

FROM THE PROMISE TO THE ★ PRINCE OF PEACE ★



Advent Devotional 2023

“The Promise”

December 3rd

Read Isaiah 7:14, Galatians 4:4,5

We often get boxes of candy during the Advent season and of course, we also get them for Christmas itself. I think you know that at this time of year See's Candies and other confectionary dealers do a stellar business selling boxes of their delectables and do so generally from just before Thanksgiving to the celebration of the Lord's birth. During this holy season, our family members, friends, and colleagues, out of love for us and the spirit of the season, bring a seemingly endless supply of sweets, box after box after box, of the sugary, Christmasy treats...that unfortunately, we will then need to work off during the New Year!

I've noticed something about that, though; sometimes, the excitement of having that box of candy can usurp and overtake what I would call "wise navigation" of said box of delights. We'd all have to admit that there's just something about being the first to tear into the little treats and perhaps be the one who gets the best of the best of them before anyone else has an opportunity to rifle through the box and leave the empty brown-paper-wrappers askew. That zeal to dive in inevitably ends in disaster, however, and you're stuck choking down one of those oozy-gooey cherry bombs or one of the maple-flavored "things" that seem so dry! (If you couldn't tell, I'm not a fan of either one...sorry if you are!)

There is a way to avoid that painful moment, however. If you slow down just a bit and look at the "map" the candy maker puts on the inside of the lid, you can steer clear of the cherry bombs and maple semi-dry candies or whichever flavor makes you say "yuck." In order to succeed at candy navigation, we simply have to slow down and take the time to look into the lid and check the "map" of the candy in the box to find out exactly what's inside each one!

Okay...I know you're likely thinking, *"Hey, Pastor Joe...where's the Advent theme...or the manger or Jesus or Bethlehem or Christmas in all of this?"*

Well, this truth about boxes of candy, in fact, comes to roost in our theology for today, too! Yes, I'm proposing "Candy-Box-Lid Theology" today! You see, we will remember in tomorrow's devotion that there was a miraculous promise, namely, the Son of God promised and ultimately given by being born to a woman with no husband, a virgin girl named Mary. But today, we remember the even greater miracle than Mary's no-husband pregnancy and even greater than the fact that with God, the promise given is the promise fulfilled!

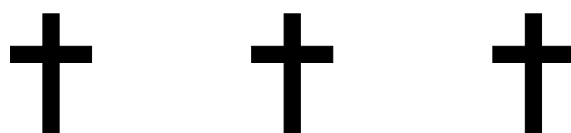
You see, we have in our hands the “map” of Isaiah 7:14 to see the incredibly mind-blowing truth about the “inside” of the promised Son and, therefore, see the true miracle of that virgin birth as well!

Isaiah 7:14 reads: *“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son....”* You can read and interpret this section yourself...it seems from this portion of the text that the miracle is only the conception of Jesus in the womb of a virgin girl. And I will say it again, that is indeed a mighty miracle!

But there is a greater miracle here, one found in who this Son would be! Not just what was inside the womb of Mary, but what was on “the inside” of the Son she would give birth to! You need the entirety Isaiah 7:14 “map” for this one Christian! The whole verse reads this way: *“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son and shall call His name Immanuel.”* Immanuel was, in fact, who Jesus was! And “Immanuel” means?

You know it well, don’t you? You know that Matthew tells us that Immanuel means *“God...with us!”* (Matthew 1:23) When you slow down and take a look at the Isaiah 7:14 map, you realize this wasn’t just a son, this was the Son, aka, God Almighty in the flesh who had stepped into our world! This wasn’t just a Son; rather, in Jesus, God Almighty chose to become a human being! What was “on the inside” of that tiny little baby boy? God Almighty was found to be residing in a tiny baby boy born to Mary so long ago! As Paul would write about Jesus in Romans 9:5, He is *“...the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.”* When you look into the map of Scripture, you find that in Jesus, you have both a baby boy given to a virgin girl named Mary, and you have the One who was and is the Creator God and therefore alone is, as Paul writes, *“God over all, blessed forever”!*

And that truth from the “map” of Scripture gives us true hope and true peace in our salvation! God came to us when we could not come to Him! God came to us so that we could come to Him. In fact, the “map” of Scripture continues to remind us of that very truth: *“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons”* Galatians 4:4,5. In the person of Jesus, God dwelt, so that in the person of Jesus, we might dwell with God! A miraculous promise and a promised and mighty miracle indeed!



“The Miraculous Promise”

December 4th

Read Isaiah 7:14 and Luke 1:26-35

“Promises, promises!” You’ve heard it said...you’ve said it yourself! So often, all we ever get is promises made and then promises broken. In a world like ours, how can we trust anybody to actually do what they say they’re going to do? Contracts are signed...contracts are broken. Commitments are made...commitments are broken. And sadly, what we experience in our world and from other human beings, we almost automatically ascribe to God thinking the very same thing and having our hearts say, “Promises, promises!” We wonder in our hearts: The Lord makes promises...but does He keep them? We have been hurt by so many people so many times, it’s easy for us to think that the Lord will simply “get in line” along with all the other promise-breakers in our lives and do the very same thing to us. Every person reading this has had a promise given to them that became a promise broken...and every person reading this has also made a promise that they have later broken. Day after day, promises are made, and promises are broken, and that reality makes us cautious and skeptical even when it comes to the pure and perfect promises of the Lord of Glory!

The Christ story reminds us, however...God always keeps His promises!

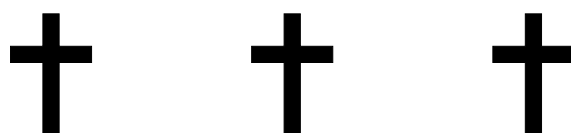
Our trek through Advent and the eventual celebration of Christmas gets at the greatest multi-faceted miracle from the hand of God that our world has ever seen. To be sure, one of those facets would be that a young virgin girl named Mary would be blessed with an incredible miracle in a baby boy named Jesus! Mary herself gets at the miraculous nature of this amazing promise and our Lord’s very specific entrance into our world by asking the angel, “*How can this be since I am a virgin?*” Yep...that’s a good question! You understand the rule: no husband, then no babies, therefore, no promised Son either. The biology is clear and easy to grasp. Without the intervention of Joseph or another husband, there would be no son, no daughter, no child whatsoever. And yet, as we are told, minus any husband at all, Mary would, in fact, be pregnant with God’s Son; pregnant with Jesus! The miraculous intervention of our miracle-working God caused Mary to become pregnant and be what we call her, namely, the bearer of the Christ or the Mother of our Lord.

Remember, however, to the point of today’s devotion title, in the giving of that gift, the giving of that miraculously wonderful gift, there was another miracle that was given by God, and it was given in the promise itself!

God made a promise and God kept that promise! At first, many people won't see the promise itself as a miraculous part of this story...but we should! You see, to begin with, the promise of the Son of God to a virgin was miraculous in that it was spoken by God long before it ever came to pass! Amazingly, a full seven hundred years before the pregnancy happened to Mary, Isaiah 7:14 tells us, *“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”* Notice...the Lord gives a sign and the sign is His Son, but also notice that the Lord promised that sign and that Son way ahead of the scheduled delivery to Mary's womb! A miraculous promise indeed!

Having said that, however, hand-in-hand with the incredible nature of a promise seven hundred years in the making, our Lord gives us something else to marvel at here! While what He promised did indeed take seven centuries to be fulfilled, miraculously, our Lord nonetheless fully delivered on the promise that He made! He didn't waver. He didn't schwaflle. He promised His Son, and He delivered His Son. While He seems to have been very patient, waiting for just the right time to send His Son, He nonetheless, sent His Son and fulfilled His promise seven hundred years after the promise was made!

Through that fulfilled promise long ago then, the Lord also brings an important reminder about Himself to us! And what's the reminder? We are reminded here that it was indeed a “miraculous promise” because God would do exactly what He said He'd do! Of course, it shouldn't be a surprise, even though because of our hurts and concerns, we're skeptical of any promise given, because we know down deep that God always, always, always fulfills His promises...and He always will!



“So...What was the Promise?”

December 5th

Read Matthew 1:18-25

I've heard people say things like, “What's the bottom line?” or “What's the end-game here?” What they mean by saying things like that is that they want you to get to the point of the conversation and for you to tell them how much it's going to cost them or how much it will impact them, whether up or down or good or bad. “What's the end number here?” “What's the final tally?” “What's the most important takeaway?” All these types of questions seek to get at understanding how what you're telling the person will impact their very lives.

As we consider the narrative of the birth of Christ, those same questions arise in our minds. We know what God is telling us in this story and we know it well! A very brave virgin girl. A wonderful and loving husband. A stable. A manger. Heavenly angels. Faithful shepherds. Glorious star. Swaddling cloths. God's Son the Christ...God's Son, the Savior! We got the story. We love the story! We love to hear it told over and over again! But we're still driven to ask of this story and of the promise given and fulfilled regarding Jesus, God's Son, “What's the bottom line?” or “What's the end game here?” “What's the most important takeaway?”

