

“God’s Christmas Peace”

St. Luke 2.10-14

Christmas Eve 2005

The Word of God for our sermon meditation this Christmas Eve was recorded for our faith and life in the Gospel of St. Luke, the 2nd chapter, beginning with this 10th verse Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this *will be* the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

The story is told of a king who once issued a challenge, with a reward, to the artist who could best depict peace. Many different paintings were created showing serene scenes of meadows, calm waters, mountain views and the like. These paintings were also populated with rabbits, doves, and various animals one would associate with a peaceful setting. Sunshine and brightly colored flowers brightened the canvasses in an effort to win the king's reward.

One painting, however, was unlike the others. It was dark with storm clouds filling the air and lightening strikes in the background. The scene was anything but pleasant as it was a rocky and jagged shoreline with angry waves crashing and pummeling the rock face. Nothing living was included in this picture except a little child who sat under an outcropping of rock with a smile on her face. No fear was in her eyes. No terror was etched on her face. She wore merely a smile of joy and contentment amid that fearsome storm. It was this painting that received the king's reward for it showed peace as no other.

Peace. The world has its ideas of peace and it is often depicted as those first artists sought to depict it. Peace is said to be a life free of conflict, fear, and uncertainty in life. It is said to be a life where all is going well with nary a trouble and sorrow in sight. When the world speaks of peace it wants the perfect life, the shimmering meadow scene where waters are always calm and life is always agreeable. It was a world where everyone gets along, where all differences are set aside, and all are happy.

Though this is what the world often depicts as peace, we, as God's people, know that this is not true peace. We know life in

this world is anything but peaceful and not just because of the war on terror and other threats to our nation and persons. Life in this world is usually stormy, confounded by conflicts, filled with fears, and full of confrontations with others who are often Scrooge-like all year long. Though greatly desired this time of year, peace often seems to be the most elusive guest of all.

Yet, there is a peace that can stand up under life's everyday pressures, stresses, and sorrows. There is a peace that can bring healing to families fraught with friction. There is a peace that can comfort and assuage even the most guilt-ridden soul. There is a peace that is not dependent on anything in this world – not money, not friends, not decorations, nothing in all this creation. The peace that endures even when all of life is crashing down on us, when our best laid plans have gone down the tubes again, when all seems to conspire against us is found not in this world but rather has come from heaven. It is God's Christmas Peace.

This is what the angels announce to those fear filled shepherds the night of Jesus' birth. God's Christmas peace is given us in the Babe of Bethlehem born of Mary in the shelter of a cave. He is, as Isaiah the Prophet told us, none other than the Prince of Peace, the Author and only Source of peace that has no end. For only Jesus can dispel our fears. Only the Lord can assure us that all is well with God on high, that we indeed enjoy His good will and favor. Only Christ the Lord can guard and keep us safe through all things to heaven's peace.

Only He who is our Peace can remove the guilt and shame of wrongs that have been done, of deeds that have remained undone. Only the Divine Savior of the world, born into this world that first Christmas, laid in a feeding trough and worshiped by angels and shepherds can give the peace that surpasses all understanding. Only the Lord Jesus who entered and lived in this sin-fallen and conflicted existence of ours can give us the confidence and contentment that allows us to smile at all our fears and through all the storms of life.

For God's peace, rather than removing all of our troubles and woes in this life, rather than setting us up in a paradise on earth, actually equips us to endure the sorrows and afflictions of this age no matter how threatening and tempestuous they might be. God's

peace enables us by faith in Jesus to look at our conflicted, troubled, topsy-turvy lives and remain confident that even if the world be turned upside down, we are still standing on He who is the solid Rock of our salvation.

God's peace is the conviction that all things – our lives, our souls, our family, our friends, our finances, our eternal rest – all these and more are in God's hands, the hands that reached out to His mother Mary, the hands that were fastened to a tree on Calvary's hill, the hands that spread out on us in benediction and will welcome us into His eternal glory. God's peace in Jesus Christ is the assurance that with God on our side, He is all that we need.

