

Advent 2021—AWAITING OUR TRUE KING
Jesus is Our Prince of Peace
Isaiah 9:6 & 7; Luke 2:14; and, Romans 12:18
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December 19, 2021

We've titled our Advent series, "Awaiting Our True King," and so far we've explored what it means for Jesus to be our King of Hope, our King of Love and our King of Joy. Today our focus is peace, and I've titled the sermon, "Jesus is Our Prince of Peace," because that's how Isaiah refers to the Messiah. Isaiah's prophecy pointed to a Prince who would establish peace on the earth. I'd like you to read verses 6 & 7 of Isaiah 9 aloud with me...

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. Isaiah 9:6 & 7

Peace is a familiar Christmas theme. In fact, the statement, "*Peace on earth, good will to men*" may be the signature statement of Christmas. The phrase is found in numerous well-known Christmas carols; it's on Christmas cards; and, many of us probably have those words on Christmas decorations we display in our homes during December. Outside of Christmas, the word, "peace" is thrown around casually in our culture, including at beauty pageants when contestants are asked, "*What do you most want to see in the world?*" A frequent response is, "world peace." For many of us, peace is an elusive, intangible idea we think will only happen in some utopian fantasy or in heaven. Yet peace is one of the central ideas of Christmas.

Each year the local Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Mechanicsburg Partnership and our town's Borough Council join together in hosting a tree lighting ceremony on the town square. I haven't attended the tree lighting for the past several years, because now that some of our kids have moved out of the area, the Friday after Thanksgiving, when the tree lighting is held, has conflicted with our extended family's celebration of Thanksgiving. But for 10 years or so, McBIC was part of planning this event and we often had vocalists and musicians from McBIC lead us in singing carols. Like many people, I enjoy Christmas carols for their nostalgia and their signaling that Christmas is near, but I never thought much about the words. My perspective changed dramatically when several hundred members of our Mechanicsburg community began

singing those songs at the tree lighting ceremony. In that setting, the words of these ancient carols took on new meaning for me. Listen to some of these powerful phrases...

Good Christian friends rejoice, with heart and soul and voice; Now ye need not fear the grave: Peace! Peace! Jesus Christ was born to save!

Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn king; Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!" Joyful all ye nations rise, join the triumph of the skies; with angelic hosts proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem!"

And here's a powerful poem from a carol I was only vaguely familiar with, "I Heard The Bells on Christmas Day." Listen to this...

I heard the bells on Christmas Day. Their old familiar carols play. And wild and sweet the words repeat, "Of peace on earth, good will to men." And in despair I bowed my head; There is no peace on earth, I said. For hate is strong, and mocks the song, Of peace on earth, good will to men. Then pealed the bells more loud and deep: God is not dead, nor doth he sleep. The wrong shall fail, the right prevail, With peace on earth good will to men.

Isn't that powerful? I think those words accurately reflect the reality in which many of us find ourselves. Many of our Christmas carols are filled with great theological truth. They speak of Jesus' birth breaking the curse of sin, and of God instituting a new era of peace through the coming of his Son. Jesus is our Prince of Peace, and in coming He began to establish peace on earth. The peace the Messiah would institute was prophesied frequently by Isaiah in statements like these...

My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.
Isaiah 32:18

But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. Isaiah 53:5

For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed," says the Lord, who has compassion on you.
Isaiah 54:10

All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children. Isaiah 54:13

For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Isaiah 55:12

First Century Jewish people were well acquainted with Isaiah's prophecies of peace, but not surprisingly, when God broke through and began to communicate that his Prince of Peace

was coming, people were very afraid. Luke's Gospel records 3 angelic appearances to people—Zechariah, Mary and the shepherds—and in each case the angel's first words were, "*Do not be afraid.*" The Prince of Peace was coming, but people initially responded to the news the angels brought with fear and trembling.