Well, another way of getting at that is to ask the question as it's listed in our devotional theme, namely, “What was the Promise?” If we're looking for the “takeaway,” we'd want to ask, “What did God promise when He promised to send His Son to us?” We've crossed the virgin birth and only Son bridge already. We completely understand the miraculous nature of the story! In fact, we fully embrace and love the miraculous nature of this story! But...what was the “bottom line” or “end-game” of this story and the promise to be fulfilled in Jesus? What's at the heart and soul of this thing and what is it that God is giving us in and through Him?

Our text for today from Matthew chapter one gets at that better than any other! Of course, our text about Joseph isn't as famous as the one with from Luke about Mary. You'll remember when Gabriel spoke to Mary as recorded in Luke, he said this about Jesus: *“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”* Luke 1:32,33.

But that important information doesn't really help us to answer the "bottom line" or "end-game" or "what?" question as much as it tells us the "who?" of the story. In other words, the visitation of Gabriel to Mary does give us His pedigree, namely, "David's descendant," and does help us understand the amazing truth of the "foreverness" of His kingdom, but it doesn't get at how His advent into our world affects us.

But Matthew's account of Joseph's dream does help us and help us immensely! Matthew writes this in our text: "*But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.'*" Matthew 1:20. So, this Child will be from the Holy Spirit and will therefore be a miraculous intervention from God in our world...these words being similar to Gabriel's words to Mary. But with Joseph, there's more! What was the promise of God through His Son? Matthew tells us this and in doing so, answers our question: "*But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.'*" Matthew 1:20,21.

There you go! What was the promise? Certainly, the promise included a virgin birth and a Son sent from God by the Holy Spirit, but the true promise is found in the name of that Son. Not "Immanuel"; that was His "title" (God with us). No, the true nature of the promise was found in His given name, "Jesus." And Jesus means? You can read it for yourself, but Jesus means that "He will save His people from their sins," but more specifically, it means exactly, "YHWH saves!" Jesus' name means that YHWH (the Old Testament name of God) has come to save His people from their sins! What a wonderful promise! What a powerful promise! God was with us to be sure, but God was with us in order to save us from ourselves, save us from our sins, so that forevermore we could be with Him! That, my friends, is the end game; that's the bottom line; that's the takeaway here! In Jesus, God came to forgive!



“What Did the Promise Mean?”

December 6th

Read Luke 2:22-38

There's a saying among us Pastors that is intended to get at the true heart of whatever issue it is we are confronting at the moment, and it's this: "What's the 'thing' behind the 'thing'?" There's all sorts of ways that question can be brought to bear. It can be applied to very practical situations, like someone stepping into our office and talking to us about a personal issue. Of course, we listen intently because they are telling us, their Pastor, something that is a concern to them and is likely weighing heavy on their heart. In truth, however, in the midst of that conversation, it becomes obvious that there is something they are not saying that is truly driving the concern they are presenting...in other words, in their personal crisis, there is indeed "a thing behind the thing."

The same principle can be applied to the study of God's Word. Pastors, and all Christians for that matter, should ask of Bible passages, "What's the thing behind the thing?" This principle guides, directs, and clarifies our theology as we read God's Word and attempt to understand it better. When we read a passage of Scripture, we need to mine it for all it's worth as well as learn as much as we possibly can about what's being said and you can get at that by asking the very same question, namely, "What's the thing behind the thing?"

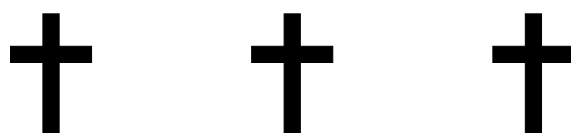
And I bring it up today because in this first segment of our Advent Devotional we've been talking about the promise of Jesus, the promise of God's Son, given so long ago. We've focused on God's prophesied-promise regarding the sending His Son into the world and what that promise meant for Mary and Joseph, but what it meant for the world as well. Today's text gets at that very thing. What did the promise mean? Our text answers that and answers it well. Admittedly, this isn't an Advent or Christmas text, more of an Epiphany set of verses, but I chose it because it not only speaks into the reason Jesus came to Bethlehem and to our world, but also gets at answering "What's the thing behind the thing?" Simeon says this about Jesus: "*Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples...*" Luke 2:29-31. So...Jesus is just a baby. Jesus is just eight days old at this point. Jesus is completely dependent on His mom and dad, not preaching or teaching to performing miracles. And yet, Simeon says, in seeing the Christ-Child, that he is also seeing the "salvation" prepared by the Lord God Almighty? So..."What is the thing behind the thing" here? Maybe said another way, "What are we missing that Simeon seems to see?"

Well, we actually know the answer because we have the whole story laid out in the New Testament! Of course we know that Jesus is a baby boy here. We completely understand that He is utterly dependent on His parents. We get it...He was so young that He has yet to be circumcised, that telling us that he is just eight days old! But we also know, fully understand, and completely grasp the real reason He was in our world and with Mary, Joseph, Simeon, and Anna.

We know the real reason...we know the “thing behind the thing” about this baby boy named Jesus. We know full-well He is God’s salvation. But we also know that God’s salvation required not just the birth of this baby boy, but also the death of this baby boy as well. We know that the beautiful and poignant picture of Mary, Joseph and their new baby must be overshadowed by the ugliness of the pitiful scene that was to come at the cross...that which awaits our Lord just three decades hence. Simeon gets at that when in verse thirty-five he tells these very new parents but specifically to Mary, “...a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

Mary would watch her “baby boy” die on the cross for the sins of the world (Joseph was likely dead by the time Jesus was crucified). Mary would eventually and fully understand “the thing behind the thing” when it came to this baby boy God had given her. As she watched her beloved Son give His life for the sins of the world, her soul was certainly “pierced” as her Son was pierced too, with nails and thorns and a spear.

But that leaves us with one more “thing behind the thing” to consider and that “thing” is you. Why did God promise the Savior? Why did Jesus come into our world? The “thing behind the thing” when it came to Christ’s life, death and resurrection is actually you! He loved you! He came for you! He was born for you! He died for you! He rose for you! He will return for you! Christ’s saving work in our world is indeed the true “thing behind the thing”...but His saving work in our world was all done for you!



“Becoming Parents”

December 7th

Read Luke 2:1-7

For those of us who have been given the deep responsibility and absolute joy of parenting a child, we understand well the awe and wonder that we've experienced as we not only went through the miracle of the birth process but, ultimately, when we held “junior” in our arms. Even those of us who have not become (or those who have yet to become) parents understand the amazing gift given in children...a gift given by the hand of our Heavenly Father Himself! Parents already or not, all of us have looked at a child and marveled at how amazing it is that our Lord allows us to love, manage, guide, guard, and direct the wee ones in our lives!

With that in mind, how do you think Mary and Joseph were feeling that first Christmas night as they looked down at their newborn Son there in the stable? Surely, they were excited and, frankly, gobsmailed by the beauty and wonder of this baby boy. Certainly they were looking forward to all that their Son would bring their way in the coming years as they raised Him as their own. Beyond the usual checking of the “ten fingers and ten toes?”, they had to be dreaming of the future, dreaming of the many days, months, and years of raising their Son and loving Him well. In other words, I think we can confidently say that Mary and Joseph were experiencing the normal parental feelings all of us would feel.

And yet, they had to be confused or bewildered and probably amazed and in awe, too. What in the world would you be thinking if you knew that the child you had been given and would ultimately raise was, in fact, the very Son of God? After all, remember what we read in Luke chapter one about this baby: *“And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”* Luke 1:31-33. *“He will be great”*? Mary and Joseph probably wondered, “What does that mean?” “He will be called the Son of the Most High”? No pressure there! He will have a never-ending kingdom and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever? We're raising the King...what? You have to imagine Mary and Joseph were experiencing normal parental feelings, but we realize along with that that they were also likely feeling overwhelmed by this amazing baby boy God had given them responsibility for!

So...with all that on her heart and mind, what does Mary do? How does she react to the birth of this very special, one and only, Son of God? Quite unremarkably, Mary does what every parent would do in the moment. Luke writes this for us: *“And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.”* Luke 2:7. This “Son of the Most High” and “Davidic King” is simply wrapped up and put to bed? What? Isn’t there more? Isn’t there something to indicate how amazing and how great this baby boy really is? Nope.

Mary and Joseph simply become parents through the advent of their Son Jesus and would simply and humbly do for Him as any parent would...wrap Him up tight and put Him safely to bed. This is an important image for us because it’s exactly what Christ would have them do and how He intended to come into our world from all time and eternity. Nothing special. Nothing over the top. Just love Him deeply, bundle Him tightly, and put Him down to sleep.

You see, Jesus, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, didn’t come as would have been expected. Jesus came to a humble couple and He came to humble surroundings and came in a very humble way...even though we know full well that He had every right as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords to demand bigger and better. We read about the humility of Jesus in the New Testament: *“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”* Philippians 2:5-8. Notice that Paul starts by telling us He was *“in very form God!”* In Jesus, God Almighty came to us in the flesh! But Jesus, God Almighty in the flesh, didn’t come into our world to be wrapped in silk and waited on hand and foot. No, he came to humbly serve us and to be stripped of His clothing and nailed to the cross, nailed there for you and for me, to suffer and die for our sins and the sins of the world...or as Paul puts it *“humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”* In fact, as Jesus came into our world at the beginning of the story, so He would go at the end of the story. He would die for our sins but he’d also be wrapped up again.

