

222 December 6, 2023
Advent Week 2-Peace

We continue our observance of Advent with a reminder of what Advent means. Advent is a translation of the Latin *adventus*, meaning 'coming; arrival' which is translated from the Greek *parousia*, or 'coming'. In the New Testament, parousia often refers to the future second coming of Jesus. Most Advent observances are from three simultaneous perspectives: 1) Jesus coming at birth in Bethlehem; 2) Jesus coming into the lives of believers at salvation, and: 3) Jesus Second Coming. The historical purpose of observing Advent is for believers to focus on these three perspectives, intentionally reflecting on Jesus' birth into this world, His present-day living in the hearts of believers, and His future return. We hope that by observing Advent it will help you focus on these three perspectives instead of our culturally consumer-focused holiday obsessions. Christ's birth should help us focus on God's plan to offer all humanity the chance to be restored to relationship with Him, the holy purposes God has for our redeemed lives, and the sure and confident hope we can have in His coming again.

Last week we started with a focus on Hope. Biblical hope has God as its author, source, sustaining power, and object. Because hope is God-grounded, God-sustained, and God-directed, hope is a reality in which His people may dwell. Hope is the response of God's people to God's activity in their lives. Biblical hope is expectation expressed in faith, confidence, patience, endurance, and eagerness. Our hope is an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast, which enables us to bear our burdens and infuses strength when we are weak and worn.

Week 2-Peace

What do you think of when you hear the word 'Peace?' Do your thoughts immediately spring to the phrase 'Peace and quiet' as if peace is the absence of noise? Or does your mind leap to your last vacation, and some idyllic retreat from the hustle and bustle of your work-a-day life and the chance to throw a daily routine and work planner out the window for a few treasured days of doing what you want to do instead of what everyone else wants you to do? As sweet as that may sound, it is not what Scripture has to say about the concept of peace. Biblical peace is more than the absence of strife or conflict. It is an attitude of tranquility despite adversity.

One of the hallmarks of the Christmas story is when the angels appear to the shepherds and proclaim, "On earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." Jesus brought about peace, in the most unexpected ways, when he arrived. The Jews, particularly the zealots, wanted a rebellion. They wanted their Savior to overturn the oppressive rule of the Romans and restore the historic kingdom of King David, to bring about peace in a violent way. Many were looking for a warrior king and certainly not a baby born in a barn. But God had something else in mind.

The Hebrew word for peace: *Shalom*, goes far beyond not fighting with others or peace as we know it. *Shalom* is, in essence, how things are meant to be: a slice of heaven. The peace of God allows us to look at others through heaven's eyes and help guide the world to see God's here and not-yet here kingdom. Peace from God, biblical peace, allows us to trust in God's promises, through restful, tranquil faith, despite the dark, scary world around us.

Jesus brings us peace in a number of ways. First, he gives us inner peace. Because of his work on the cross, we have a chance to receive salvation and be indwelled by the Holy Spirit. This grants us an inner peace. Not only do we have the peace that comes from our assurance of salvation, but we also have the peace of mind knowing God will heal this broken world and will come again. Second, we have peace with others. We put aside our differences, especially with other believers, because we belong to the same family. We have the same purpose: to let others know about the peace of Christ.

Inner Peace

Inner peace begins with a relationship with God, and it continues as we focus on His strength and trust Him to fill us. You can exchange your weakness for His strength in any area of life. Inner peace hinges on your trust in God. If inner peace is eluding you these days and anxiety is spilling over in your life, choose to trust God. You can choose to put your hand in His and draw from his patience and wisdom as you take each step. He will guide you through the maze of life if you ask Him. Choosing to trust God with those blind corners in your life will take you down the road to inner peace. Choosing not to trust Him will take you down the road to stress and worry. Inner peace is there for the choosing.

Isaiah 26:3

³You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.

Personalize this passage into your own prayer for peace:

God will keep me in perfect peace as my mind focuses on Him and trusts Him.

