

## Week 2 - Peace In The Heart Of Christmas

Monday, November 28, 2022 10:05 AM

**Big Idea:** The announcement of Jesus's birth was delivered to shepherds who lived on the fringe of society, in the fields, watching their sheep by night. If a king were born to the world, you would expect these shepherds to be the last ones to know about it. Yet, the heavenly angels told them that peace was coming to the earth for those on whom God's favor rested. What a shocking message! God's favor was even on the shepherds. They were being offered peace; and if it could be given to them, we can rest assured it is offered to us as well. Now that is good news for a world in turmoil!

**Scripture:** Luke 2:8-14 // Colossians 1:19-22 // Matthew 5:9

Intro

Good morning church family. I want to welcome you to service today. You joined us at just the right time. We are in the middle of a Christmas series called The Heart Of Christmas. We have been discovering the true meaning of this holiday season and the gifts of hope, peace, joy, and love that Christ brought us through his miraculous birth.

Last week we began with the hope that is at the heart of Christmas. We see the faithfulness of God from his prophetic word about Jesus's future coming and the fulfillment of that word in Jesus's birth, which gives us confidence that we can place our hope in him. No matter what we face, God is right on time and will meet us in our time of need.

Today, we will look at another aspect of the heart of Christmas—the wonderful offer of peace.

***Story:** Over the years, my wife and I have had a tradition of buying a Christmas ornament each year, sometimes while we are traveling. We have purchased ornaments from many different places we have lived, and traveled to, but my favorite ornaments to hang on our tree each year are very simple. We picked them up locally and spent time as a family painting them, they are the simple wooden ornaments which reflect a time of peace and simplicity that I love. And whenever we take them out of the storage container from the basement to place on the tree, I am reminded of what this season is all about.*

The reason for Jesus' birth is God's deep desire to see his creation no longer broken and in conflict but rather restored and at peace. This divine path to peace began in an unlikely place amongst some unlikely characters, and that's where we begin today.



You have to admit, the Christmas story in the Bible begins with an odd group of people. The first announcement of the arrival of Jesus in Bethlehem was given by a multitude of heavenly angels to a group of shepherds who were out in a field watching their flocks to keep them safe at night.

### **Luke 2:8-14**

*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."*

You need to understand that, Shepherds in first century Israel, were individuals who existed on the fringe of society. They were considered stinky, dirty, and untrustworthy. They lived on their own for months as they traveled with their flocks. It would have been shocking to the first readers of the book of Luke that these were the people God chose to entrust with such an important message.

### ***THE PEACE OF GOD IS FOR ALL PEOPLE***

The angels had to steady the shepherds by telling them to not be afraid

because they were terrified in their presence. The message they brought was good news because a baby had been born who was the long-awaited Messiah—the one who was promised long ago to rescue God’s people. The angels told them where to find Jesus, and before they left on their search, a heavenly host spoke over them: peace to those on whom God’s favor rests. Jesus was ushering in peace.

*Story: I remember a time shortly after High School, down in Racine our youth group had a service opportunity right around Christmas time. About 15 middle and high school kids signed up to feed the homeless in our city at a local mission. We set up tables and chairs and prepared a spread to share with others who were hungry. At the end of the meal, one of the pastors shared a short message from Luke chapter two. In his message, he said Jesus was born to save them. He told them that though they may feel forgotten and alone, Jesus’s birth was God’s way of staying close to them. At the very end, we gathered around the people, laid hands on them, and prayed God’s richest blessing upon them. I learned that day that the good news of God is for all people from all walks of life. Jesus was born for them as much as he was born for me.*

In one survey, nearly one-third of those questioned said that of all the people mentioned in the Christmas story, they identified the most with the shepherds. The shepherds were average, ordinary people and yet were invited to see the birth of the Messiah. When God wanted to announce the arrival of his son, he did not do it in the presence of kings or queens. He announced it to the poor and the forgotten. It truly is good news because, if God’s favor was offered to the shepherds, then surely God’s favor and peace is available to us as well.