Not unlike what Mary did for Him as a baby, He would be wrapped in simple burial cloths awaiting that first and glorious Easter Sunday and His resurrection for our world! He came into our world to perform an amazing, incredible and world-changing duty, but He did so in a humble fashion. As Jesus would say it Himself, He came into our world not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many (See Mark 10:45)!



“The Perfect Parents?”

December 8th

Read Luke 1:46-48; Romans 3:23,24

Becoming a grandfather has been super fun. It’s been a hoot watching our little Nora grow and learn and smile and laugh and all the other milestones a baby her age experiences. In fact, it’s been extremely interesting because she seems to be changing so fast! Of course, it has been a long time since we’ve raised our own wee-ones, and so we may not remember what our kids went through at her age. But her rapid changes have been shocking at times and elicited “ooos and awwws” along with “at-a-girls” from her grandparents, aunts, and uncles!

Having said that, an equally amazing thing about becoming a grandparent isn’t found in what I’m witnessing in Nora, but what I’m witnessing in her parents, my son, Aaron, and daughter-in-law, Keelin. Again, it’s been a bit since we had a nine-month-old child in our life and things were significantly more basic when we were raising our four, but I’ve been amazed at how dialed in they are to this “kid thing.” Our son and daughter-in-law have an app that walks them through what to feed her and when, and as she begins eating solid foods, even what form to present the food to her, mashed or whole or somewhere in between. They have online tools to help them know what she’s supposed to be doing developmentally at each stage and how best to obtain solid developmental outcomes for her. They even found a system for her sleeping schedule, short naps all the way to full-on night-night, so that she can be rested well and as healthy as she can possibly be. They have so much to help them with their parenting and as much as in them lies, so much to help them be absolutely perfect parents!

Now, as I write those words and as I imagine you reading them, I can also imagine a wry smile appearing on your face when you read “perfect parents” above. Whether you’re a parent already or not, you know that my son and his wife will never be “perfect parents” because nobody ever could be a “perfect parent.” They’ll make their mistakes. They’ll mess up her schedules. They’ll discipline incorrectly. You know it’s true, they’ll never, ever, ever be perfect parents because that’s simply impossible.

I bring all of that up today because “perfect parents” doesn’t describe any parent, including the parents of Jesus. In fact, Mary herself gets at that very thing in our reading from Luke 1:46-48.

In this text, Mary gave us what is now known as “The Magnificat,” taken from Mary’s words, “*My soul magnifies the Lord...*”. But, that sentence would prompt the question, “What was it that moved Mary’s soul to magnify the Lord?”

To begin with, Mary must’ve understood the gravity and privilege of being allowed to be the bearer of the Christ. Mary got it. She knew that this was a singular duty that no one else would ever, ever be given the privilege to perform. She knew that being the bearer of the Christ meant that she was indeed the one and only, bearer of the Christ! All the Old Testament prophecies were about her, not another woman, just her. Indeed, were we to be in Mary’s situation and given Mary’s appointed duty for God, we’d likely all exclaim, “My soul magnifies the Lord!” too. But notice that there’s another reason that the Advent of the Christ-child caused her to exclaim, “My soul magnifies the Lord!” The real reason Mary would proclaim this “Magnificat” is that she understood who this Christ-child would be... for her! The complete statement made by Mary gets at that very thing “My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!” Mary understood that God was her Savior (in and through Christ of course), but Mary also understood that she needed God to be her Savior. Mary understood she’d never be a perfect parent because no one is, but also because Mary understood she wasn’t perfect...because no one is! She was a sinner. She was in need of God’s grace. She wasn’t sinless even though her firstborn Son was. And it would be that perfect, firstborn Son of hers who would some three decades later, die on a cross for her sins and rise again for her justification (See Romans 4:25).

And you know that His entrance into our world was for you too as Christ came to be your “Savior” too! No one can be perfect parents because no one is perfect and the Bible is clear about that. Romans 3:23 reads, “...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” A Bible-reminder that you have a need for a Savior just like Mary did. But notice that Romans 3:24 continues the thought by reminding us of the purpose of the baby Jesus for sinners by saying that we “...*are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...*”. We are sinners but sinners saved by the grace that Jesus came to bring so long ago. Mary, Joseph, you and me, altogether not only needing the grace of God, but receiving the grace of God in and through Jesus our Lord and indeed, being able to then proclaim with Mary, “*My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!*”



“Pondering Parent”

December 9th

Luke 2:15-20

I really appreciate what we'd call “thoughtful people.” Now, by using the word “thoughtful,” I could mean that I appreciate people who not only think of others but do so in a way that truly blesses the person they're thinking of. A person you know likes coffee and so you hand them a gift card to buy their favorite cup-of-joe. A person enjoys movies and so you get them a theatre-pack and treat them to a night at the cinema. A person enjoys card games and so you make time in your busy schedule to be with them and play their favorite game. I could go on and on but you get the idea, “thoughtful” means thinking of others and doing something about it! Let me repeat myself: I really appreciate people who are genuinely thoughtful of other people.

But as we gaze into Luke chapter two yet again, I want to use the word “thoughtful” in a slightly different way. As we look into what Luke tells us about Mary today, we'd definitely call her a “thoughtful” person. Luke writes this: *“But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.”* Luke 2:19. Let me say it this way: after going through birth and graciously receiving the shepherds and probably entertaining visitors of all kinds (see verse eighteen), we're told here that the Lord's mother Mary, *“...treasured these things, pondering them in her heart.”* Mary was pondering or...thought-full...in the moment! To be honest, I think we'd all agree that she was very “thoughtful” to allow the shepherds and other people to show up shortly after she'd experienced the birth process for the very first time! Thoughtful indeed! But let me say it again, I mean that she was thought-full...as in Mary was likely full of thoughts! Perhaps thoughts about the situation she was in. Maybe thoughts about Joseph and how he was feeling about all this. Could be thoughts about her body recovering from the birth process. Likely thoughts about next steps and perhaps most of all, definitely thoughts about her newborn boy, pondering her Son...likely cuddling her new baby boy while cogitating on the future and wringing her hands over what His future would entail.

We should then follow the lead of our friend and sister Mary and both “treasure” and “ponder” these things in our hearts, too. In doing so, in focusing on the amazing truth of God's amazing grace given in His Son, we will not only be thought-full, but we'll also realize that, in fact, our Lord is thoughtful towards us.

He saw our need. He saw the mess we made when we brought brokenness, death, and degradation to our world. He saw our sin and sinfulness and knew that apart from His intervention through Jesus in the womb and at the tomb, we'd never come to Him or be with Him whatsoever. And so our Lord and God was thoughtful about us and was then also thoughtful towards us as He saw what we truly needed and provided for that need through His one and only Son! It's true, our thought-full-ness about God will always lead us to the incredible thoughtfulness of God!



“Is This Really the Best Place?”

December 10th

Micah 5:2-5a

When you consider what happened 2000 years ago regarding the birth of Jesus, you'd likely imagine a different scenario! In truth, if you had to write this story, it'd probably look quite a bit different than it actually did! Perhaps a different set of parents giving birth? Perhaps a different set of circumstances surrounding the birth? Perhaps, and to the point of today's devotion, a completely different place for the birth? If we were writing the story, probably all of the above!

To get at that, let me first remind you that on Christmas night so long ago, God Almighty became a human! Let me say that again...on Christmas, God...the Creator of every single thing, chose to take up residence as a human being in a human body! The Creator of the Universe, the Creator of all that is, became part of His creation, and did so in the fleshy, human baby boy named Jesus. Sounds odd! Sounds unbelievable! Sounds incredible! And yet we know that on Christmas night, God Himself indeed came to us! You know the truth of it! You know that Jesus came into our world as “Immanuel” or “God with us”! (see Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:23). Our text says it just a little bit differently, but nonetheless reminds us of who this Baby-Boy would be: “*...from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days*” Micah 5:2. Notice that the Promised Messiah is not only from God but will also be “ruler in Israel” and His origins are “from of old, from the “ancient days.” All the verbiage in that densely packed verse reminds us that this is not simply an ordinary prophet from God, but in fact, the Davidic-Messiah who was also God Himself in the flesh. This Messiah was, in fact, “The Ruler” in other words, God Almighty made manifest among us in Bethlehem-town.

But the further amazing truth of “The Ruler” or, more specifically, “God with us” resides in His extremely humble birth in Bethlehem-town and gets at why you and I would write a different scenario if we were to write the Christ-story. God among His people? Surely He'd come to Jerusalem if we wrote the story! God among His people? Surely He'd be born in the best possible place, namely, “The City of God,” as Jerusalem was known by. He'd come where His Temple was erected and where He then met with His children in the Holy of holies. Perhaps, if we were to write this story, He'd have even been born in the Holy of holies itself with the High Priest standing by to bless His parents and His entrance into our world!

Of course, He wasn't born in Jerusalem or the Temple or the Holy of holies, now was He? No High Priest, no "City of God." God was indeed among His people but when God came to His people, He came to the least likely Jewish spot imaginable. To be sure, He was the Davidic King, or the King from David's line, and so it makes sense that He was born in "David's City," the place known as Bethlehem.

But besides the Bethlehem/David connection, God's choice of place makes no sense. After all my friend, remember that His parents were of the line of David and so born in the City of Bethlehem or not, Jesus would have been the Davidic King by His lineage and that's really all that mattered. Our text from Micah five then expresses well the odd and shocking nature of His birthplace: "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah..." Too little to even be among the clans of Judah?

