

## THE HEART OF CHRISTMAS IS PEACE

Sermon written by Martha-Jean Fitch  
December 10, 2023

**TEXT:** Luke 2:8-14, Isaiah 9:1-7, Colossians 1:19-22

(Play the sermon bumper at the beginning)

58 years ago, "*A Charlie Brown Christmas*" was first broadcast on American television. Some network executives thought it would be ignored, while others worried that quoting the Bible would offend viewers. Some wanted its creator, Charles Schulz, to omit the Christmas story, but Schulz insisted it stay in. The program was an immediate success. I remember watching every year as I was growing up – and even as I was raising our children... but you won't be able to watch it this year on TV, unless you have a subscription to Apple TV... or maybe watch portions of it on YouTube.

Remember the plot of the show - Charlie Brown is the frustrated director of the children's Christmas play. And he is discouraged by the commercial spirit of the holiday season. When Charlie Brown brings this scraggly tree on to the stage, and everyone laughs at him --- he finally cries out, "Can anyone tell me the real meaning of Christmas?" Linus was quick to say that he could. He then recites Luke 2:8-14, including the words, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, 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, good will toward men" (vv.11-14) then Linus says, "That's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown."<sup>1</sup>

What is Christmas all about – what is at the heart of Christmas? That's the question we are asking this Advent season. Last week we began with the hope that is at the heart of Christmas. We saw that over the centuries – there had been great hope for the coming of the Messiah. And Jesus, the Messiah came right on time – fulfilling those prophecies! We too can have hope for God's faithfulness in our own lives – that He is always right on time and will meet us in our time of need.

Today, we look at another aspect of the heart of Christmas – the wonderful offer of peace. Peace, goodwill, toward all – that's at the heart of Christmas. That's what the angels proclaimed that night when Jesus was born. It was a shocking and amazing message, given first to some unlikely folks – the shepherds. The announcement wasn't given in the presence of kings and queens in a palace – but rather to humble, poor shepherds on a hillside, watching their sheep.

What an incredible experience this must have been for those shepherds. These shepherds were living in a time of turmoil. Rome had come into their land and taken over. There was political and social unrest everywhere.

Oh, how they longed for peace. How they longed for the time when their country could return to peaceful days! If only the prophecies of a coming Messiah could come

true.....prophecies that said the Messiah that would be the Prince of Peace. That day must have seemed a long way off as they sat out on the hills that night talking about the Roman soldiers making their presence felt all over the countryside.

Suddenly the sky was filled with angels singing praises to God and proclaiming the good news of Jesus' birth. Those insignificant shepherds out on the hills must have listened and watched in utter amazement. The prophecies of Isaiah were really being fulfilled – and they were the first ones to hear it!

And what was it the angels sang? "On earth peace among those whom God favors!" Could this mean the end of Roman occupation? I imagine their hopes were rising as they saw this miraculous sight and heard those words of hope. And then they saw the beautiful Christ child and were amazed! They returned to their fields, praising God for what they had seen and heard.

Can't you just imagine their hopes and dreams that this was finally going to be a time of peace? But that peace really didn't last long, did it? Think about it. Right after the birth of Jesus, what happened? Herod sent his soldiers into Bethlehem, and he massacred all the baby boys under the age of 2! Where's the peace? Where's the peace the angels sang about?

We too listen to those words and long for peace on earth, peace in *our* time. Yet we look around the world and all we see after 2000 years of waiting is a continuation of war after war after war.

So, we ask again – Where's the peace? Where's the peace that Jesus is supposed to be bringing? What happened to "peace on earth"?

Well, it is obvious that peace is NOT found in the world. The world cannot bring the peace that we are longing for.

So, maybe we're asking the wrong question. Maybe first we need to ask WHAT is peace? The dictionary describes it as "the normal, non-warring condition of a nation" and "a state of harmony among people or groups". Peace, according to the world, is the absence of turmoil. But we know that because we are sinful people, there will always be some sort of turmoil and conflict until the day that Jesus returns.

So, what kind of peace can we find in the birth of the Christ child? What kind of peace can we find today? Remember, Jesus said in John 14:27, "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.*" The kind of peace Jesus brings is different than the world. It is not the absence of conflict but is a confident assurance of God's presence and power in any circumstance. With Christ's peace, we have no need to fear the present or the future. Christ's peace gives us an inner sense of peace and calm in the midst of turmoil.

You might remember the story of a man who sought the perfect picture of peace. Not finding one that satisfied, he announced a contest to produce this masterpiece. The challenge

stirred the imagination of artists everywhere, and paintings arrived from far and wide. Finally the great day of revelation arrived.

The judges uncovered one peaceful scene after another, while the viewers clapped and cheered. Tension grew. Only two pictures remained. As a judge pulled the cover from one, a hush fell over the crowd. A mirror-smooth lake reflected lacy, green birches under the soft blush of the evening sky. Along the grassy shore, a flock of sheep grazed undisturbed. Surely this was the winner.