John 14:27

²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Philippians 4:7

⁷And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Peace with Others

Peace with others begins as we understand that God has called us to be peacemakers in our world. Is there somewhere in your own world where you can be a peacemaker this Christmas? Is there an invitation that needs to be extended to smooth over a fractured family relationship? Is there an apology to be made or a silence to be broken that has stood as a barrier for too long? Don't miss the blessing God promises in your life as you respond to his call to be a peacemaker in your own circle. You can help bring peace to our world one heart at a time.

Isaiah 52:7

⁷How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!"

1 Thessalonians 5:23

²³May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 14:17

¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,

Why Does This Matter?

We live in an eye-for-an-eye, revenge culture. We also live in scary times. But the peace of God transcends our circumstances and world. With this, we can rest assured that He will come and make everything right once more. Our peace can also stir the curiosity of those who do not believe in Christ. They will see us exercise a spirit of tranquility and faith, and they will want to know the reason for our faith in shaky times. When they ask, we can have a reason at the ready. “I am not afraid because I have the peace of Christ.”

Advent Prayer Week 2 — Peace

Heavenly Father, You are the God who gives peace. This second week of Advent causes us to remember that because of Jesus we can experience a Christmas free from turmoil and chaos. Regardless of our circumstances or our situations, you offer us peace that passes understanding. That first Christmas, when you sent your Son, you sent the one who is called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. Even the angels cried out, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” The angels knew your purpose. They know the gifts of hope, peace, joy, and love that Christmas held. They recognized that the fullness of God was wrapped in the tiny flesh of an infant as you humbled yourself and dwelt among us. Emmanuel. God with us as the baby Jesus. That baby would grow to be the same God-man, Jesus, who would again humble Himself to face death on a cruel cross as payment for our sin. He would triumphantly defeat sin and death and hell in order to cancel our sin debt and reconcile us to you, Father. You exalted Him and gave Him a name above all names. Every knee in heaven and earth and under the earth must bow to the name of Jesus. The winds and waves obey Him. He rules and reigns as king overall. No situation or circumstance that we find ourselves in is a match for Jesus. We are able to have the fullness of peace in our hearts on Christmas day, and every day, because that same Jesus sits at your right hand in heaven and makes intercession for us. Not only that, but he paid our sin debt. He loves us with a love that is unfathomable. Nothing can separate us from His love. He is

good and his plans for us are good. Father, this second week of Advent, keep us in perfect peace as our mind is stayed on the truth of your powerful love. Thank you for your mighty, sovereign hand. Help us to trust fully in you and rest in the peace that you offer. It's in the precious name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Group discussion questions:

Is Peace easy or hard to attain in your life?

Are your challenges to peace external or internal?

What do you think about the statement Shalom (peace) is how things are meant to be?

How do you overcome challenges to inner peace?

How do you overcome challenges to peace with others?

Does your life demonstrate a spirit of tranquility and faith?

To make the most of this advent week, consider the following prayer of St. Francis of Assisi:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is injury, pardon. Where there is doubt, faith. Where there is despair, hope. Where there is darkness, light. And where there is sadness, only joy.

Consider how to personalize this prayer during the week 2 focus on Peace:

Almighty God, help me turn my selfish heart of stone into your vessel for peace. Remake me so that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console. To be understood as to understand. To be loved as to love with all my heart. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen

Addendum 1

Observing Advent at Home

You can use the 222 study guides to observe the four weeks of Advent at home. Use the Scripture readings as listed and the weekly Advent prayer, or adjust them as needed along the same weekly focus.