So unimpressive a place that no one would expect anyone of note to be born there. And yet, the single most important birth our world has ever or will ever experience happened in this, as we sing it at Christmas, "...little town of Bethlehem"! Indeed it did! The single most important person ever born, was born in one of the least important towns of His time. Does He deserve the best? Yes! Would we think nothing of it if He chose the best? Of course we would. Would you write the story differently if given the chance? You bet you would. But what does our text say? God chose differently. "*But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days*" Micah 5:2. So...why did God choose the lowliest place possible among the clans of Judah? Why did God write the story this way?

God did it this way because this is exactly how our God rolls...and on top of that, this is exactly who God is for us. He doesn't choose the high and the mighty. He doesn't choose the biggest and the best. He chooses the lowly. He chooses the humble. He chooses the things that we'd never choose and He does so that He and He alone might be the focus. Paul writes this in 1 Corinthians 1:28-31: "*God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'*"

And thankfully, He is that way. You see, it's a reminder that the pure and perfect, sinless son of God, chose to come to our broken, imperfect, sin-filled world! The place wasn't important, the Lord Himself was instead the heart and soul and center of this story! If you're asking the question "Is this the best place for the Son of God to be born?" the answer would be an unqualified "No"...not Bethlehem...but also, and expanding that thought, not this sinful world either! And yet, our Lord chose to come here anyway and make an imperfect place the perfect place by His wondrously holy presence, pure and perfect presence! Our Lord came into our broken and imperfect world, not the best place at all, to bring us His righteousness and holiness and to grant us everlasting, never-ending life with Him!



“A Place Among the Flock”

December 11th

Ezekiel 34:11-15

All of us have them in one form or another. We sometimes call them “crèches” or “manger scenes,” but more often, just call them “nativities.” Whatever we call them, we generally have a tradition of setting them out this time of year, along with all of the characters assembled in their proper places within the nativity. In fact, when I first came to Gloria Dei back in 2014, during Advent we would have nativities laid out all over the place, literally from stem to stern on the property. I’m guessing we had at least a dozen or more of those Christmas displays laid out for our people to enjoy during the Holy Season! They are a small little art piece, but they carry big reminder of this Holy Season!

But it begs the question, “What’s the reminder?” or even “Why do we set them out?” Said differently, “What are they representative of?” What exactly is a crèche or a nativity and why is it important within the Christ-story that we love so much? I know you know what a nativity is, in that, as mentioned, you likely own one or more and may have already set them up in your home. At the very least, you’ve seen them for many, many years. What I mean by the question is: What does it represent? How does the nativity help us with the story? Well, since that’s still a little cryptic, let me just say it plainly and answer my own questions: The displays we put out at Christmas are a reminder to us that our Lord was literally “born in a barn!” Our Lord Jesus came to us in a stable and He was placed in a feed-box where critters received their daily nourishment...in other words, Jesus was, as the title of this devo gets at, born among the flock! But okay then, why is that important for us to remember?

To begin with, it goes right back to the Lord’s “humble-digs modus-operandi.” We explored this concept yesterday, namely, that our Lord doesn’t come to the biggest and the best but willingly and quite intentionally chooses the humblest of the humble circumstances. He doesn’t come to hang out with the rich and the famous, the important or religious, but, as Jesus Himself would say it in Luke 19:10, “*The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost,*” and when He came to seek and to save us, the lost, He came in humility and did so right in and amongst the humblest of critters! Jesus came in humility because Jesus comes to the humble...re-read yesterday’s devotion if you need to.

But there's another aspect to the Christ-story that I think you should see here. Our text from Ezekiel thirty-four is very important in relation to this baby born in the crèche. Ezekiel thirty-four reminds us that God's People in Ezekiel's day were not only going astray but the leaders or shepherds of Israel were, in fact, leading them astray and leading them away from worshipping God. Instead of leading them to the one, true God, they were enticing them to the worship of false and fabricated idols. The leaders or "shepherds" of Israel weren't tending to the flock as God told them to, but were instead destroying the flock against His Word and His will...and the flock was willingly following them in the process.

Here enters the true import of Ezekiel thirty-four found in the promise of God to come to His children and to yes, "shepherd" them, the way that only God can. Many times in our text from Ezekiel thirty-four, you'll read of the Lord God saying "I will come...I will come!" His promise back then was a promise fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus is the fulfillment of the "I will come" promise of God in this text from the pen of Ezekiel. But note that the promise of God "I will come" is placed among "shepherd" language.

Ezekiel reminds us six hundred years before Bethlehem's stable: *"God is coming! God is coming for us! But God is coming for us as our Shepherd who will tend the flock and protect the flock and feed the flock and nurture the flock."* God coming as a Shepherd of His people? Sound familiar? Perhaps you'll remember that in John ten we're told that Jesus calls Himself that very thing, namely, "The Good Shepherd." He does so, in my opinion, in fulfillment of the Ezekiel thirty-four promise of God to come to us Himself and to Shepherd His sheep as God intended them to be shepherded all along.

When Jesus came into our world in Bethlehem's stable and manger then, He came as the fulfillment of Ezekiel thirty-four. He did so, not coincidentally I think, among the flock to provide right away the imagery of the Good Shepherd He'd call Himself in John ten. It should not be a surprise that even in His birth, our creative Lord and Savior would give us this beautiful image of who He would be for us. He was born in the midst the animals? Sure, humble surroundings for our humble Lord. But born in the midst of animals? Also sounds like an imagery of a shepherd to me, or more appropriately said, "The Good Shepherd" who loves us and cares for us and nurtures us and protects us!

So as you put out your crèche or nativity this year...as you carefully position each piece and then as you pass by it day after day...stop to give thanks to Jesus who came for us His flock, came to the stable, so long ago! Stop to give thanks to the Lord Jesus for coming to us and for taking His rightful place among the flock!



“The Proclaimers and the Proclamation”

December 12th

Read Luke 2:8-14; Romans 5:1

One of the most remembered movie songs of all time comes from the movie titled “The Sound of Music,” released in March of 1965. Julie Andrews was the star and she used her God-given talent to sing the title song impeccably and even if you’ve not seen the movie, the words and tune are likely forever etched in your brain. If I started it, you might possibly be able to finish it, at least the first line of that song. “The hills are alive with...?”. You know it, you could probably sing it. “The hills are alive with the sound of music!” There you go, you can thank me since that song will now be stuck in your head and you’ll be singing it all day long! But it was a lovely song with a lovely backdrop...beautiful music, beautifully sung, in a beautiful place!

Now I bring it up because I want you to imagine in your mind's eye Julie Andrews running and dancing and swirling while bringing you the “sound of music” and doing so on the hills of Austria. But I do that because I primarily want to transport you away from the visual of that movie and to another and far more beautiful song, one sung not on the hillsides of Austria but the hillsides of Bethlehem instead. Instead of seeing Julie Andrews, I want you to imagine seeing the Angel of the Lord and the heavenly host right along with him! Instead of hearing “The Sound of Music,” I want you to hear “Glory to God in the Highest.” Instead of the brilliant sun on the hills of Austria, I want you to visualize the stark-dark of nighttime on hills of Bethlehem lit up not by the sun, moon or stars, by God’s glory alone. I want you to take a moment and imagine what it must’ve been like to hear the Angel of the Lord and the entire heavenly host singing praises to God, “Glory to God,” and doing so because of the birth of the Christ! Let’s face it: as lovely as Julie Andrews’ voice is, she’s an amateur in comparison to the voices of God’s angels! As beautiful as the song was on those Austrian hills, as beautiful as Julie Andrews’ voice was, nothing can compare to the beautiful heavenly music that was heard on those hills that night two millennia ago!

But in saying that, I don’t just mean the quality of the singing or even the beauty of the music sung, I also mean the beautiful proclamation embedded within the song that the angels were bringing as they praised God that night. Don’t get me wrong, it must be amazing to hear the perfect pitch and amazing harmony brought by the angels of God...don’t you think?

You gotta believe that their songs would make your knees weak since they are perfect beings and designed to praise God with their perfection! But let me say it again, in saying “nothing can compare to the beautiful music that was heard on those Bethlehem hills” I mean by that the proclamation of the message contained in the song itself.

Our text reminds us that when the angels sang that night, they also proclaimed that wondrous gospel message, saying, “*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!*” Luke 2:14.

They remind us in this one sentence of what God intended to accomplish by sending His only begotten Son into the world. In sending Jesus, He sent peace to our world, Jesus being the Prince of Peace of course (Isaiah 9:6 and Romans 5:1).

There is, however, a caveat to obtaining that peace with God. Don't miss it...the angels proclaimed it. You want God's peace? Well, there's a requirement you need to meet. The text from Luke reminds us, you only get His peace if, in fact, He is “pleased” with you. “Pleased” with me? “Pleased” with you? I think you know that our sin and sinfulness displease Him, and as the Bible tells us, our sin and sinfulness have even made a separation or brought animosity between us and our God (Isaiah 59:1,2). In other words, it's impossible for us to please God apart from His intervention and, therefore, impossible for us to have this peace that the angels proclaimed that night without His Son.