The man with the vision uncovered the second painting himself, and the crowd gasped in surprise. Could this be peace? A tumultuous waterfall cascaded down a rocky ledge; the crowd could almost feel its cold, penetrating spray. Stormy-gray clouds threatened to explode with lightning, wind and rain. As you looked closely at the rocks at the edge of the waterfall, you could see a spindly little tree, clinging to the rocks. One of its branches reached out in front of the torrential waters. A little bird had built a nest in the elbow of that branch. Content and undisturbed in her stormy surroundings, she rested on her eggs. With her eyes closed and her wings ready to cover her little ones, she demonstrated a peace that transcends all earthly turmoil.<sup>2</sup>

Can we have this kind of peace – peace in the midst of turmoil? The good news is that we can. We can have inner peace because God gave us His Son.

Really, the most important question is not “Where’s the Peace” – or even “What is peace”...but “WHO gives us peace”? And that is found only in Jesus. Jesus is the one who gives us a peace that passes all understanding. It’s a lasting peace that remains with us even when times are difficult. It’s a real peace that is like an anchor, holding you steady in the most stressful, most uncertain of times.

As Ron Hutchcraft says, “*Silent Night is right when it refers to peace as being heavenly peace. It’s only heaven -- it’s only God that can finally bring peace to the lifelong storm in your heart.*”<sup>3</sup> Our Scripture reading from Isaiah 9 says, “*Unto 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, the Prince of Peace.*” There it is. Jesus came to be our Prince of Peace, but we can’t have His peace until He is our Prince.”

And so that really is the most important step we have to take to have peace – we need to make Jesus our Prince of Peace. What we need more than anything is to put our trust in Him with all our hearts.

But making a confession in Him is only the beginning. In order to have that peace that is strong and real, even in the most difficult of circumstances, we have to walk in His presence day in and day out and give Him full reign in our lives. Jesus is supposed to be governing your life. Yet all too often we try to control our own lives and effectively ignore the God who made us. He may be a compartment in your life, but not in control of your life. He may be in your head, but not in your heart. The only way you are going to know that kind of deep peace that passes all understanding...that stays strong amidst all the storms...is if you develop a strong relationship with Him.

When we receive the gift of forgiveness that is offered to us by faith in Jesus – we become friends of God – and He gives us the power and strength to navigate through the difficulties of life. Now, some may think that once you have been made right with God, that you will never have any problems. But such is not the case. We will all still have struggles in this earthly life – but God is there to carry us through and face those difficult times and even fill us with His peace. Dr. Tony Evans says it like this: *“Peace does not mean you won’t have any problems. Peace means that your problems won’t have you.”*<sup>14</sup>

That’s the inexplicable peace...the peace that passes all understanding. You get that kind of peace when you are in relationship with the One who promised it – the Prince of Peace, Jesus our Savior. And that peace can’t be taken away from you...no matter what happens, as long as you stay in close relationship with Christ.

Now there will be temptations and challenges along the way. All around you, you may experience the howling storms of life – the raging torment of conflict or pain. And so, the challenge will be to keep focused on Christ and to live your life as a peacemaker. The good news is that we have a God who will match every challenge we face with His resources – His strength and His power. We can depend on Him to give us the strength to be that peacemaker.

The Apostle Paul encouraged the Christians in Rome with these words, *“May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (Romans 15:5 & 6) Living at peace with others can be very difficult – but God can give you the strength to do the impossible! And when people see the peace within you – and the way you face each situation with an inner calm – the name of the Lord will be glorified.

The scene was at the Alpine Elementary School in Columbus, Ohio. Tornado warnings had gone off and the children were sent to the basement for safety. The children huddled together in fear. The teachers were worried too.

To help ease the tension, the principal suggested a sing-along. But the voices were weak and unenthusiastic. Child after child began to cry – and no one could calm them.

Then a teacher, whose faith seemed equal to any emergency, whispered to the child closest to her, “Aren’t you forgetting something Kathie? There is a power greater than the storm that will protect us. Just say to yourself, ‘God is with us.’ Then pass the words on to the child next to you.”

As the words were whispered from child to child, a sense of peace settled over the group. You could still hear the wind blowing with the same ferocity of the moment before, but it didn’t seem to matter now. Inside, the fear had subsided, and tears faded away.

The heart of Christmas is the peace we have been given in Christ! Emmanuel – “God with us”! Thanks be to God!

## PRAYER

## INVITATION

Where's the peace? It is found in the manger in the Christ child. It is found in cross at Calvary. It is found in the empty tomb on Easter. It is found on the throne in the heart of every believer who makes Jesus their Lord and Savior. Have you found that peace?

Jesus loves you and wants to be in relationship with you and give you that peace that passes all understanding. He may, at this very moment, be working in your heart, urging you to give yourself to Him. Now is the time that you can come forward and say, "Jesus, I'm yours. My life is Yours to lead from this moment on."

Won't you come now and make a decision for Christ? You're invited to come now, as we stand and sing.

## RESOURCES

<sup>1</sup>"What Christmas is All About" by David C. McCasland – "Our Daily Bread" on [www.preceptaustin.org](http://www.preceptaustin.org).

<sup>2</sup>John Beehler's sermon "Peace" – [www.sermoncentral.com](http://www.sermoncentral.com)

<sup>3</sup>Ron Hutchcraft, "*Why We Can't Sleep in Heavenly Peace*" - #7815, <https://hutchcraft.com/a-word-with-you/your-most-important-relationship/why-we-can-t-sleep-in-heavenly-peace-7815>

<sup>4</sup>"*The Heart of Christmas*", Advent 2, sermoncentral.org