the angelic message of peace and good will.

The glories and splendor of the world are great, and its pleasures alluring, and we need not pretend otherwise. But these things can never satisfy; there is always something wanting. The world's pleasures cannot bring permanent happiness to any one of us. The real demand of the soul, even when we cannot define it, is for the peace and strength and confidence which the Lord alone can give as we
come to worship Him. We are only travelers here. We may attain all that the world can offer, but this is not the end of the journey; it is not our home.

When the Lord came into the world, He made Himself known to a few shepherds and wise men. Shepherds represent those who cherish innocence and goodness in the heart, and wise men those who seek the truth as a guide to life. Today the number of shepherds and wise men has increased. The reality and purpose of the Incarnation which took place two thousand years ago is becoming more and more appreciated. In the light of the Second Coming the truths of the Word shine more brightly and as the ages come and go, mankind will realize that the hope of the world lies in the birth of Christ in each individual soul.

The Golden Age prophesied in Revelation will come by Christ's being born in human hearts. He came to reveal Himself to us, to lift us above all selfish things, and to bestow upon us life's real blessings. This is the truth that the world needs to make men really the children of God.

He comes to us as He came to the world on that first Christmas day. His coming brought to men new light, new strength, and new hope. And He did this by presenting in Himself the ideal which men had tried vainly to create. He became to them the way, the truth, and the life, and through His followers inaugurated the Christian era.

Today belief in Him brings as an actual experience inner light, strength, and peace. And power goes forth from the Lord today to those who receive Him, which enlightens their minds, gives them victory over their temptations, heals their griefs and sorrows, and gives them rest and peace.

May we cherish the truths of the Incarnate Word, ponder over them, care for them, until they grow in us in grace and stature and finally fill our lives with the glory of heaven's wisdom and love.

Amen