But here comes the Christmas message and the intervention of God in our lives! Remember that at Jesus' baptism, the Lord said, “*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased*” Matthew 3:17. God was “well pleased” with His only begotten Son! In saying that, however, remember too that Jesus came into our world to give to us, to hand to us, to impute to us, His “well pleased” status. Yes, He came to die for our sins. Yes, He came to rise for our justification. In doing so though, He willingly and purposefully transferred His “well-pleased” status to us through faith and baptism into His name! This beautifully proclaimed song by these heavenly beings on the hills of Bethlehem also proclaimed an incredibly important message...namely, through Jesus and in Jesus and by Jesus, the peace of God is yours and yours forever! Alongside that, through Jesus, God is “pleased” with you too and He therefore gives you His peace both now and forevermore! Romans 5:1 reads this way: “*Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

Indeed then, that's what made the song sung on those hills so amazing and wonderful and blessed! God came into our world to give us the peace we lacked and His angels came into our world to sing the truth of it, proclaiming the fact of it so that the world would forever know that Jesus was indeed our Prince of Peace!



“Proclaiming the Savior”

December 13th

Read Luke 2:8-14

One of the blessings of being in a large congregation is that we are constantly privy to and, therefore, constantly celebrating the birth of children over and over again. Just this past week, we had yet another wee-one born and another family calling us to give us the details and give us an opportunity to rejoice with their family... and set up the baptism, of course! We are so blessed to not only be part of a large congregation but furthermore to be part of a young congregation, one where we hear the “good news” of ten fingers and ten toes over and over again!

Of course, I bring it up because the angels of God came into our world that first Christmas night so long ago to give us the greatest birth announcement ever given! They came to proclaim the birth of the only Son of Mary and Joseph and furthermore to proclaim the birth of the only begotten Son of our Lord and God. You’ll recall from our reading that the angel of the Lord spoke to the shepherds about this new baby, saying, *“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”* Luke 2:10,11. They were indeed giving a birth announcement that night as they sang and praised God for the birth of His Son. They were indeed proclaiming a birth announcement that night, but in doing so, they were also heralding and proclaiming who that baby was and why His birth was worth proclaiming in the first place.

First of all, the angel tells us who this baby was by saying that this baby was *“Christ the Lord.”* Yes, He had ten little fingers and ten little toes which were bound up tight in swaddling cloths, but He was also the limitless and almighty and all-powerful Lord and God. Yes, He had a squeaky little newborn voice that cried out in the night for His mother, but He was also the Creator God whose voice spoke our Universe into being and created everything and placed everything just where He wanted. Yes, He was the firstborn Son of Mary and Joseph, but He was also the only begotten Son of God, the Christ, or the Second Person of the Trinity, and was so from all time and eternity!

But why is all that important? Why did the angel say that about Jesus and further, why does that proclamation make this birth announcement so special? Well, besides who He was, as stated above, “limitless,” “almighty,” “all-powerful,” “Creator God,” “Second Person of the Trinity,” the angel also tells us why He came.

He was all those things and yet, as the angel said it, He was also the “Savior” of this world. God Almighty? Yes. God Almighty come to save? Again, yes! Jesus, who was God in the flesh, came into our world as a tiny baby to bring His salvation and to be our Savior. You see, Jesus was proclaimed the Savior of the world, but He was only able to be the Savior of the world because He was no ordinary baby! The birth announcement and proclamation was the reminder that God had come to His creation! The angel tells us that indeed, God had come to His children!



“Proclaiming the Story”

December 14th

Read Luke 2:15-20

There is a human trait that we all share. We’re all very different from one another and very different in many and various ways, but there is at least one way in which we’re all the same. The shared human trait I’m talking about is the fact that when we experience a story or even hear an account of something amazing, we will tell others about what we’ve experienced or heard. Of course, social media has exploded this human trait, and so we’ll not only tell others the amazing things we’ve seen and heard and learned, but we’ll post and re-post it with a fervor unmatched even to total strangers! It might be an amazing meal we had with friends. It might be a birth announcement, as mentioned yesterday. It might be a movie we’ve experienced, or a show we’ve binged, or a football, baseball, soccer, hockey, or basketball game that wowed us. Whatever it is, when we’re impacted by something, we will, in turn, impact others by “proclaiming” what has been “proclaimed” to us.

Can you even imagine then, the impact that the visit from the angels had on the shepherds that night? Can you imagine what it would be like to be surrounded by not only the angels of God but also the glory of the Lord Himself? Can you imagine the amazing change that would have overtaken those men and women who were herding sheep that night on the hills? But in asking those questions, think about this question, too: Can you even imagine the shepherds keeping it to themselves? Of course not! You know they told the story, and you know they told the story over and over again! Repeatedly, they likely said things like: “The angels were massive!” “Their song was in perfect pitch and incredibly beautiful!” “They glowed individually and collectively lit up the hills like it was the middle of the day!” You can almost see them proclaiming the experience repeatedly and probably for the rest of their lives.

In fact, they would have initially proclaimed it to each other. Luke tells us this: *“When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us’”* Luke 2:15. We can understand just how excited they must’ve been! We can understand how fast they must’ve made their way to the stable and to Jesus! But we can also understand that on the way, they were likely proclaiming to one another the amazing story that they’d so quickly become a part of.

They had to be hugging each other and hooting and hollering over the truth of the Christ-child, and yet, they were probably telling and re-telling their experience to the very people who had experienced it themselves!

But of course, if that is true, they wouldn't have stopped there. They wouldn't just tell one another and remind one another and encourage one another...they'd also tell as many people as would listen to them of the wonders of the angels and the truth of the birth of the Christ, the Lord Jesus!

Luke tells us that, too: *“And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them”* Luke 2:17-19. They ran to see Jesus in the stable, and once they had seen the proof, they ran to tell others of the incredible Gospel message that had been proclaimed to them and to which they were now eyewitnesses. They knew the truth of Jesus, and they then spoke the truth of Jesus in response.

And I think you know this already, but let me remind you, the shepherds and their willingness to proclaim Jesus, lives on yet today in us who come to the stable and the manger year after year! We carry on the shepherds' legacy of proclamation! We hear and are embraced by the story of God's love for humanity. We recognize the truth of the message proclaimed to us of His amazing grace. We know who Jesus was and what He came to do. Taken up by that message and overwhelmed by God's love for us, we, in turn, proclaim the truth of this Gospel message, namely, *“God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life”* John 3:16. We not only celebrate as the shepherds did, but we also faithfully proclaim the story year after year to whoever will listen that they may wonder at what has been told them...and become proclaimers of the story right along with us!



“Proclaiming God’s Glory”

December 15th

Read Luke 2:15-20

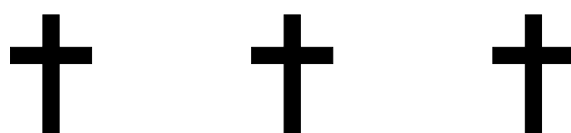
One of the disciplines I’ve encouraged Christian people to adopt over the years is to make sure that they give God glory whenever they see something, experience something, or are given something. You could call it “Saying thank you to Jesus” because it is that, but really, you’re glorifying and praising God for His many and wondrous gifts given to us as human beings. When you walk your dog in the early morning, you can stop to glorify God as you look at the beautiful morning sky and telling the Lord how amazing His artwork is. When you eat your breakfast and drink some strong coffee, you can glorify God by telling Him how good and plentiful His food supply is to you and further thank Him for the amazing tastes He gives us in this life...especially coffee! When you arrive safely at work or school or other destinations, and beyond that, have a car to drive to those destinations and gas in your tank to drive the car, you can glorify God for His amazingly abundant and providential hand in your life. Whatever the circumstance, we can most certainly find something to give glory to our Lord and God!

Thinking about that then...how would you have reacted had you been given the privilege of seeing Jesus just hours after He was born? What would you have done as you saw Mary and Joseph, tired and worn out, gazing at the newborn baby boy they’d been given laying there in the manger? How would you have responded after being given a personal audience with this young couple and their baby Jesus? I think you know you’d be as giddy as kid on Christmas Eve! And really, you’d be that way likely and simply based on the beauty of the moment. A new mother and father. A newborn baby. Worn out, maybe, all three of them, but nonetheless full of wonder and awe at the gift of a Son, which in turn would cause you to be full of wonder and awe at God’s providential hand in their lives.

But I think you know that you’d glorify God in the moment for something far greater than His providential hand in the life of a young couple, granting them a Son. You see, seeing Jesus, you’d be seeing God’s providence for the sins of the world. Luke tells us this just ahead of our reading: *“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger”* Luke 2:11,12. When the shepherds ran to Bethlehem, they ran to see the “...*baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger,*” but they also came to see the Savior, the Christ...the Lord!

When they came to the scene described above, they came not just to see a young couple and a newborn baby, they came to see what God had done to redeem the world from sin, death, and the power of the devil, by coming here Himself!

And what did they do? Luke tells us this: *“And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them”* Luke 2:20. Because of Jesus, they glorified God! Because of Jesus, they praised God! Because of Jesus...we do exactly the same! We proclaim God’s glory every day for His amazing and providential hand in our lives. We proclaim God’s glory when we eat and sleep and have housing, and cars, and kids, and all the amazing gifts God gives us in this life. But more than all of that combined, we glorify and praise God, proclaiming His glory, because of what He’s done for us in Jesus! Each and every day, we proclaim God’s glory for His goodness and His mercy to us!



