

December 8, 2024
The Mission of Christmas Gives Peace
Luke 2:8-14
Vernon Advent Christian Church

Intro...

Are you at peace today? Do you have a sense of real peace? We all long for rest and relief, exhausted and stressed by the pull of everyday life. Perhaps we need a break from caregiving, a day off from a stressful job, or financial help to calm the storm of constant worry. We may want quietness and calmness. But we have a profound need for the real, authentic, eternal peace of God.

Shalom is the Hebrew word for peace in the Bible and it describes the very thing we are all longing for. Biblical Shalom literally means completeness and wholeness, and at its root, brings with it the idea of a completed wall which was built in ancient times with no missing stones. Or it can describe a stone with no cracks in it. Do you feel like your life is missing any stones? The peace, or shalom, offered through Jesus fulfills every longing of the human heart regardless of what we're going through in our present circumstances.

We all long for peace in our lives, and yet peace is sadly lacking in our world. We are full of worry and anxiety. Our relationships are full of conflict and stress. The world is full of wars and rumors of wars. But in the midst of all the chaos, Jesus is not only our long awaited hope at Christmas, he is also our peace.

In our advent reading from Isaiah 9 this morning, God promised to send his peace to us in a person, the Prince of Peace. And it is only through this Prince of Peace that we will ever truly obtain the peace that we all long for. So that is what our focus will be on today. God's mission of sending his Son to rescue the world has brought us peace. If you are able, please stand with me as I read the word of God this morning. [Read Luke 2:8-14]

On the night Jesus was born, there were these shepherds out in the fields. In David Guzik's words, "Bethlehem's shepherds were known to care for the temple flock." These men, most likely, protected and cared for the lambs used in temple sacrifice. As these shepherds are out at night watching over their flock, when an angel appears and announces that the promised Messiah has been born in Bethlehem and they should go to see him. And not only that, then an angelic choir joins in to tell them a little more about this child that had been born. And their song went like this, "Glory to God in the Highest and on the earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" Translations vary here. We're all familiar with the King James, "Peace on earth and goodwill toward men." Other translations, such as the NIV, have it, "...on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." But the point here is this, the peace, the shalom of God, the wholeness and completeness of being, was now being offered to the world through this child who had been born that day in the city of David. The gift of peace had been given in the person of Jesus.

This morning we're going to look at 4 different aspects of peace. And the first and foremost aspect is that Jesus brings peace with God. We read in Romans 5:1: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Notice that we are not naturally at peace with God. The Bible tells us our sins have separated us from God, and it is only through Jesus and faith in him that we are brought into a relationship of peace with our God and Creator.

When God first sent the angel Gabriel to Mary, he sent Gabriel with a message of peace. We read in Luke 1:26-30: “In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, ‘Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.’ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.’”

Mary was troubled at the angel’s greeting, but the angel spoke words of peace and assurance to her, telling her not to be afraid because God was with her and she had found favor with God. You might wonder how did Mary find favor with God? This is one of the places where we disagree with our Catholic brothers and sisters. We do not believe, as the Catholics do, that Mary had favor with God because she was without original sin. We believe she found favor with God the only way any of us find favor with God, and that is, she had faith in God and in his promise of the Messiah to come. Like so many Old Testament believers before her, she had faith in Christ before Christ even came. And now God had chosen her to be the vessel through which his Son would enter the world.

God also sent an angel to Joseph, Mary’s husband-to-be. And the angel told Joseph in Matthew 1:21: “She [Mary] will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” The name “Jesus” actually means “God saves.” Jesus was given this name because he was the promised Savior from Isaiah 9 who came to bring us peace with God by saving us from our sins.

When John the Baptist was born three months before Jesus, John’s father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied about John. And in his prophecy he spoke about how John would go before Jesus preparing the way for this one who would bring us peace with God through the forgiveness of our sins. He spoke of his son in Luke 1:76-79, “And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins ... to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

How did Jesus do this? Why is it that everyone who puts their faith in Jesus finds peace with God? It is because of what Jesus did at the cross. Jesus was born into this world to die on the cross so that our sins could be forgiven and we could be restored to a right relationship of peace with God. As we read in Isaiah 53:5: “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.” That’s the first and most important aspect of peace to be reminded of this Christmas. Jesus brings peace with God to those who were once separated from him because of sin through their faith and trust in the work of Christ on their behalf.

The second aspect of peace that Jesus gives to us who are in him is peace within ourselves. This is not in some type of therapeutic, self-help kind of way but in a real, spiritual sense. As I mentioned before, ultimately sin separates us from God. Full stop. But sin also brings separation within our own selves. The truth is, we really are conflicted beings. We are constantly fighting anxiety and stress and inner turmoil. We desperately need inner peace, and Jesus came not only to bring peace with God but also to bring personal peace within ourselves.