That He is our Peace is stated by the angel that first Christmas night. For Jesus was born on this earth to be our Savior, to reveal to us that instead of God's wrath for sins we now will receive His good will and favor. Jesus' birth into the world announces to you and me that God desires that we all be saved and come to faith in His Son. Jesus' incarnation proclaims that God wants nothing more than you and I to enter Paradise, enter heaven where there is peace without end.

For Jesus is God's message of peace to all mankind. Firstly, He is our Peace before God on account of our sins. This is the very reason Jesus is even conceived and born into this world as the angel Gabriel announced "He will save His people from their sins." For without Christ we would remain at odds with God and be subject to His punishment and wrath. Without Christ, God's Christmas Peace, we could only expect to endure the torments and agonies of hell. Without Jesus born in the city of David, we could never enter the eternal city of our God.

For our sin, even our sins of buying into the world's ideas of peace, created a state of war and hostility between God and us. God's wrath and displeasure had to be satisfied for we can never stand in His presence and face Him in our sins. This is why the shepherds are first filled with fear. They know of their sin and that the holiness of God that accompanies the angels means certain destruction for them. They know that unless the conflict between the holy God and sinful man be ended, they and we have only one end.

But the angel announces to them and to us this night that we do not have to fear. The angel brings us good tidings, glad news of God's Christmas Peace in the Child of Mary born in Bethlehem. The angel tells us of peace, of good will for us from God wrapped up in this Babe who is swaddled and laid in a manger. In the Son of God Incarnate the solution to our warfare with God is given, the answer to our sin is given, peace and pardon has been given in He who is the Prince of Peace.

This peace with God is now ours through the blood of Jesus' cross. Forgiveness and pardon before God is ours through faith in that Babe of Bethlehem who was laid in wood, who grew up working wood, and who was nailed to the wood of the cross for our salvation. Through faith in Him, having been justified through faith in His name, we have peace with God. Our sins have been taken away. God's punishment has been served. His displeasure and wrath have been turned to good will and favor. In Jesus, by believing on Him as the only Savior of the world, of each of us individually, we have peace with God.

That means we never have to wonder where we stand with God since we stand on Christ. We know that we are no longer subject to His condemnation and judgment on sin because our sins, through faith in Jesus are no more. Feeling guilty over a wrong done or some deed left undone? Fear not for I bring you good tidings of great joy – in Jesus you are forgiven and are at peace with God on high. Are you dreading the day after, the Christmas let-down? Fear not for in Christ Jesus you are promised and given all the strength and support you need for your every life situation.

Are you wondering how you are going to make it in the coming year, how you will cope with your or another's failing health? Fear not for in Jesus you have the One who has borne your sicknesses and sorrows and promises to give you rest. Are you questioning how you forge ahead on the daunting and dark path before you? Fear not for Christ is with you and has surrounded you with His angels to watch over you and keep you. Are you looking for relief, for some sign from God that He cares about you and what you are facing in your life? Fear not for He has given you that sign in His Son born of Mary that first Christmas.

For in Jesus we have the One who can and who promises to give us all that we need for this faith and this life. In Him our forgiveness has been secured. In Him our eternal rest is guaranteed. In Him we have our life and being. In Him we have the conviction, the assurance, the confidence that in the midst of all of life's storms, no matter what they might be for each one of us, whether relationships, health, finances, and more, He is our Savior and Lord come to be our Brother and King. He is on our side. He is Immanuel, God with us.

It is He that in the end that enabled the shepherds to dismiss their fears and run to His side to worship Him the first Christmas. It is He who gave them the joy that led them to tell everyone about all they had seen and heard. It is He who saved them and us from our sins. It is He who can cause us to smile on all our woes, face our troubles, and live our lives no matter how harsh the winds, angry the waves, and sore the tempest because He is our Peace. For each and every day, to each and every one He is God's Christmas Peace. Amen.

+Soli Deo Gloria+