“The Silent and Sleeping People”

December 16th

Read Luke 2:1-7

One of the traditions on Christmas Eve that is simply not negotiable is the lighting of candles and the singing of that Christmas Eve carol known as “Silent Night.” That holy moment at the end of every legit Christmas Eve service really is an unbelievably moving and amazingly beautiful tradition, one which people look for and long for each year. In fact, because Silent Night was first played on the guitar, we do the same, which helps to keep the moment very majestic and yet very personal...and so many people love it. You can see it in your mind’s eye, can’t you? You can see families huddling together and holding the candles as the soft glow lights up their faces. In fact, people love this Christmas Eve moment so much that every single year, multiple people ask me, or more accurately, tell me, “We are having candles while we sing Silent Night...right?” Indeed we will! Of course, we will! If I factored out Silent Night or even the candles for that matter, folks would be none-too-happy with this Pastor!

But have you ever considered what Silent Night says about our God and the Gospel? Have you ever stopped to think about what that dearly loved song says about God coming to His people?

Now, I don’t necessarily mean the words to the song...although that’s certainly part of it. Verse one goes like this: *“Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright. Round yon virgin mother and child. Holy infant so tender and mild. Sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.”* Great words about Christ’s mother, Mary. She was indeed a virgin, and therefore, this baby’s birth was no ordinary birth but, as we’ve already explored, was a miraculous intervention from God! Great words about Jesus, too! The King of kings and Lord of lords who chose to be a baby and a baby that was indeed the Lion of the Tribe of Judah but came to us both “tender” and “mild.” But I also want to point out that the amazing truth I’m referring to is the truth that this song gets at about the Savior of the world bringing His saving work to a “silent” and yes, “sleeping” world! The greatest event the world has ever known and it happened in this tiny little town while the residents silently slept!

But I bring it up because, again, it says something very important about what the Lord came to do and came to do for us. You see, God acted that night. God came into our world that night.

More importantly, God came to save His children that night. Notice however, in saying all of that about God, on the flip side the people were silently-sleeping while the Lord was actively-acting. God was on the move and His people were silently and quietly sleeping the night away. Let me say it this way: The people were passive, but our God was active!

And that truth from Christmas Eve so long ago gets at the heart and soul of the Gospel message and does so through and through. There are so many passages that remind us that we are the passive recipients of God's good and active work in our lives. Peter writes this: "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...*" 1Peter 1:3. Notice that God "caused us to be born again." In the same way that you had nothing to do with your physical birth, you also had nothing to do with your spiritual birth. You didn't decide to be born again. You didn't choose to be born again. You didn't even come to the realization that you needed to be born again.

In fact, the familiar and wonderful verses from Ephesians 2:8,9 get at this amazing truth as well: "*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*" God simply acted that first Christmas and brought His grace, His faith, His salvation, while we silently received His grace and mercy and our living faith in the living Lord Jesus.

Perhaps that's why we love Silent Night and the lighting of the candles so much? It's a wonderful reminder of the depth of our Lord's love for us. It's a wonderful reminder that our Lord loved us so much that when we wouldn't, when we couldn't, come to Him, He nevertheless came to us! When we were silent, He was speaking. When we were sleeping silently in our sin and sinfulness, He was wide awake making a way for us to awaken from our sin and through His intervention, to live for Him. When we needed Him, He was born into our world that we might be born again!



“People Coming Home”

December 17th

Read Luke 2:1-7

One of the more wonderful things about Christmas is coming home. Home is at the heart of Christmas. Home is where we want to be at Christmas. Family gathered and a sense of belonging together is wonderful any time of year, but especially as we celebrate the Lord’s birth. Of course, not all of us travel for Christmas or go to see mom and dad in another state, thereby “coming home,” but we all know the feeling of doing so. We also know it in our own homes long after we leave our home of origin. I’m writing this on November 1st, and we’re already making plans for the family to gather, the family to be coming home for Christmas. We’re planning the menu. We’re talking about who is coming over. We’re rearranging the furniture in our mind's eye to prepare for so many people in our home. We cannot wait to see our granddaughter and all the family open their gifts. We are anxiously awaiting all of us together, all of us coming home. And so we will. We will gather, we will come home.

I bring it up initially because that first Christmas “gathering” brought Mary and Joseph home as well. The celebration of the Advent of the Christ that first Christmas was marked by people returning to their home. They came to their home that first Christmas, as Luke tells us, because “...*all went to be registered, each to his own town.*” Everyone was ordered by Caesar to come to their family’s city of origin, no matter where they lived or where they had been dispersed. The crowds coming to Bethlehem, coming home, were, of course, totally unaware of the mighty miracle about to happen in a stable and manger that night. Though this was indeed Christmas, it wasn’t “Christmas” for them, of course. No, the families of the lineage of the city of Bethlehem knew nothing of this Jesus and His parents, but they nonetheless came home. The masses gathered their effects for travel and came to the city of Bethlehem and in doing so, came home.

In fact, so Mary and Joseph and the Lord Jesus came home too! In this regard, it’s important to note that we now know that the Holy Family wasn’t trying to check in at the “Holiday Inn of Bethlehem” and were subsequently turned away from a full hotel. No, the word we translate as “inn” was actually and simply the guest room of a relative who, in this instance, had no room in those guest accommodations for this family about to give birth. Apparently, though they didn’t have room in the guest accommodations, they did have room in a place inside the house where the animals stayed at night, a stable on the lower level of the home where they all could keep warm.

Knowing that they came to a relative's home is vitally and not a hotel, is vitally important information as it reminds us that indeed, Mary and Joseph and Jesus were literally coming home.

But I also take you there to remind you that Jesus coming home to Bethlehem was actually all about us coming home as well! Of course, I don't mean showing up at a house and opening presents and eating Christmas ham, all the while celebrating the Christmas message, I mean truly, permanently and securely coming home; coming home to that which is your true home! I'm sure you understand but let me make sure...Jesus came home to Bethlehem so that you could come home to Him! Paul writes it this way: *"So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord"* 2Corinthians 5:6-8. Where would we rather be? Home...at our true home...and that is, at home with the Lord. And indeed, we long for it because when Christ came home to Bethlehem, He came to ensure that every man, woman, and child could have the opportunity to know Him as their Savior from sin and furthermore that we might be welcomed by Him into His heavenly home as well!



“The Pure Heavenly Light”

December 18th

Read 2Corinthians 4:1-6

One of the more beautiful outdoor experiences you can have is being in the desert at night. Now, don't get me wrong, there are some scary things in the desert and night-time is when many of the scary things choose to come out and lurk around! Snakes and scorpions alone are enough to send you packing! But taking into consideration their seemingly unlimited number of compadres that come along with them, the host of crawling critters that live in that sandy environ, without adequate lighting, being there in the dunes and the dark of night, makes your skin crawl right along with them! When the clouds are out and the night is especially dark, that dark world can be a very, very frightening place to be!

But when the stars are out in full force and they, along with their “favorite friend,” the moon, brilliantly light up the desert floor, there's a distinct beauty along with a comforting peace that goes along with that heaven-born light. With the heavenly light shining brightly to illumine your way in the dark, you absolutely feel more comfortable. With that heavenly light, you even feel a wonderful sense of peace. Because of the light shining brightly from the heavens, shining brightly into the darkness and danger of that world, it's an extremely beautiful and yet also marvelously comforting sight in the moment!

What made me think of all that was remembering what is sometimes called “The Star of Bethlehem.” The Star of Bethlehem is, of course, the God-given heavenly light that shone brightly the night Jesus' was born and also continued to shine long after His birth. We know that the star in the sky was an amazing gift from God but also an important sign that the Savior was about to be born and furthermore indicating the place where it was to happen. After Christ's birth, that light continued to shine and did so for likely two or more years, coming to rest over the place where Mary, Joseph, and Jesus lived (See Matthew 2:9). That heavenly star shone bright in the night sky and did so to illuminate the people in the dark world below, something that many of us have experienced in the dark places of this world too.

But I bring all of that to you because the star shining in the darkness so long ago also proved to be an important reminder and a living illustration of what our Lord Jesus came to do for us as well.

In our next devotion, we'll get at the truth that Christ is indeed, as John 8:12 says it, "The Light of the World." Our text gets at that for us today when Paul writes, *"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"* 2Corinthians 4:6. To be sure, this is a reference pointing back to the creation of the world where God spoke this universe into being by saying "Let there be light!" But it's not just a reminder of our Creator God; it's a solid reminder of our Redeemer God, too!

The Star of Bethlehem was an image of the light from heaven that the Lord Jesus chose to bring into our sin-darkened world...from heaven above to earth below, the bright light of Christ illumined our world! The Lord's gift of that heavenly star and it's illustrative purpose regarding the life of Jesus in our world, was quite simply pointing out that our world can be a scary place where there are far more harmful things than scorpions and snakes.

Our world can be a place where we are regularly coming face to face with fearful and awful things! But God chose to shine His light in our world, first with the star, but more importantly with the light of His Son! Let me say it just a little bit differently: From heaven above, the light of Christ was sent to illuminate the darkness of our sin-darkened world...and so He did...and so He does! What scary things are you facing? What scary things have you faced in the past? Whatever your answer, the frightening things brought on by sin's darkness, those you have faced or will face, are always altered, changed, and at the very least minimized, by the light Christ came to bring to you long ago, and comes to bring you every day!



