

# The Heart of Christmas (Part 2)

Sunday, December 4, 2022

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 said that...

- THE PRESENCE OF DARKNESS THREATENS OUR HOPE
- THE LIGHT OF GOD'S PRESENCE HAS COME TO GIVE US HOPE
- HOPE IS OURS TODAY

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.

## Find Peace In The Heart Of Christmas

**Key Texts:** Luke 2:8-14; Colossians 1:19-22; Matthew 5:9

**Luke 2:4-20**

4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

14 “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

The reason for Jesus’s birth is God’s deep desire to see his creation no longer broken and in conflict but rather restored and at peace. Jesus’s birth offers us peace in the middle of our difficulties and stresses. He longs to bring us peace. Peace is not the absence of conflict; it is the presence of Christ. We should believe the message of the angels and trust that His favor is on us today.

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.

Now many people have suggested that this is significant because, Shepherds are the lowliest of the low and that the announcement to them signified God's peace being offered to all of mankind.

While there may be some truth to that; those of you that have been here a while know that I believe that these particular shepherds were Shepherd priests. Perhaps you've heard me discuss Micah 4:8

**Micah 4:8 (ESV)**

8 And you, O tower of the flock (Migdal Eder), hill of the daughter of Zion, to you shall it come, the former dominion shall come, kingship for the daughter of Jerusalem.

*A number of years ago... Jimmy DeYoung, an outstanding news commentator and Bible teacher, made a presentation at a Bible prophecy conference. Since it was during the Christmas season, he was teaching about the birth of Jesus in the first chapter of Luke. He read {from} Luke 2:8-12:*

**This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths, and lying in a manger.'**

*Dr. DeYoung then asked the audience a surprising question: "Did you ever wonder why this was a sign?" {He} had us turn to the book of Micah. We were all familiar with Micah 5:2, which prophesied that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, but many of us were not familiar with Micah 4:8, which prophesied that He would be announced at the tower of the flock (Migdal Eder). Dr. DeYoung, who had lived in Jerusalem for a number of years, told us that Migdal Eder was a two-story tower that had been built in a pasture outside Bethlehem. The remains of the tower had recently been discovered.*

*Dr. DeYoung explained that the shepherds in the field had not all been the lowly shepherds that we had always assumed. They were actually priests from the temple who were doing shepherding work to assist in the birthing of the sacrificial lambs so that they would be unblemished for sacrifice. While the shepherds were keeping watch over the flock from the top floor of the tower, the shepherd-priests would bring the pregnant sheep in from the field to the tower's bottom floor, where the sheep would give birth. As soon as a lamb was born, the priests would wrap it with strips of cloths made from old priestly undergarments. This was done to keep the lamb from getting blemished. The priests would then place the lamb onto a manger to make sure it would not get trampled. Wow! So when these shepherd-priests went into Bethlehem and saw the baby Jesus wrapped in cloths, lying in a manger, they must have exclaimed, "There is the Lamb of God, prepared for sacrifice, unblemished!" They had to be excited beyond description, because they were the only ones who could have understood the sign. It was just for them from God. It was personal!*

*{Presumably}, Jesus' swaddling cloths were from the same source as the lambs' cloths. Mary's cousin, Elizabeth, was married to the priest Zacharias. Elizabeth could have given her the cloths made from the priestly undergarments. It is highly probable that the first clothes that Jesus wore were the clothes of a priest. What a sign!*

But what does that have to do with the PEACE OF CHRISTMAS

Think about it, these shepherds job was all about trying to make peace between man and God. - AND IT WAS A LOT OF WORK and it was a never ending job. Think about God sending the angels to tell them that they could finally be at peace and not have to worry any more about constantly trying to ensure they had lambs without blemish, that

they constantly had to make sacrifices. But now the SAVIOR had been born, the MESSIAH who would bring PEACE on earth

## THE PEACE OF CHRISTMAS IS PROMISED TO ALL PEOPLE

10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

14 “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

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.

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 King of kings.

([ministry127.com](http://ministry127.com)). But more than that I believe people identify with the shepherds because we are all looking for peace.

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 this world, one another and ourselves. This is why Jesus’s 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, ourselves and others, and our own inner struggles.

## THE PEACE OF CHRISTMAS IS FOUND IN THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child,

20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

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.

Meanwhile though, the Peace of Christmas can be ours everyday as we, like the shepherds come into the presence of Christ. There's nothing as peaceful as being in His presence.

Just ask the disciples.

Mark 4:35-41

35 That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." 36 Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. 37 A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. 38 Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

39 He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

40 He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

41 They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

**Illustration:** The peace of locking up on Christmas Eve

Whatever may be going on in your life... Whatever the chaos all around you... Know that you will find peace in the presence of Jesus

Philippians 4:4-7

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Some may believe that the peace of God means they will never face any problems. 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. 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.

## THE PEACE OF CHRISTMAS PROVIDES RECONCILIATION TO GOD

10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.

Colossians 1:19-22

19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 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.

21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 22 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—

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.

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.

His peace covers our past, meets us in our present, and is a promise for the future.

When we receive the gift of forgiveness that is offered to us by faith, we are made right with God. We become friends of God and he offers us his power to help us navigate the difficulties of life. God desires for us to have peace with Him and within 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.

## THE PEACE OF CHRISTMAS WAS MEANT TO BE PASSED ON

**17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.**

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**

**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 a 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, and Linus observed, "Charlie Brown, you're the only person I know who can take a wonderful season like Christmas and turn it into a problem."

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.