

The Gift of Peace

Luke 2:14

Series: The Good News of Christmas (2019)

Preaching Date: December 24, 2019

Worship: Peace on Earth

Key Sentence: In the coming of the Prince of Peace we find peace

Outline:

I. Peace on Earth (Luke 2:14)

II. The Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6-7, Luke 1:76-79)

III. The Gift of Peace (John 14:27, Philippians 4:4-7)

Order of Worship:

Prayer and opening worship, two carols

Teaching segment 1, Luke 2:9-14, Scripture read by a shepherd

Children's Corner: The Missing Peace

Worship: one or two carols

Teaching segment 2, Isaiah 9:6-7, Luke 1:76-79, read by Isaiah and Zechariah

Worship: one or two carols

Teaching segment 3, John 14:27, Philippians 4:4-7, read by John and Paul

Closing worship: two carols

Luke 2:8-14 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear.

¹⁰And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹²And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

Isaiah 9:6-7 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Luke 1:76-79 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, ⁷⁷to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, ⁷⁸because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high ⁷⁹to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

John 14:27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

Philippians 4:4-7 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

The Gift of Peace

Luke 2:14

Welcome and Prayer: Once upon a time, in the fullness of the times, there was a child. God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

Opening Worship: O Come All Ye Faithful; O Holy Night

Peace on Earth

Once upon a time there was a shepherd. He wasn't a very clean shepherd, but that wasn't so different from all the others, nor from the sheep, for that matter. He wasn't a very happy shepherd, but those who had to stay up all night watching the foolish sheep and worrying about wise wolves were rarely happy. Most of all he wasn't a very peaceful shepherd. He was angry and discontent, a shepherd who never meant to be a shepherd. His father had been a big shot in Palestine, minor nobility, nephew of John Hyrcanus, but Herod the Great had killed Hyrcanus as a rival and eventually had all of his descendants wiped out as well. The shepherd had escaped only by being smuggled out of his own home at night, and had been left with a poor family in Bethlehem. Twenty-one years later his anger at Herod was as strong as ever. He his soul longed for peace, but not as much as it screamed for Herod's downfall.

But then one day the shepherd. . . . Well, let me ask Todd to come and share what this shepherd experienced: *And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹²And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"*

We've taken several of our key words for this Christmas season from this little text. "Joy," this past Sunday, "Savior," the week before, "Glory," next Sunday, and tonight we explore the word "peace" in verse 14. So the setting is the angel announcing the birth of the Savior to the shepherds. Before we even learn about the shepherd's response, a multitude of angels appears.

Multitude is a Greek word, *plethos*, from which we get the word *plethora*. It's not just a big number, it's an uncountable number. It's not out of the question that every unfallen angel in existence showed up for this celebration, for this was the inaugural ceremony for God's great rescue of a dark and fallen world.

These angels sing a two-part song. First "Glory to God in the highest." God's glory, as a noun, is the radiance of the perfection of all his character qualities. As a verb, glorify, it means to recognize and praise that glory. Do you see that? "Glory to God in the highest" is a command. It means "Give glory to God in Highest heaven." In other words, "the news you've just heard is so magnificent, so wonderful, so earth-shaking that God himself should be recognized as magnificent and wonderful for sending this Messiah Savior."

We'll look deep into that word "glory" this coming Sunday. But for now, look at the second half of the verse "and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased." I think a better translation of that is New International Version "and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." In heaven God receives glory and on earth men receive his favor. In that sense the oldest English translations are closer, in my opinion, than some of the modern ones. "Peace on earth, good will to men" implies that through this child God bestows his peace on earth and his goodwill, his favor, to people. This is the starting point. In the birth of Jesus we receive peace. And this peace is not reserved for some heavenly future but is specifically peace "on earth." We do God a great disservice if we assume that every benefit of salvation is a future benefit. No, a lot of the gifts of salvation are gifts given to us now. We looked at joy last Sunday, peace today, we know that love for God and others is great commandment. That's a pretty good start on the fruit of the Spirit "Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control." These gifts of salvation are not for later, they are given for now.

This question was once asked, "If you could choose what you want most in life, what would you ask for?" The most common answer was "Peace." But what is peace? Biblically I believe there are four dimensions of peace. First, peace with God. A Savior has come who died to pay the price of our sins and bridge the gap, the separation our sins had made. Where before we were rebels and enemies of God, Jesus has made peace, a peace received through faith in Him. Paul famously says "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Second, we have peace with others. This may be the first thing you think of when you think of peace. An absence of war, strife, conflict. Paul says in Ephesians that Jesus himself is our peace and has made the two one, bringing together the warring factions of the world, specifically Jews and Gentiles.

