

## A PEACE TO BEHOLD

Luke 2:8-20

Peace.....

When we think of this word peace, we typically think about it in the sense of a crazy day, where we feel like we're stressing out, have no control, and the only thing that will satisfy us is some PEACE. Sometimes people just want a moment to let their guard down, set their worries aside, and relax. This is an element of peace, but this isn't the only form of peace. Sometimes peace can represent a calm in the midst of a storm. Philippians 4:7 tells us that God is able to give us a peace that surpasses all comprehension, meaning that we can't make sense of it. Paul says in **2 Thessalonians 3:16a** *Now may the Lord of peace himself give you his peace at all times and in every situation.*

This is a great peace that God gives us, that no matter what we're facing we have access to His peace. This is something that is always there and available. But where did this peace come from? Where did it begin, and why is it so readily available?

God's peace for mankind was not given because of some truce or treaty, but God's peace for mankind was born. Jesus was born so that mankind would have "peace with God". Meaning that before we could experience God's peace on a daily basis, we first needed to be at "peace with God". Peace with God is a spiritual reconciliation, and the day Jesus was born into this world, it meant that mankind's relationship would be restored with God at the death and resurrection of Jesus. **Romans 5:10** *For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.*

This should blow our minds! But if you're anything like me, this is something we can just take for granted. Sometimes we get caught up in the cuteness of baby Jesus in a manger, really meant for all of us.

During this Christmas season, I want us to revisit the magnitude of this moment, because it perfectly describes what God thinks of our world, you, and I. That His love for us is unimaginable, so much so that He was willing to give up His son so that we wouldn't be distant from Him, but that our relationship with Him would be restored.

I want to do this by looking at three points.

- Peace Declared
- Peace Recognized
- Peace Made known

Context:

As we catch up with Mary and Joseph. Mary after encountering the angel Gabriel and hearing about the messiah she would be pregnant with. She is now around full term of her pregnancy, and Joseph is still with her. I assume that they would be trying to make a life for themselves, but then the world would get turned upside down because of a census that the Roman government decreed.

### **PEACE DECLARED V8-10**

**In the same Country** – Luke 2:1-3 *And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.* Luke gives us a historical clue by pointing to an event in history, because he wants us to know that these events actually happened. This census to register all people wasn't for record keeping but it was so that the Roman government could tax everyone in the empire. This was actually a pretty common thing. Luke continues to describe this historical setting, by clarifying that this census, *first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria.* The idea is that this registration was the first of many that had been authorized. As a result, all people in the Roman Empire had to travel back to where their families originated from so, they could be registered. This included Mary and Joseph.

Have you ever wondered why there aren't very many details about Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem? That's because Luke is writing with the assumption that the reader already knows what the journey was like. To shed some light on their journey, we have to understand that it was no "simple trip," it was rough. The journey was about 80-90 miles south of their hometown in Nazareth, and oh yeah, Mary is around 9 months pregnant. This trip took multiple days, over mountainous terrain, and plenty of dangers along the way.

When they finally got to Bethlehem, things didn't get any better for them. Under normal circumstances, upon their arrival, they probably could have stayed with a relative of Joseph's family, but because the census had so many people traveling, that it left no room for them. This would force them to try and find shelter in an Inn. When that didn't work, they finally found some shelter in a stable, and it was there that Mary gave birth to Jesus

- Typically, when we read this story, we think that Mary and Joseph were experiencing some serious bad luck, because they couldn't get a room in the Inn, but this was actually according to God's plan. In ***Micah 5:2*** *But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah (ef-ratha), are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel, whose origins are in the distant past, will come from you on my behalf.* This was an ancient prophecy that God spoke about the birth-place of the Messiah. This means that God knew where Jesus was going to be born. So, God had centuries to prepare for Jesus' birthday.
  - So, did God drop the ball in preparing for the birth of Jesus? Nope. This was God's plan. He used a world-wide census to bring Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem at just the right time, and to birth the Messiah right there in that stable. You might be thinking how do you know this? Think about it, don't you think that the God who created planets could reserve a hotel room for the birth of His son? Yes, but He didn't because this was His plan.
    - When I think about this, the one thing that comes to mind is the fact that we don't know what God is doing globally. He is moving, shifting, and adjusting things in place so that His will is accomplished. Even when it comes to something like Covid-19, we don't always know what God is doing but we can be confident that He is positioning the world for His ultimate return of Jesus.

What's amazing about this story, is that in the midst of the crazy night Mary and Joseph were having, just outside Bethlehem, the angels of the Lord we're about to throw a surprise party for some shepherds in a near-by field, keeping watch over their flocks of sheep.