It is the world’s greatest need. From the time sin entered the world and affected all of creation, we have been at odds with God. The Bible says we were enemies of God and in rebellion against his rule and reign. Sin did not just stop there, it also caused us to be in conflict with one another and ourselves. This is why Jesus’ birth was, and is, such good news. It is the ultimate answer to the brokenness that exists because of sin—brokenness between ourselves and God -- brokenness between ourselves and others, and brokenness in our own inner selves.

This is the way Paul put it as he wrote to the church in Colossae. Paul was expressing the role that Jesus plays in making peace.

**[Colossians 1:19-22](#)**

*For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*

*Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—*

To understand the peace that is ushered in at Christmas time, we must understand that, although Jesus arrived in a cradle, his life would lead to a cross. Jesus intentionally lived a sinless life and willingly offered his life through crucifixion. Paul said it is the blood of Jesus Christ that makes peace between us and God. Christ's sacrifice on the cross pays for the sin we have committed, it appeases God's anger toward sin, and it destroys the power of evil in our lives. Being reconciled to God is the key to experiencing peace in every other area of our lives, because that's what Jesus does.

## ***JESUS RECONCILES US TO GOD***

When we receive the gift of forgiveness that is offered to us by faith, we become friends of God and he offers us his power to help us navigate the difficulties of life. Some may believe that being made right with God means they will never face any problems. I'm here to tell you, this is not the case. Pastor and speaker 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."

The peace offered to those on whom God's favor rests does not equate to the absence of conflict. In fact, we may still have circumstances that don't go our way or challenging relationships to navigate. What it does promise is the presence of God in our lives. AND, if He is with us, there is nothing we should fear. We can go to him for guidance and strength. We can lean on him when we get weary. He promises to bind up our wounds when we are hurt.

God desires for us to make peace with ourselves. Every past mistake, personal struggle, or worry for the future is met with the love and grace of God. We also make peace with others because of the forgiveness of God given to us. When we come to recognize the grace given to us, our hearts are transformed to offer grace to others.

As we get closer and closer to Christmas day, we move through a season known as Advent. Advent comes from the Latin word meaning *arrival*. Jesus's

first coming was the arrival of God's light of the world. Like sitting around a lit Christmas tree at night, the glow of God's presence washes over us. It calms our fears and steadies our hearts. At Christmastime, we also make note of another advent that is to come. One day in the future Jesus will return and make all things right once and for all. His peace covers our past, meets us in our present, and is a promise for the future. Therefore ...

## ***PEACE IS OUR PURPOSE***

What the world needs more of is people who have the peace of God in their hearts and who are willing to share that peace with others. It is not optional for us to embody this peace. It is an expectation that Jesus has for his followers. Joining God in making the world a better place is the purpose of our lives. In fact, Jesus speaks to this in the middle of his most famous sermon called the Beatitudes.

### ***Matthew 5:9***

***Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they will be called children of God.***

The angels told the shepherds that peace was available to those on whom God's favor rests.

Jesus said something similar when he stated that peacemakers will be blessed, and they will be called children of God.

When we are willing to seek reconciliation with others and fight for harmony rather than sowing dissension, we are identified with the heart of God who longs to reconcile the world to himself. We look like the Father, and we are recognized as children in his family. We find peace at the heart of Christmas because God desires us to be in right relationship with him, with ourselves, and with others. It is the very reason for which Jesus came to earth.



There are many people who do not value peace in their relationships, and so they live in this constant state of conflict. Some people are looking for a fight because they aren't in one. It reminds me of what Linus said to Charlie Brown in a *Charlie Brown Christmas*. Charlie Brown was having trouble getting into the Christmas spirit ...

## Video: The Charlie Browniest

Unfortunately, this is the outcome for people who believe Christmas is about other things besides hope, peace, joy, and love. This Christmas may we be people who embrace the gift offered to us through Jesus who died for us so we might live in right relationship with God, ourselves, and others.

### **PRAY**

*“Dear Lord, help us to receive the peace of Christ this Advent season. Help us to be peacemakers and peace seekers in our relationships as we interact with a weary world around us. And thank you God, for offering us peace, forever, through your Son Jesus.”*