“The Passing on of the Light”

December 19th

Read John 8:12/Isaiah 9:2

One of the most moving parts of the Christmas Eve service is the way in which we do the candle lighting at the end of the service. Now I don't mean the part where we have all our candles lit and there's a soft-amber glow on faces while we sing Silent Night together, although that's extremely moving too (see December 17th's devotion for that). What I mean is the moment in the service where the Pastor or worship assistant takes a large taper or tapered-candle and lights it from the main Christ-candle in our worship spaces. (If you're unfamiliar with the Christ-candle, it's the candle closest to the baptismal font in the Sanctuary, and in the FLC, it's the one we use when we have baptisms in that space.) Once the Pastor or worship assistant has their own light from the Christ-candle, they then pass that flame from the Christ-candle to the rest of the worshippers assembled and do so one row at a time. So many Christmas Eves have ended with me personally walking down the center aisle, lighting the candles of the worshippers on either side and offering a very personal moment when I'm able to say "Merry Christmas" up close to our wonderful members. Many Christmas Eves, I've been privileged to be the one passing the Christ-candle-light to those who have come to worship Jesus and hear the Gospel and receive His light in their lives.

Having said that, most of the people assembled completely miss the moment that the initial candle is lit from the Christ-candle. Most people miss when the Pastor or worship assistant grabs the initial flame from the Christ-candle. Understandably, most people miss the lighting from the Christ-candle when it happens because they are getting ready to receive the flame in their row, or are managing their kiddos in their velvety Christmas outfits, or even simply preparing to sing "Silent Night." Whatever the reason, most people miss the visual and the import of lighting our candles directly from the Christ-candle. But why is that important to see and furthermore, to acknowledge?

Well, John 8:12 gets at that. While John 8:12 isn't exactly a Christmas text, it is a text that nonetheless points to the truth of Christmas and to this very moving and holy moment in the Christmas Eve services. Let me say it again...our candles are lit from the Christ-candle. Let me say it then, according to the text: "*Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life"*" John 8:12.

Notice first that Jesus is in fact “the light of the world.” We have a “Christ-candle” in the building for a reason and the reason is located in John 8:12. Our Christ-candle is a living and continuous illustration of John 8:12 and Christ’s words there, namely, that Christ came into our world so long ago to bring us His eternal light. Christ didn’t “become the Light of the world” at Bethlehem’s stable, but was from all time and eternity the Light of the World who chose to arrive as a baby boy in a manger. Let me say it again then, Christ came into our world so long ago to bring us His everlasting light.

And I said it that way because that’s the second half of this verse. Jesus reminds us that He is the Light of the World but, as Jesus Himself said it, “*Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*” The light from Christ lights our way...the light of Christ removes the darkness from my path...the light from Christ given to us both now and forevermore. Said another way: Originating from Christ who is the light, light is then given to us by His Holy Spirit; given to us who desperately need the light He brings.

You see, apart from Him we would not only walk in darkness, but we’d dwell in darkness, or for that matter, we’d drown and die in darkness. Apart from Christ who is the Light of the World, we’d be a people groping around, always afraid, never knowing His peace or His presence. But as our Isaiah 9:2 reading tells us, in and through Christ, “*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.*” The beautiful imagery at the end of the Christmas Eve service is a reminder of this very thing, namely, that the light of Christ came into our world in Bethlehem’s stable and in and through Him, we will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life!



“Petrified by the Light”

December 20th

Read Luke 2:8-14

When I was a seminary student in St. Louis in the early nineties, I worked a couple jobs while being a full-time student. We needed the money but I'm also not exactly a “just do one thing” kind of guy. So I worked with a house-flipper, hanging drywall and painting during the day, and I worked for a caterer waiting tables at night. Both jobs taught me so much, but I must admit I genuinely loved working catering the most. I was able to learn so much about cooking and presentation of food and got to see “behind the scenes” in some of the most amazing homes and incredible businesses in the St. Louis area. That said, I'd also have to admit that the thing I didn't like about catering was the hours. We'd often work twelve-hour shifts and that then meant we'd regularly be out late at night or even into the wee hours of the morning when the party finally broke up.

One late-night/early-morning on the way home from a mid-summer party, one of those huge St. Louis-style storms hit. Per the usual, there was loud-pounding thunder and indiscriminate lightning and torrential rain. The storm seemed to completely swallow us up in our little catering van and so we were driving as cautiously and as slowly as we could to make it home safely. All of a sudden, a bolt of lightning hit, and when it hit, we heard the sound of that lightning and saw the flash...all at the same time. I have a feeling you know what that means. Don't know that the van got hit directly though we thought it did, but it was certainly an extremely close strike, right by our van. So close by us, in fact, that we were completely engulfed in its brilliantly eye-cringing light! The light was so brilliantly bright and so all-encompassing that the lot of us were completely overtaken and blown away in the moment...screaming and yelling like a bunch of little kids who'd seen something really scary...kind of comical to be honest.

Now, I bring you that St. Louis story to in fact transport you backwards to the brilliant light from heaven on the hills of Bethlehem two millennia ago, and the fact that what I saw that night likely pales in comparison to what the shepherds experienced on the hills of Bethlehem. The fear and trepidation that my coworkers and I felt that night had to be just a microcosm of what the shepherds felt when they were totally engulfed by the light of heaven itself and accosted with the angelic host...all the winged ones glowing, and all bringing with them, the “*Glory of the Lord!*”

Our text reminds us of those famous Christmas Eve words: *“And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear”* Luke 2:8,9.

Notice first that like a bolt of lightning and its flash, the brilliant light of the “glory of the Lord” was completely surrounding them and overtaking the shepherds and their families! But to the point of today, notice then their response to that brilliant heavenly light, as Luke records it for us: *“...and they were filled with great fear.”* Sounds like our screaming and yelling in the van that night may just have happened on the hills of Bethlehem, too!

Indeed they would be afraid, and yes, possibly screaming and yelling! But indeed, they should be afraid. They should be fearful. Let me remind you that while our Lord is loving and merciful and kind, He is also awe-full, overwhelming, and frightening. To be engulfed by His light would elicit fear and trepidation from the stoutest of souls, Christian or not. God’s presence can, as I’ve titled this devotion, “petrify” us...and to be frank, it should. God’s pure and perfect, overwhelming and overtaking presence and light, are a frightening place for mere mortals to find themselves!

So...what’s the answer? How do we go from afraid of being in God’s brilliant presence to no longer being afraid to stand before Him? That’s what He wants for us...so how does it happen?

Well, the Bible says, *“Perfect love casts out fear”* 1John 4:18. Perfect love casts fear out...the perfect love of God found in Jesus Christ, that is! Christ’s perfect love for us casts out all fear of God in our hearts. In fact, remember what the angel of the Lord says to the shepherds: *“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord”* Luke 2:10,11. In other words, the angel of the Lord pointed the shepherds away from the fear of the brilliant light of God on the hills, by pointing them to the brilliant Light of the World, our Lord and Savior...yes, our Lord but also our Savior...Jesus Christ! The fear of being in God’s presence is completely taken away by being safely ushered into God’s presence by the one and only Savior, Jesus. He came to us so long ago so that when we die or the Second Coming happens, we will no longer be afraid of facing the light of God, but we’ll be at peace knowing that we will be safe and at home and at peace and yes, completely engulfed by the love and the light of our Heavenly Father forever!



“The Prince of Peace”

December 21st

Read Isaiah 9:6 and Philippians 4:7

There is an interesting thing that happens when you become a parent. You are immediately given crazy joy and over-the-top-excitement over the little critter that God has given you! You see the positive pregnancy test and can't believe what you're seeing and that you've been given the gift of having a baby of your own! You walk through those forty weeks with joy and anticipation over what is to come and envision what your baby boy or girl will be like and what it will be like to be their parents. That nine months of reading about your baby in every book and online resource you can consume, along with absorbing what your doctor says about your baby's growth at every appointment, are nothing short of heaven itself!

And then one day, the pains show up quite unannounced and the labor and the delivery commences...and you are quite all-of-a-sudden handed a one-way ticket to a train leaving the station for reality-central. In a matter of hours, it hits you and hits you hard. Not only do I have to go through birth but I gotta take care of this little thing? I don't get to simply tote the baby around in the womb and have him or her completely encapsulated and totally managed and fully taken care of? I'm responsible for this child's welfare and well-being...every single day for the rest of his/her life? It all comes a-tumblin'-in on you like a ton of bricks the moment the doctor or nurse lays that wrinkly little bugger on your chest and proclaims, "Congratulations!" You "hear" them say instead, "You're responsible for this child's life...don't mess it up!" and trepidation sets in and in short order, you go from joyful to frightened, frightened about the responsibility, frightened about the future.

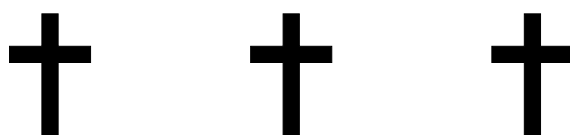
Mary and Joseph had to have been going through those same normal emotions. They'd already had a wild ride explaining and processing this pregnancy that was given by the Holy Spirit of God! They independently saw angels, both in person and in a vision, announcing this Child's arrival and, therefore, had to have been wondering what was next. They then went through all the normal and difficult birth-biology as they delivered their baby boy all by themselves in a stable filled with animals looking on. And there they lay together, the three of them, exhausted, wiped out, and yes, probably frightened over what was to come. What would this baby boy be to them? How would He affect them and change them? What would the future hold for them with Him in their lives?