V9

### **Suddenly an angel stood before them and the glory of the Lord shone around them**

It is difficult to try and describe this moment, but from what we know in the scriptures God's glory means the beauty of His Spirit. It's not an aesthetic beauty or a material beauty, it is the beauty that emanates from His character, attributes, and holiness. When you read this, it should make you scratch your head and ask, why shepherds? Why not a priest, a scribe, or governing authority? In that culture, Shepherds were considered to be social and religious outcast, because they had to be around the sheep 24/7 meaning that they couldn't keep the Law, the Sabbath, or regular relationships. So, again, why the Shepherds?

God doesn't do anything by accident, nor was the angel isn't like, "dang, I surprised the wrong people," but God is making a point. ***Luke 5:32*** -Jesus said- *I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.* Meaning, that these outcast Shepherds were exactly the people that Jesus came for. People that are rejected, cast aside, or viewed as insignificant. The ministry of Jesus reflected this, in fact, He was known as someone who loved people that were cast aside society. When we're talking about outcasts, we're ultimately talking about us. We were the outcasts. We were distant from God. We rebelled against His word, and yet through faith in Christ, we are brought near to Him

- This is what the body of Christ looks like! The church isn't a place for "perfect people," but the church is a bunch of misfits and outcast who have no business being near God, but by His grace are able to be called His children. ***Ephesians 1:7*** *In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace*

V10

### **Which shall be to all people**

To calm the fears of the Shepherds the angel tells them some good news. This news was the beginning of the gospel message going into all of the world. It's hard to comprehend how big this moment was for mankind, but I want to point your attention to the last part of what the angel said. He said, "to all people." For the Jewish people this would be strange to hear, because the assumption was that the promised Messiah was just coming to save them, not all people. So why did the angel say this? **Romans 1:16** *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.*

Paul tells us that salvation comes to the Jew first and then the Greek. Greek meaning anyone who isn't Jewish. This isn't in anyway saying that the Jews are better than everybody else, or vice versa, but it's a reference to God promise that he made to Abraham. God chose Abraham to be the father of the nation of Israel, and his descendants would be Gods chosen people, and ultimately to bring the Messiah through them. Meaning that because the Jews were God's chosen people, the gospel would be given to them first, and then it would go out to the rest of the world.

- Now, this doesn't mean that they are the only one who can receive it. All people regardless of your heritage can receive salvation through faith in Christ. **Galatians 3:26-28** *For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>27</sup> For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*
  - God gave His son to the world, so that everyone would receive God's free gift of salvation. No one is excluded from receiving the great grace and mercy of God in Christ. Jesus offers life for all people, everywhere, through the gospel.

To behold the peace of God, it first had to be declared, so that mankind can recognize who holds their peace

### **PEACE RECOGNIZED V11-14**

V12

### **This shall be a sign unto you. You will find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger**

The angel doesn't just want the shepherds to believe his words, but he wanted them to go see the King for themselves. So, they are given a very specific sign to follow that will lead them to the truth. This "sign" wasn't like the star the wisemen followed, but the shepherds had to go look for a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and laying in a manger. Even for Shepherds, this was weird, because no parent would put their new-born child in a manger, but this was the sign they had to look for. The word *Manger* comes from the Latin word for *chew* or *eat*. It refers to a trough where slobbering horses, donkeys and cattle eat.

**Lying in a manger** - Many times, during the Christmas season we romanticize the birth of Jesus, and think that everything was quiet, peaceful, really sweet and sanitary, but that is not how it was. The stable that Mary and Joseph were in was the worst place you could think of to birth a child. We can be sure that Mary and Joseph tried their best to clean things up, but ultimately after Jesus was born they put him in the manger. **Philippians 2:6-8** *who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, <sup>7</sup> but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross*

- Think about this for a sec... The King who wrapped Himself in glory in Heaven, was now a baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes.....HE MADE HIMSELF OF NO REPUTATION, meaning that in order to reach into the mess of mankind He was willing to do anything to save us. He wasn't worried about what it would cost. The King of Kings, subjecting himself to the form of a baby, so He could relate to us and die for our sins.

V13

**And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:**

As if the one angel wasn't enough, then all of a sudden, a multitude of angels appear before the Shepherds. Just to give us a little bit of perspective, the word "multitude" suggests that so many angels showed up that it was impossible to count them. To get an idea of how many angels were there that night, we have to look at a few verses. **Psalm 68:17** says - *The chariots of God are twenty thousand, Even thousands of thousands.* In **Daniel 7:10**, speaking of the angles that are around the throne of God it says, *A thousand thousands ministered to Him.* That means that this sight that the shepherds were witnessing was indescribable, so many angels showed up that they couldn't be counted.

