



from Garth...

If this is your first Garth Hewitt Foundation newsletter - welcome and thanks for signing up!

## Peace at Christmas

For some time I've wanted to do a Christmas album and I'm delighted that back in April up in Bury St Edmunds with **GingerDog Records** the album **Peace at Christmas** was recorded.

Half the songs are new or newly recorded - and the others are tracks I picked that seemed suitable for the album.

There were two musical influences in my mind when I came to do the album - **one was Johnny Cash's Christmas album 'The Christmas Spirit'** - this is an album we have listened to in the family for years and one interesting thing is that he speaks a lot of the album with Christmas carols playing behind him. I have done two items on **Peace at Christmas** the same way - one, *Making Holy Dreams Come True* and two, *Prayer for Christmas Eve*. These are prayers and meditations that I have written, and I've used the American tunes of 'O Little Town of Bethlehem' and 'Away in a Manger' as the background for them.



*The cover photo was taken in Binkley Baptist Church, North Carolina by Brooks De Wetter-Smith. He is a superb musician - an outstanding flautist but he is also a great photographer. Live shots can be very difficult but I liked this one - even the lectern looks good! Brooks has a website here - [www.dewetter-smith.com](http://www.dewetter-smith.com)*

**The other person who influenced me was John Lennon with 'Happy Christmas (War is over)'** - I've always been very struck by that bit "War is over, if you want it," and I felt this album should have that commitment to a rejection of violence, which is a key part of the Christmas and Christian message.

The relevance of the message of Christmas at the moment could not be higher - Jesus is born into poverty or at least a very simple way of life, the way of the people of power or empire is consciously rejected, there is a massacre of children in Bethlehem, and of course Jesus was soon a refugee fleeing for his life through Gaza down to Africa.

We have seen so many refugees in the past year, so many of them have died - many children, and of course in the conflict in Syria so many children have died, but this has been true through the years also in Palestine - children are imprisoned today by the Israelis in the land once known as holy.

So on the album I have included a song called *Little Boy Down*, which is the sad and shocking story of Aylan Kurdi. I've also then recorded a song of Steve Earle called *Nothing But A Child* which has a powerful Christmas message - the shock for the wise men to discover they had travelled all that distance for, as he puts it, "nothing but a child"; but then they discover this child is the sign of hope.

**I put a couple of favourite traditional numbers on the album - *In the Bleak Midwinter* and *Silent Night***, and recorded it with many of the musicians who were on **Something for the Soul** - Chris Rogers on Violin, Paul McDowell on accordion and Pete Banks on backing vocals with Abbie Goldberg, and with Kevin Duncan producing the album and playing several instruments.



Inside the Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem - where 'One of Us' was written, and also a few years later, 'Bethlehem is Calling'

One that I recorded several years back and put on the Bethlehem Palestine album is *Shine on (Star of Bethlehem)* which was produced by Paul Wilkinson - recorded walking distance from our house in Wapping - with Pete Wilson from Duke Special playing piano and doing backing vocals. Also on the album is *One of Us*, a song I wrote in the Church of the Nativity in Manger Square in Bethlehem; originally that went on the **Dalit Drum** album produced by Paul Field, who also sings

on it. The album ends with the Christmas version of *Light a Candle in the Darkness*. There is also a song that I recorded on the album **Stronger than the Storm** called *Don't Blame God for Christmas*, which I wrote with Peter Meadows many years back now. In fact he gave me some lyrics just as I was going off on a tour of the States and you can tell in the verses that's where I am, and the choruses are his words.

*The Child of Christmas* and *Peace at Christmas* are both songs that pick up the hope and the rejection of violence and domination that came with the Prince of Peace.

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I really enjoyed recording this album. Doing it in April brought some curious moments - *Silent Night* is inescapably Christmassy and when I came out of the studio I discovered that everyone had been singing along to it! Someone suggested getting Christmas decorations and Santa hats but I resisted that strongly!

I wanted the album to have a good Christmas feel, to be ideal to start playing at the beginning of December or the beginning of Advent. But **I also wanted the album not to forget that we live in a painful world and the message and lifestyle of the Prince of Peace is a radical revolution of the values of the Kingdom or community of God that go up against the empires of our world**; the empires are dependent on their weapons and the members of the community of God use the values of non violence, equality, peace, justice and love. **Christmas introduces us to this amazing story of God's revolution of love.**

One of the spoken pieces on the album is *Making Holy Dreams Come True* - a prayer for peace with justice for the Palestinians which in turn will offer peace and security for the Israelis.

**Let's make sure that the Palestinian story is part of our Christmas story so the people of the Holy Land are not forgotten this Christmas.**

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## A Christmas prayer for Bethlehem



### Making holy dreams come true

#### A Christmas prayer for Bethlehem

What have they done to the 'Little Town'?  
Imprisoned it in a concrete wall  
Bethlehem – once a holy city  
Trapped inside a ghetto wall.  
Here where angels sang of peace  
Where love and hope were born anew  
Once surrounded by a heavenly host  
Now surrounded by a concrete view.

Yet people crushed and hidden away  
Still celebrate on Christmas Eve  
Lighting candles for the child –  
They still remember – still believe.  
So light a candle this Holy Night  
For Bethlehem and Beit Sahour  
And for all the people caught inside  
That cold and grey prison wall.

Longing for a world of peace  
Where all are treated equally  
Where all can recognize their worth  
Where all can live with dignity –  
Where all can join hands with neighbours  
Whether Muslim, Christian, Jew  
And find a way to live together  
Making holy dreams come true.



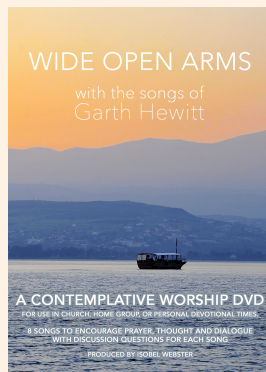
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**Click [here](#)** to see Garth singing the title track from the album, **Peace at Christmas**, in situ in the Shepherds' Fields, Bethlehem, earlier this year

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