We all go through it. Parents or not. We all experience fear and trepidation in this world. What's the future hold for me? What's next for me? Ever been there? I have a feeling you have been and may have been multiple times. You're not sure what's going to happen in the days and weeks to come. Your mind runs at a hundred miles an hour, trying to process what you're going through but also trying to come up with solutions to the problem or situation. Your mind runs at a hundred miles an hour, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and yet there seems to be no resolution whatsoever or back door out of the situation.

So what do you need in those moments? How do you handle it when things come your way? Well, let me repeat the questions above that may have been on the hearts of Mary and Joseph so long ago, but this time, ask and answer them for you through the words of our text from Isaiah nine.

Who is this "baby boy" to us? He is our Lord and Master, or as our text says it "Mighty God" and "Everlasting Father." I can assure you, the "Mighty God" and "Everlasting Father" has our troubling situations well in hand and is also capable of managing it better than you and I are able! How does this Babe in Bethlehem affect you and change us? He is not just our "Mighty God" and "Everlasting Father," He is also our "Wonderful Counselor" and brings us wisdom and insight and direction far beyond what our capabilities, intellect or experience could ever provide!

But finally, what does the future hold for your life? Well, I think you know, there are going to be times that are "good" and situations that are "bad" and yes, some of them may just get downright "ugly" too. In those moments when your world is rocked and seems to be flying apart, you stop and remember Isaiah 9:6 and that Jesus, the little boy born in Bethlehem's stable, is finally your "Prince of Peace." Even when the problems, difficulties, and fear-bringing situations don't change or dissipate, you have, in your Savior Jesus, what the Bible calls "*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 4:7) because He is your Prince of Peace! He was that for Mary and Joseph, He is that for you too! Thank you, Jesus, for being our Wonderful Counselor, our Mighty God, our Everlasting Father, but most of all, for being our Prince of Peace!



“The Prince of Peace”

December 22nd

Read Isaiah 9:6 and John 16:33

As I write this particular devotion, our world is swimming around in a tumultuous sea of unrest. Of course, our world, being broken by sin and inhabited by sinners, is always in a state of unrest. But right now seems to be so bad...worse than usual. And we're feeling it. The Ukrainians are still fighting off the aggressor and despot and president of Russia. Hamas chose to pick a violent and bloody fight with Israel and Israel has responded with ten-fold the violence and bloodshed towards them. Our own government, primarily the Republicans and Democrats, are locked in a battle all their own, not as bloody as the above-named conflicts of course, but one that's leaving America paralyzed and the American public scratching their heads as to who is running the show. And speaking of the American public, we're drowning in debt, experiencing violence in our streets, schools, workplaces and public venues, all the while watching our younglings die of overdose and be hamstrung by anxiety and depression. We're collectively wondering just how bad this thing's going to get and we pray for peace and pray for peace and pray for peace.

So...if Jesus is the “Prince of Peace” as God's Word proclaims Him to be and we are His beloved children, why doesn't He fix all this? To be honest, there are days when you can be driven to wonder, where is God in all of this? Why doesn't He bring the peace that seems to be at the very core of who He is, the very heart of His nature as our God. We pray for peace and yet, peace does not come. We pray for peace, and all we get is violence, anger, hatred, prejudice, and malice. We pray for peace but our prayers seem to fall on deaf ears. Where is the peace Jesus promised to bring?

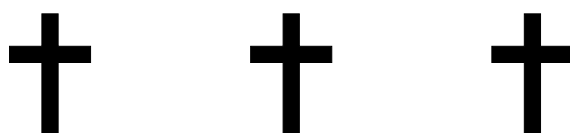
Here enters our second reading from the Gospel of John. Is Jesus the “Prince of Peace”? Yes, Isaiah reminds us He is. But in effect, Jesus also says that He is in the words of John 16:33. *“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”* Notice something right away, Christian. Jesus is the Prince of Peace, but He nonetheless promises something that we just don't want to hear, namely, *“In the world you will have tribulation.”* We think this place we live is going to get better and things will level out and wars and hatred and fighting will cease. But Jesus tells us “Yeah...no.” Ain't going to happen, Christian. Jesus reminds us that this sin-torn world is a place of “tribulation.”

This sin-torn, sin-saturated world is a mess and will continue to be so until the Lord Jesus returns and gives us eternal peace.

But Jesus is also promising us peace right now in this world. Granted, we'll always have unrest and trial and tribulation the whole of our lives and the whole of this world's existence. That being heard and further received from Christ's words about "tribulation," we also need to hear and receive Christ's words about the peace He comes to bring.

Let me remind you that though Jesus said, "In the world you will have tribulation," He also said, "...take heart, I have overcome the world." Indeed He has! Our Prince of Peace has given us His peace, the peace that passes understanding in a sin-saturated world! Our Prince of Peace has given us His peace by "overcoming the world"! Jesus overcame the things of this world, namely, sin, death and the power of the devil and He did so for us! He overcame sin, death and the power of the devil so that, as He said it, "...in me you may have peace."

In fact, think finally of the world Jesus came into when He was born in Bethlehem. Not a whole lot different from ours with horrible leaders like King Herod. Violence and hatred and bloodshed were the norm. Just living in that day and time was risky. In other words, Jesus willingly entered our world in spite of all it's unrest, and He did so that first Christmas night that, in and through Jesus, in the midst of sin and sinfulness...all generations might have peace from none other than the Prince of Peace! Do we pray for the return of Christ and the cessation of sin and it's consequences? You bet we do! But nevertheless, we live in the peace of Jesus in the middle of this upside-down and backwards world! Indeed we do. Every day, until that day, we live in and grasp hold of the peace of Jesus until that day when peace and the Prince of Peace will be all we know!



“The Prince of Peace”

December 23rd

Read Isaiah 9:6 and Revelation 19:11-16

In recent years, many Americans have become fascinated with the culture surrounding the British Royals. Admittedly, some of us just don't care...but I think all of us are at least familiar with their ways. If you watch the series “The Crown” or even the series “Queen Victoria,” you get the gist of how the Royals live and do life with others in their kingdom. There's lots of deference demanded. There's lots of respect expected. There's a general tenor that some folks are simply more important than others and that those who are lesser than the royals have a responsibility and obligation to show reverence or pay homage to the royals who hold the higher class.

What got me thinking about this was the title for Jesus from our repetitious reading of Isaiah 9:6, namely, the title of the devotions in this segment, “Prince of Peace.” This idea that Jesus is, as the last few days have told us, the “Prince” to be sure, but also the “Prince of Peace.” Of course, Jesus is not just a prince like Prince Harry or the future King of England, Prince William. Jesus is not just a prince like any ordinary prince on this earth who demands obeisance solely based on class ranking. No, Jesus is “The Prince.” In fact, I had you read Revelation 19:11-16 because that text gets at who this “Prince” really is, when John writes what he sees, “*On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords*” Revelation 19:16. This isn't just a prince, it's not even just “The Prince”, this is the Creator God and is therefore rightly and appropriately labeled as “The King of Kings and Lord of Lords.”

So, you'd expect that the bowing of knees and the obligatory obeisance would naturally follow for this King's subjects, this Lord's vassals. And...yes...indeed all will bow to Him. Don't get me wrong, being found in the presence of God will bring deference and obeisance, it will happen. Remember those famous words about Jesus in Philippians 2:9-11: “*Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*” Every single knee will bow! Every single tongue will confess! In fact, before the King of Kings and Lord of Lords we will all humbly give over our homage whether we did so in this life or not!

But while our King of Kings and Lord of Lords deserves our knee bowing and tongue confessing, remember that though He is our “Prince,” He is also, and will be forever, our “Prince of Peace.” While the image of our Lord and Savior in Revelation 19 is awesome and terrible and frightening, we remember from Isaiah 9:6 that this King and Lord came to our planet at Christmas to bring us not His wrath but to bring us His peace.

Let me say it just a little differently: our King and Lord, and more to the point, our Creator God, came to us in the person of Jesus to bring us His peace, or, as Paul wrote in Romans 5:1, He came to bring us true and everlasting peace between us and Himself! In Jesus, you are now and forever at peace with Almighty God! Paul writes it this way: *“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”* Romans 5:1. Paul reminds us here that we have been “justified” or made right with God through faith in Him. But he also reminds us here that we’ve been given “peace with God” through our Lord and Savior Jesus.

Peace with God means that you can have peace every day of your life, but you can also have peace about standing before Him on Judgment Day, awaiting eternal life! You won’t be driven to your knees; you won’t be pressed to say Jesus is Lord! You are at peace with God now, and therefore, you are at peace with God forever. Will His Almighty presence elicit our humble, knee-bowing, tongue-confessing response? Yes...He is God, after all. Will the Lord invite us into His heavenly Kingdom and allow us into the permanent peace of paradise? Yes...He is our King and Lord, but He is also our Prince of Peace!





Gloria Dei

Lutheran Church