There's another word that often appears in conjunction with peace throughout the Christmas story. It's the word *FAVOR*. When the angel Gabriel first appeared to Mary he said, "*Greetings, you who are highly favored.*" Luke's Gospel tells us Mary was troubled at his words. In response the angel said, "*Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God.*" Later in Luke chapter 1 when Mary went to visit her relative, Elizabeth, whom the angel had informed her, was also pregnant, Elizabeth said, "*Why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?*" And in Luke chapter 2 when the angels appeared to the shepherds with the news of Jesus' birth, the angels praised God saying, "*Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.*" Favor is also referred to in Isaiah chapter 61—the passage Jesus quoted when He declared Himself to be the promised Messiah in Luke chapter 4. Jesus concluded reading Isaiah's prophecy with the statement, "[The Spirit of the Lord is on me] *to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*"

The word favor is associated with kindness, approval and support. It's often conferred by a person of standing on another of lower status. Definitions for favor include: "*Effort in one's behalf or interest; a special privilege or a right granted.*" As it pertains to God's love for us, I think favor can be summed up best with the statement, "God is for us." When God sent Jesus, his Son, as Immanuel—God with us—He said definitively, "**The Prince of Peace has come and He is for us.**"

"The Prince of Peace has come and He is for us" sums up the message the angels brought to the shepherds shortly after Jesus' birth. Listen again to these familiar words from the Christmas story in Luke chapter 2:

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." Luke 2:8-14

"And on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

- We tend to think of peace as the absence of noise, stress or strife.
- Peace is when small children go to bed and parents can enjoy some downtime.
- Peace is the weekend when I don't have to worry about work.
- Peace is lounging on a beach enjoying a drink and intermittently reading and napping as the sun shines brightly and the waves roll into the sand.
- Peace is freedom from war.

Our definitions of peace tend to be narrowly focused, but the true meaning of peace is best captured in the Jewish word *shalom*. *Shalom* speaks to harmony between people and people, between people and nature, and ultimately between people and God. Peace or shalom is the restoration of what was lost in the Garden of Eden at the Fall. Peace is what the well-known Christmas carol, "Joy to the World" is referring to when it says...

Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King. No more let sins and sorrows grow nor thorns infest the ground; He comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found.

The classic Christmas carol, "Joy to the World" expounds on the truth that Jesus came to reverse the curse of sin. Peace is prominent in the Old Testament prophecies and in the unfolding of the Christmas story in the Gospels, but it's also a recurring theme throughout the New Testament. Listen to these powerful declarations of the peace Jesus brings...

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. John 14:27

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world. John 16:33

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 5:1

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6 & 7

Peace is pervasive. It begins with our relationship with God, but it also encompasses our relationship with our world and our relationships with others. As Jesus' followers, you and I declare Jesus' peace by sharing his message of peace with others, and that message is most clearly seen in the love and respect and honor with which we treat others. In the middle of chapter 12 of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans there is a section in my Bible with the heading, "Love in Action." In this section Paul encourages God's people toward love, sincerity, avoidance of evil, devotion, honor, zeal, spiritual fervor, faithfulness and hospitality. He challenges us to bless those who persecute us, to mourn with those who mourn, to live in harmony with others, and to steer clear of conceit. And then he writes a powerful line, "*If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*" Romans 12:18

I love that statement. Paul is calling us to bring the reconciliation we've experienced with God through Jesus into our relationships with others. Peace on earth began when Jesus came to earth as a baby and initiated the righting of wrongs, but peace on earth continues in our day as you and I take the peace we've received from Jesus and allowing it to flow through us to others. We are bearers of peace in our families, in our neighborhoods, in our schools, in our places of work, and wherever we go.

As I was thinking about the Christmas carols' declarations of peace and the unity between people and God and between people and our world, I was reminded of a quote by the 19th Century Dutch Theologian and Prime Minister, Abraham Kuyper. Kuyper said, "*There's not a square inch in the whole domain of human existence over which Christ, who is Lord over all, does not exclaim, 'Mine'!*" Abraham Kuyper Jesus' peace and reign extends over all creation and He extends his peace through us, his people—the ones in whom He lives and who have been the primary recipients of his peace. Everywhere we go, we take peace of the Prince of Peace with us.

As we move to our time of response, I'd like each of us to answer the question, "How have I seen Jesus be the Prince of Peace in my life this past year?" And a follow up question you may want to consider is, "How does God want me to be a bearer of Jesus' peace in my interactions with people?"