

“Peace to All Men”

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Opening Prayer

Good Morning, I hope today's service finds you doing well! I am Pastor Jacob Hanson, and while I would prefer as always to meet in person with you I am nonetheless thankful that we are able to worship together even online. This has been a different year, and usually during Advent we have many things that bring us lots of joy. Family traditions, Christmas parties, the Christmas Bazaar, etc. are what usually occupies us during this time of year. We have many fond memories that we encounter in this season. A favorite present we got, something hilarious a relative did, that certain Christmas play our child was involved in... we have so many memories that both bring us joy in remembrance, and potentially grief in 2020 because we can't do much of what we are used to. Beloved, this morning I hope and pray that you would find some encouragement. This morning and this year that are different from many others, I pray that you would find peace. Peace, Beloved, peace given to all men through our Lord Jesus Christ... that is what we are focused on today. That message of peace to all men is not only hope for the future but hope for right now, and it is that peace that sustains us even in 2020.

Before Jesus is even born there were many proclamations about the peace that He was to bring. For the last two years we have talked about the prophecies concerning this, specifically the ones from Genesis given to Abraham and the several given by Isaiah, but there is a wonderful proclamation given just months before Jesus is born. It is

the canticle of Zechariah which we prayed together, and it comes from our first reading at the end of Luke 1. Zechariah is the father of John the Baptist, and while his prophetic proclamation has something to do with the herald of Jesus that John will be, it really has more to do with Jesus. Zechariah proclaims that Jesus comes as salvation for God's people. (Vs. 71) He proclaims that Jesus comes to grant mercy in remembrance of God's covenant with Abraham to bless the whole world. (Vs. 73-74, referencing Genesis 22:16) But perhaps the most wonderful proclamation, the one that should really stick with us today, comes in verses 78-79. He says "Because of the tender mercy of our God, with which the Sunrise from on high will visit us, to shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." Beloved, we would do well to remember that Jesus does in fact bring us peace, that that was His plan all along. Furthermore, Jesus's actual birth is a reminder of that because He does not come as a conquering king, nor does He come as some great ruler... instead He comes as a baby.

Our second reading encompassed basically half of the Christmas story. Really only Matthew and Luke go into depth about what Jesus's birth really looked like, and between the two of them we get the bigger picture. What we read in Luke this morning no doubt is well known by most of you. "And everyone was on his way to register for the census each to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

What a humble birth for Jesus. The Lord of all Creation, the One who made you and me, the One who rules the heavens and the earth, who is from everlasting to everlasting... chose to be born in just the same way as you and me. There is a peace about that isn't there Beloved? If you have ever witnessed a birth (or been a part of one!) you can probably attest to the painful anticipation and struggle ahead of time, as well as the peace that follows. Don't you think it odd that the Lord chose to come to us in such a manner? It isn't becoming of a conqueror or destroyer to be humbly born in a manger. It is becoming of an emissary of peace.

When Jesus is born the first people to hear about it are not kings and priests and commanders, but instead it is a bunch of regular old shepherds out in their fields. These are the most average, or perhaps even less, of society... and it is to them that God's angels loudly sing "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased." (Luke 2:14) Beloved, the first thing that God revealed to men, to anyone, was a twofold wonderful statement. The angels at God's behest proclaim peace among men. Think about it, God came to the earth in peace, not in war. There is no more peaceable thing than to show up humbly, and nothing ever is more humble than a little baby. In addition to saying that He had come to proclaim peace, the angels also state to the shepherd that He (meaning the Lord) is pleased with men. Pleased with men... what an interesting statement to hear from the God that intended to die in our place precisely for our transgressions.

I think many of us have the impression, even still, that God sits up in heaven with an angry look on His face as He judges us for our sins. No question God does not like our sin, but He doesn't hate us. Many of

you probably understand this better than you know. If you have had a difficult child, one who has gone astray for whatever reason, do you hate them? Of course not! No good parent hates their child, not even when their child has done many foolish things. No, a good parent instead loves their baby, and wants what is best for them. A good parent will sit up at night in a cold sweat, praying for their son or daughter fervently. A good parent will go to untold lengths, often at the expense of their own happiness, to try and help their child. Beloved that is how the Lord felt, and still feels, about you! He sought your peace for you, and sent Jesus in your place for your sins to the cross so that you could spend eternity at home with Him. The humble birth of Christ is celebrated for precisely this reason, that our Father in heaven came down and lived the life we could not and went to the cross in our place and rose again on the third day so that we would be with Him forever. No good parent would be unwilling to sacrifice for their child, and our Father in heaven is no exception.

In Luke 2:1-20 we read the Christmas story, which marks the beginning of Jesus's sacrifice for us. We celebrate it, it is a wonderful thing, but in our last reading we see what culminates in our salvation. In John 14:25-31 we read some comforting word from Jesus given to His disciples on the last day of His life. He is speaking to them at the Last Supper, and if you have been with us for any length of time we have looked at John 13-16 quite a bit. (Note that a great chunk of the Gospel of John is taught at the Last Supper.) Normally when we look at these verses at the end of chapter 14, we focus upon how Jesus states that the Holy Spirit will come to us, and that is extremely important. However today I want you to look at verse 27 and focus in on what Jesus has to say to the disciples and to us.

“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.” Beloved, the peace that Jesus leaves with us is found within our relationship to the Lord. Because He came and was born amongst us, lived the life we couldn’t, went to the cross, and rose again, we are able to have full communication with our heavenly Father. If you call upon Jesus as your Savior, if you cling to Him, then you are never on your own. You are never without hope in this life or the next, because you are taken care of by the man in charge. Your eternal home is set, you don’t have to worry about where you go when you die. Your hope here on earth for as long as the Lord allows you to live is secure, because He promises to watch over you every step of the way. The people that you care about so much, the ones that you love and worry about (especially in 2020 right?) are also cared about by Him. He loves you enough to die for you, He also loves your children or your friends or your spouse or your neighbor so much that He died for them as well. Jesus is right to say that the peace He gives us is not like the world’s peace. The world may give you some small peace for a time, but Jesus has given it to us for forever.

So what are the brass tacks, what is the main takeaway from this morning? Beloved, the main point you should take to heart is that God has extended peace to you through Jesus. Christmas time may look different this year, and it definitely doesn’t feel the same worshipping from home (or from the church parking lot), but the peace that Jesus has extended us hasn’t gone anywhere. As Jesus told us “Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.” Our peace isn’t found in the stuff of this world, it is found in Him. Praise the Lord He came to us on Christmas.

Let us pray,

Closing Prayer