The angels were there because they wanted to praise God for His plan of salvation for mankind. This wasn't the first time that the angels praised God for His mighty acts. When God laid the foundations of the earth Job 38:7 tells us the "*sons of God shouted for joy.*" Here we see them doing that again at the foundation of mankind's salvation. The angels' song is a declaration to us that God is with us.

- What we see in these announcements are examples of the way God works, and they should strengthen our faith in Him and what He is doing. They should solidify our hope in the resurrection because, not only did the Father bring His Son into the world, just as prophesied, but after His death on the cross, He was resurrected three days later, and this would be proof that He was actually the Messiah.

V14

In the NLT version, Luke 2:14 reads like this "*Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.*" The good pleasure of God is on His children, people who put their trust in His son, through faith. **John 1:12** *But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.* What kind of good pleasure is this? Is it the kind where, you have to earn the good pleasure of God, or earn His affections? No, His good pleasure is that of a loving father to His children, even when we make mistakes, it doesn't mean that we become any less of His child.

- Even after we have become children of God through faith in Jesus, how can we continue to be pleasing to God? We continue to walk in obedience to His word. Pleasing God is directly related to this. When we say no to sin, and yes to righteousness, we do so as children who make their heavenly father smile.

To behold the peace of God, it has to be recognized through the person of Jesus, and made known to others.

### **PEACE MADE KNOWN V15-20**

#### **Let us go to Bethlehem and see**

As we look at this verse, we have to ask, "Were the shepherds the only ones who knew about the birth of the Jesus?" No, remember there were the wise men who traveled from the East, to see baby Jesus, but there is another group that knew the Messiah would be born this night. That would be the religious leaders.

They also knew about the birth of Jesus. In fact, in Matthew 2:1-5, when King Herod was concerned about rumors of a baby boy that was being called King of the Jews, he summoned the chief priest, and scribes to see what this was all about. When Herod asked where this King was supposed to be born, the priest and scribes responded, "*In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet.*" The religious leaders knew where the messiah would be born, because they studied past writings of Gods prophets.

So why didn't the religious leader seek to find Jesus on the night of His birth? Even though these religious leaders knew the prophecies of the coming Messiah, it was only head knowledge. It never got down into their hearts to promote a response or action. In fact, when we look in the scriptures, it becomes clear that they were looking for a different kind of Messiah. One that would fit their idea of what the Messiah would be like, and according to their man-made religious system.

- A lot of people today want Jesus, but they want Him on their own terms. They want the kind of Jesus who will not challenge or correct them, but they want a Jesus who will require little commitment and even less discomfort.

V16-18

**They came with haste And found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this Child. All those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds**

You know what I love about this is that the angels didn't have to tell the Shepherds to tell people about what they experienced that night. It was something that they were excited to do. This is what evangelism is like, it's just out of joy sharing with people what God is doing in your life.

- Does anybody in here like food? How about a good burger? Has anyone heard of this magical place called In-n-Out? They just opened one a while ago in Northern Colorado Springs, and as you know for the past weeks since they just opened people have been going there like crazy and telling people about it like crazy.
  - When you go to In-n-out, no one tells you after paying for your food, "Now you better tell at least 10 people or were going to come get you!" No, people are doing that naturally, because they like the food. This is again what evangelism is like, it is simply enjoying Jesus and out of the overflow of that sharing your joy with others

V19

**Mary pondered these things in her heart**

Mary's reaction was different from the shepherds that night. She calmly took it all in and meditated over it in her heart, seeking to understand the deep meaning of it all. **In other words**, she "remembered" and thought about what the angel had said to her, what had happened to Elizabeth, the census, journeying to Bethlehem, no room in the Inn, giving birth, and what the shepherds told her about their experience with the angels in the field that night. Thinking about all of this would have only continued to confirm that God kept His promise He made to her 9 months ago in Nazareth.

V20

**Then the shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them**

Can you imagine what the end of that night was like for the Shepherds? They probably started their day thinking, it was going to be just like any other day, but instead it was the craziest night of their lives, and they returned to their flocks with an overflow of Joy they never had before. **One commentator said:** "If the cradle of Christ had such an effect upon them, as to make them rise from the stable and the manger to heaven, how much more powerful ought the death and resurrection of Christ to be in raising us to God?"

- This is a sobering thought, because for all that the shepherds had heard and seen, "haven't we been told so much more?" So, what should our response be, even in this year, of the Joy that comes from the beautiful fact that we have peace with God?

To behold the peace of God, we need to seek Him and from our joy in Him share Jesus with others.

In conclusion:

The magnitude of this moment of Christ birth, because it perfectly describes God's love for you, and I. God didn't care what He had to do, He risked everything so that you and I would be able to have a relationship with Him.

We also have reason to be thankful to the sacrifice of Jesus, who through His life death and resurrection has given us a peace to behold.