Third, Jesus offers inner peace. “My peace I give to you,” he says. We’ll explore that later. It’s the key application we’re going to touch on this evening. And finally the fourth aspect of peace is the one most closely aligned to the phrase “peace on earth.” This is “shalom.” In the Old Testament, in Hebrew, peace was seen as something more than lack of conflict with God or others, and even more than inner peace. It was flourishing, wholeness, completeness. Oddly enough, Wikipedia has the best short definition I’ve read: “In the Bible, shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness and delight, a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights.” That’s good. That’s the Old Testament promise fulfilled at Christmas. Peace on earth.

Worship: While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks, How Suddenly a Baby Cries

Children’s Corner: The Missing Peace (Once upon a time there was a baby)

The Prince of Peace

Once upon a time there was a prophet. He lived in a time of turmoil and war. He saw the downfall of Israel and both evil and good kings in Judah. His name was Isaiah, and God got personal with him. In chapter 6 of the book that bears his name, he “saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple.” Soon after this Judah was threatened with an invasion from Samaria and Israel. Isaiah warned king Ahaz to trust in God alone, and prophesied the arrival of Immanuel, God with Us. But Ahaz sought help from Assyria, which would lead to destruction of the northern kingdom, Israel, and the most severe threat yet to Judah and Jerusalem. In the midst of this warfare and the evil idolatry of Ahaz, God gave Isaiah a prophecy, chapter 9, that the people walking in this darkness would one day see a great light. How would this rescue happen? Let’s let Isaiah himself tell us:

(Joseph reads) **Isaiah 9:6-7** *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.*

This child, only two chapters later, is almost certainly the same child Isaiah had spoken of earlier as “Immanuel,” “God with Us.”

And this child would reign on David's throne and over his kingdom with justice and righteousness. He would not be any ordinary ruler, however, but would be "Wonderful Counselor," "Mighty God," and "Everlasting Father." Each of these names is intended to show us that "Immanuel" is truly God, perfect in wisdom, power, and fatherly care. And finally, he will be "Prince of Peace." This is Jesus. He was born to us as a child and he revealed the Father in ways that no mere man could have done. "He who has seen me has seen the Father."

The child in the manger is "The Prince of Peace," the missing peace. "Of the increase of his government" or reign "and of peace, there will be no end." A reign of peace by the prince of peace with no end of peace. Isaiah shows that all this peace is found in a person. Peace is found in Jesus. Peace with God, peace for forgiven sinners is found in Jesus. Peace with others is found, first, in Jesus. It is only through him we are able to love, forgive and care for one another. Peace within is found in Jesus. He gives peace beyond understanding. And peace on earth is found in Jesus. His reign now in the hearts of his people is peace, and his promised reign is shalom which will never end. But it all comes through Jesus, through the child whose birth we celebrate in the quiet moments of Christmas. This is the testimony of Scripture.

Once upon a time there was an old man. His name was Zechariah and he had been married to his wife Elizabeth for many years. They had never been able to have children, though they had always longed for them. And the very first evidence of the coming of the Prince of Peace was an angelic announcement to this Zechariah that he and Elizabeth would have a son. They were to name him John, and he would be the forerunner to the Messiah. When John was born Zechariah spoke words from the Lord. Let's hear what he said:

(Terry reading as Zechariah) **Luke 1:76-79** *And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, ⁷⁷to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, ⁷⁸because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high ⁷⁹to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."*

Jesus is "the sunrise that visits us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness." We talked about this a few weeks ago. He is the light of the world, the light that comes into our personal darkness and into the world's darkness. He is the light by which we are saved and by which the world is rescued. He is the light that guides our way. And that guidance is "into the path of peace." This is what a prince of peace does, is guides his people in the way of peace. Which of the four "peaces" are we talking about here? Probably all of them.

Jesus guides us into our peace with God, guides us to peace with others, guides us to peace within, and guides the world to eternal peace and well-being. We're not fully into those last three "peaces" even now, 2000 years later, but we are on the way, and we are not alone. The Prince of Peace himself is guiding us.

Worship: There Blooms a Rose, Now that I've Held Him in My Arms

The Gift of Peace

Once upon a time there was a young man. His name was John, and he had been following Jesus for about three years. Everyone was special to Jesus, of course, but John felt himself uniquely loved by this man. He called himself "the beloved disciple." We don't actually know that he was young, but we do think he lived a long time after the years of following Jesus, possibly as much as sixty or seventy years and was old when he experienced the book of Revelation while in exile on the Isle of Patmos. By that time he had already written his Gospel, his eye-witness record of the life of Jesus. His sharp and retentive memory was used by the Holy Spirit to give us that unique account.