You will probably want to add the traditional Advent candles to your observance. There are usually four or five advent candles, although some traditions light a candle for every day December 1-25. Typically one candle is lit on the first Sunday, two are lit on the second Sunday, three are lit on the third Sunday, and four are lit on the fourth Sunday. All five are lit on Christmas day. The candles are arranged in a circle, with the Christ candle in the center. The candles can be tapers or pillars. If you mix them, at least the Christ candle should be the tallest/largest. Jesus is the light of the world and we light Advent candles to signify this. It's also a way to build anticipation for the celebration of the first coming of Jesus. The closer one gets to Christmas, the more the candles get lit, and the brighter it shines. Advent moves us through the prophecies about Christ, to the hope he provides, to the joy he brings, and the love he gives. As we move through each week, the candles glow more brightly with significance.

The traditional candle colors are:

First Advent Candle: The first purple candle symbolizes hope. Also known as the "Prophecy Candle" in memory of the prophets, particularly Isaiah, who prophesied the birth of Christ. It symbolizes the anticipation felt in awaiting the coming Messiah.

Second Advent Candle: The second purple candle symbolizes faith. Also known as the "Bethlehem Candle," signifies Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem.

Third Advent Candle: The third candle is ordinarily pink and represents joy. This candle is pink because the rose color represents joy, also known as the "Shepherd's Candle." The third Sunday of Advent is meant to remind us of the world's joy at the birth of Jesus and that believers have arrived at the midpoint of Advent.

Fourth Advent Candle: The final purple candle marks the last week of Advent as we anticipate the birth of our Savior. This final candle, also known as the “Angel’s Candle,” signifies peace. It reminds us of the angels' message: “Peace on Earth, Good Will Toward Men” (Luke 2:14).

Fifth Advent Candle (if used): A fifth white candle is placed in the center and is lit on Christmas Day to celebrate Jesus’ birth.

Prayers for Lighting the Advent Wreath Candles

Observing Advent at home gives all your family an opportunity to take part in the observance together. A traditional prayer for lighting the Advent wreath candles follows. Feel free to modify your prayers focusing on the weekly theme.

First Week (Hope): "O God, as we light the first candle of this Advent wreath, we open our hearts in hope. May the light of this candle remind us of the hope we have in you. May it inspire us to prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of your Son, Jesus Christ, our hope and our Savior. Amen."

Second Week (Peace): "Gracious God, as we light the second candle of this Advent wreath, we seek your peace. In a world filled with turmoil, may the light of this candle remind us of the peace that only you can bring. Help us to be instruments of your peace in our homes, communities, and the world. Amen."

Third Week (Joy): "Loving God, as we light the third candle of this Advent wreath, we rejoice in your presence. May the light of this candle fill our hearts with the joy of your salvation. Help us to share this joy with others, spreading your love and happiness to all we encounter. Amen."

Fourth Week (Love): "Heavenly Father, as we light the fourth candle of this Advent wreath, we are reminded of your boundless love. May the light of this candle shine forth as a symbol of the love you have shown us through your Son, Jesus Christ. Fill our hearts with your love, and help us to love one another as you have loved us. Amen."

Christmas Day (Christ’s birthday): “This Christmas, Jesus, come to the manger of my heart. Break into my world like you did at Bethlehem, bringing peace to every part. Dwell within and around me, as I unwrap Your presence each day. Keep me

close to You, Lord. Keep alive in me the desire for Your return. It's in Your wonderful Name I pray. Amen”

May you be blessed this holiday season as you prepare your heart for Christmas!

Christmas in Bethlehem

PARK IN PINK AREA ONLY

REMINDER

- THU** 12/7 SETUP 5:30PM
TARPS, PROPS ETC
- FRI** 12/8 8AM-3PM
FINAL STAGING
- FRI SAT SUN** 12/8,9 &10 5PM
VOLUNTEERS IN PLACE
- SAT** 12/9 CIBOLO PARADE

1. CIB UPDATE ABOVE
2. SENIOR LUNCHEON NEXT TUESDAY 12/12 11-1PM
3. YOUTH LOCKIN 12/16
4. CHRISTMAS POTLUCK LORD SUPPER AND BAPTISMS 12/20
5. CHRISTMAS EVE 930 &11AM FAMILY SERVICE and CANDLELIGHT SERVICE 5PM