For example, last week we looked at a man named Simeon. God had promised Simeon that he would see the Messiah before he died, and, just like he was promised, the Holy Spirit moved Simeon to go into the temple courts just as Joseph and Mary had arrived to dedicate Jesus. We read that Simeon took Jesus in his arms and praised God, saying: “Sovereign Lord, as

you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people.” (Luke 2:28-31)

Simeon is a wonderful example of Jesus bringing personal peace. We sometimes talk about our bucket lists, all the things we want to do or accomplish before we are dead and gone. Well, apparently Simeon only had one thing on his bucket list. He wanted to see the Messiah. And when he finally did, when he finally saw Jesus, that was all he needed. He praised God saying, “You now dismiss your servant in peace.” Simeon embraced Christ, and he was at peace within himself.

When we put our faith in Jesus Christ, we not only receive peace with God, but we also receive the peace of God to help us through the difficult circumstances of life. When you know Christ, everything can be in utter chaos around you, and you can still have peace, the shalom of God, being completely whole and grounded, within yourself because of Jesus.

Paul instructs us in Phil. 4, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 4:6-7) But, notice again, that this wonderful peace of God is only available in and through Jesus Christ. The Bible says the peace of God will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Jesus not only brings peace with God. He also brings peace within ourselves.

The third aspect of peace which Jesus brings is the possibility of peace with others. As followers of Jesus, we are called to be peace-makers and have been given the ministry of reconciliation. This doesn't come from within ourselves, as we just discussed, but because of Jesus work on the cross, peace is now possible because all barriers have broken down in Christ.

We go through many challenges in this life, and one of the most difficult is when our relationships are in turmoil. That's when we need to ask Jesus, the Prince of Peace, to come and bring us peace in our relationships, to intervene, to reconcile and to restore.

We read this about Jesus in Eph. 2:14: “For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.” Jesus came to break down the barriers, to bridge the gaps, to bring people together and to restore peace to our damaged relationships. As believers in Christ, we are called to follow in his footsteps. As Col. 3:15 says: “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.” True peace with each other is only possible through Jesus.

Well, Jesus brings peace with God. Jesus brings peace within ourselves. Jesus brings peace with others. And finally, Jesus will bring peace on earth. The angels who announced Jesus' birth to the shepherds that first Christmas Eve also proclaimed the peace that Jesus would bring to the whole earth. We read again in Luke 2: “Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on the earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!’” (Luke 2:13-14)

This peace, again, is a direct fulfillment of the peace promised in Isa. 9:6-7. Jesus is the one who was born, who is our Prince of Peace, and who will one day rule in peace over all the earth. We all know from experience that peace on the earth doesn't exist now. But, can you imagine what it will be like in the kingdom? No more war or conflict. No more disasters or disease. But it gets even better than that, because this peace on earth will not only bring an end to war among the nations and natural disasters and disease. It will even extend to all creation itself. Jesus truly is the Prince of Peace as we read in Col. 1: “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth

or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” (Colossians 1:19-20) He will reign in peace over all things.

This verse brings us right back to where we started. The reason Jesus brings peace with God, peace within ourselves, peace with others and a future peace on earth all goes back to the cross. Without Jesus shedding his blood on the cross, there would be no peace. And, as Pastor Bruce reminded us last week during communion, without Jesus being born as a baby in Bethlehem, there would be no cross.

I’ll end today with a series of questions for your consideration all centered around the question I started out today with. Do you have this peace that I have been describing to you today? Do you have peace with God? Do you feel complete, whole and grounded in a relationship with him? Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for your sins so that you could be forgiven and restored to right relationship with God. If your faith is in Christ, then this peace with God is already yours. And so let’s live in that reality.

Do you have peace within yourself this morning? Are you filled with anxiety and fear. Let me give you this reminder today. If your faith is in Christ, then Jesus has not abandoned you, but has come to live in you by his Holy Spirit. And he offers you his peace. One of my favorite verses that I came across this week while preparing this sermon was from John 14:27. Jesus was speaking to his disciples in the upper room during the Last Supper and he said this, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

Do you have peace with others this morning? Again, we have been called to be peacemakers and to live in peace with all people. If our faith is in Christ, then he has given us all the resources we need to do our part in living in peaceful relationships with those around us. And after you have done your part, you may ask Jesus in prayer to work in the other person’s heart that you may live in peace.

Do we have peace on earth this morning? Oh, I wish we did! Come quickly Lord Jesus. We do not have peace on earth yet, but we have the promise of peace in the new heavens and the new earth to come, and God has never yet broken a promise.

This advent season, we are reminded that as we wait in hope, confidently trusting in the coming of our Lord Jesus, that in the waiting we have the peace of God that comes through Jesus who is our Prince of Peace. I want to leave you with these encouraging words of Jesus this morning, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Let’s Pray.

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.