One of the most impressive sections of John's Gospel is the five chapters devoted to the night when Jesus was betrayed. John records a long conversation between Jesus and his disciples, a conversation where Jesus revealed that he was going away, but they would see him again, and that by his resurrection victory he would enable them to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, the comforter. But this talk of his going away disturbed the disciples, disturbed John, I'm sure, and the talk of his return or even of the comforter did not to comfort them.

So ultimately Jesus says to them, (Paul as John) **John 14:27** *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.*

Jesus promises that he himself will give peace. He calls it "my peace" and distinguishes it from the so-called peace that the world might give. The world's peace is associated with external circumstances and provision, with ease and lack of conflict. But Jesus here is promising that third kind of peace, a freedom from internal turmoil. We can see that in his words "Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." This is the kind of peace we all long for, and this is the gift of peace that the incarnate one offers us. The word 'troubled' is *tarraso*, and it is used of the stirring up or agitation of still waters. It's used that way in John, when Jesus heals the paralytic at the pool called Bethesda, which was supposed to have healing properties when stirred up.

This troubling is what happens to our hearts when relationships that difficult, loved ones are sick or struggling, finances are precarious. This word is even used of Jesus when he was troubled at the death of Lazarus, and troubled by the anticipation of his own death. But Jesus says that with his gift of peace these things need not disturb the still waters of our hearts. We have inner peace though the miracle of Christmas and the miracle of the resurrection.

Dwight L. Moody once said about this verse “Did you ever think that when Christ was dying on the cross he made a will? If you are in the kingdom Christ remembered you in His will. He willed His body to Joseph of Arimathea; He willed His Mother to John, the son of Zebedee; and He willed His spirit back to His Father. But to His disciples He said: ‘My peace, I leave that with you; that is My legacy. I give that to you.’ ” Moody goes on “They say that a man cannot make a will now that lawyers cannot break, and drive a coach straight through it. I will challenge them to break Christ's will. Let them try it. No judge or jury can set that aside. Christ rose to execute His own will. If He had left us a lot of gold, thieves would have stolen it; but He left His peace for every true believer, and no power on earth can take it from him who trusts.”

Finally, I want to leave you with a verse that gives practical guidance for taking hold of all the kinds of peace God sent down at Christmas. Once upon a time there was an angry and anxious man. His name was Saul, and he was a persecutor of the Christians. But he became Paul, a transformed follower of Jesus. Yet he still knew all kinds of un-peace. If we had the time tonight we could show in the transparency of his letters that he struggled at times with peace with God, peace with others, peace within and with the desire for shalom on earth.

But he knew how to deal with these anxieties. Doug will come and give us one bit of practical advice he offered the Philippians. **Philippians 4:4-7** *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

We read those verses last Sunday, but focused on the rejoicing part. Tonight I want to look at the peace part. Paul says “do not be anxious about anything,” which seems an impossible command, but he gives an alternative: in everything, that is every anxious circumstance, worry or fear, let your needs be made known to God. How do you do that? By prayer. Cry out to God, lift up your un-peace to him. It could be un-peace in relationships, un-peace in circumstances, un-peace within due to sin or shame, un-peace with the un-shalom in the world.

Cry to God, talk to God, listen to God, trust in God, and “the peace of God,” which surpasses understanding will guard your hearts and your minds from these anxieties. This is the promise of Christmas: that Jesus is our peace, that he has come, and will guide our feet, our lives, our hearts in the way of peace.

So do you see what these five Biblical characters have shown us? That Jesus came with the promise of peace on earth. That he himself is the Prince of peace, the person who guides our paths in the way of peace. That we receive peace because he gives it, promises it, and that as we cry out to God in our anxiety, we can see that anxiety transformed into a peace that surpasses understanding.

I want to conclude these thoughts with a quote from Frederic Buechner. “Our child-King is the paradox: his palace is a stable, his bed is dirt and straw. An unlikely child, a poor family, in a nowhere town. In these ordinary conditions, all heaven broke loose: The darkness was shattered like glass, and the glory flooded through with the light of a thousand suns. A new star blazed forth where there had never been a star before, and the air was filled with the bright wings of angels, the night sky came alive with the glittering armies of God, and a great hymn of victory rose up from them—Glory to God in the highest—and strange kings arrived out of the East to lay kingly gifts at the feet of this even stranger and more kingly child.”

“Those who believe in God can never in a way be sure of him again. Once they have seen him in a stable, they can never be sure where he will appear or to what lengths he will go or to what ludicrous depths of self-humiliation he will descend in his wild pursuit of man. If holiness and the awful power and majesty of God were present in this least auspicious of all events, this birth of a peasant’s child, then there is no place or time so lowly and earthbound but that holiness can be present there too.” And, I would add, Peace. In the coming of the Prince of Peace, may we too find peace.

Closing worship: Welcome to Our World; Away in a Manger