

Peace on Earth

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Preacher: Ife Ojetayo

[0:00] Glory to God in the highest. And on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.

! Let us pray. We bless you that when the fullness of time had come, You sent forth your Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive adoption as sons.

And as we reflect on this gracious divine act, we pray, Lord, that you would give us the hearts to hear and hearts to respond in faith to your Son.

It is in his name we pray. Amen. Amen. It is my joy to welcome you this evening to the Church of the Holy Trinity.

And I want to say a very Merry Christmas to all of you. My name is Ethel Jutayo. I am the pastor here, for those of you who are visiting.

[1:14] And I just want to also say that if you are visiting, we would like to give you a gift. There's a mug in the back there. We like to say we want to mug you. But really, we just give you a mug.

It's in the back table as you come in in the narthex. Please take one. There's a slip of info card in there. Will you take the mug, fill out the card, and leave it on the table, if you will.

So we might be able to follow up with you and pray with you. But we are delighted that you are worshiping with us this evening. We have today, this evening, as our gospel reading, the account of Jesus' birth.

It's a familiar passage, isn't it? I'm sure that as I was reading the gospel passage, some of you were mousing it along with me. It's so familiar. It's the script to every Christmas pageant.

The words of these verses are even in Christmas cards. And I want our contemplation this evening to be on the most familiar verse in that passage.

[2:21] That is Luke 2, verse 14. The phrase that captures our attention the most in this verse is, Peace on earth.

It's the slogan for this time of the year. As you've seen, we have it on our Christmas banner right here. And rightly so. This angel song of peace was sung on the outskirts of the little town of Bethlehem.

Yet, even now, 2,000 years on from the time of this great event, within the present day Bethlehem, you will hear, even today, you will hear the sound of warfare.

Bombs going off in the distance. Rockets whistling across the skies. Where is the peace the angels announced?

Is it a lie? Are we fooling ourselves? Or perhaps the right question should be, What kind of peace did the angels announce at the birth of our Lord?

[3:37] You know, it's so easy to confuse this pronouncement of peace with an end to all earthly warfare and discord.

And we wish it to be so, especially around this time of Christmas. We even attempt, in our own little meager ways, to bring about peace.

In July 1914, World War I began. And on Christmas Eve of that first year of the war, all through the Western Front, there was a spontaneous ceasefire.

It was known as the Christmas Truce. The opposing armies came out of their trenches. They exchanged smokes and drinks with each other.

They played games. This lasted for about a week in many fronts of the war all throughout the Western Front. These soldiers who had just been killing each other in this brutal war were now singing Christmas carols together in German, in French, in English, whatever language.

[4:54] They can sing it. And you would think that that would be an end to the war right there. But such was the darkness of the human heart that the people in charge became increasingly bothered

by this spontaneous ceasefire.

And they sought to suppress the peace because they thought that it would threaten their objectives. Now, the book, Peace on Earth, The Christmas Truce of 1914.

This is a book written by David Bohr. If you have an interest in learning more about it, you can pick up that book and read it, read more about it. But that was the first year of the war.

The war could have ended. But no, it continued for four more years. With untold deaths and carnage in its wake.

Peace on Earth was momentary and brief for those men. You know, in truth, we always know we cannot, we cannot, by human cleverness, bring about peace in the world.

[6:15] Because we haven't. All through our human history, every new century brings about a higher death toll than the previous one.

Because of the unseasoned warfare and strife in the human mind and heart. all our efforts at peace, although commendable they are, and although we should continue to strive for peace, but all our human efforts at the end of the day is ultimately unsuccessful.

It hasn't pan out. Never has. You know, Jesus himself said that he has not come to bring peace in this age.

He said he hasn't come to bring an end to hostility in this world. He says so in Luke 21, verse 10. He says, nation will rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom.

And in case you think that Jesus is just talking about relational peace, listen to his words in Luke chapter 12. He says this to his disciples, do you think that I have come to give peace on earth?

[7:31] No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three.

They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.

Those are Jesus' words. All who are believers in Jesus know a bit of this division that Jesus speaks of. When your allegiance to Christ puts you at odds with the world's values, with your unbelieving family and friends' values, you know of the division that Jesus speaks of here.

That's the division he's referring to. And even more so, some of our brothers and sisters in Muslim countries know of it more than we do. We have some, Lisa and I have some dear friends who are missionaries in the Muslim country.

And they are preaching the gospel to people in that country. And they expect that those people, when they come to faith in Jesus, will have to live in fear for their very lives from their own family members.

[8:58] So peace on earth, as the angels proclaimed it, is not the absence of division in this world. In fact, Jesus seems to be saying he has come to be the cause of division.

Now, if you're thinking at this point, if I didn't come to the Christmas Eve service to listen to a doner of a sermon, where's the joy, where's the hope, where's the love, where's the peace?

I want you to, I want to ask you, bear with me for a moment. There is good news here. There is good news here for all of us. The peace that is announced by the angels is not a lie.

It's not fiction. It is real. It is universal. And it is everlasting. And you might be happy to know that we've actually sang the words that answers our question in our M that we sang just earlier now, Off the Arrow's Angels Sing.

Remember the second line of the first verse. It goes like this. Peace on earth and mercy mild. God and sinners reconciled.

[10:13] There it is. There it is. That's the peace the angels spoke of. Peace on earth. Notice that it is peace on earth.

You must receive this peace on earth. You must receive it now if you are to have it. This peace is objective. It is total.

It is unconditional. It is not relative, peace, or circumstantial like the Christmas cruise of World War I.

Here is an everlasting peace. And the peace is between who? It is between us and God. It is God and sinners reconciled.

That's the two warring factions to which the announcement of peace was pronounced. Now, I don't know if you knew this.

[11:17] We were at war with God. It's not really a war of two equal fighting groups. It's more like a rebellion on our part.

A rebellion of ungrateful upstarts, of wicked sinners, of disobedient children. It was a rebellion that was always doomed to fail.

And I mean to say that we were defeated in this war with God. We were hopeless even. We were helpless in our guilt before a just and holy God.

Our sin had cut us off from the source of all life. All joy and all peace we were cut up from. And we were helpless to save ourselves.

The wrath of God was justly upon us. And yet here are the angels. Have you ever thought about it? Luke tells us it was the host of heaven.

[12:23] Do you know what host means? It means an army. But they didn't come to wage war. They appeared before those shepherds who were terrified and rightly so.

They've never seen such fearsome power before them ever. They couldn't even imagine it. But instead of being obliterated, there was an announcement, great joy, great good news for them. Peace. Peace. That was the words of the angels. That is why Jesus came into the world. It is, he came to bring peace with God.

peace. And that is the peace we need most. And this is what the Apostle Paul says in Colossians 1 verse 22.

He says, But now, that is, now, Jesus, he, has reconciled you by his physical body through his death to present you holy, faultless, and blameless before him.

[13:33] That's why Jesus came. To reconcile you by his physical body through his death to present you holy, faultless, and blameless before God.

Here is the announcement of that peace. In other words, this child born of Mary, this glorious wonder of the incarnation and the birth of our Lord that we celebrate, whereby we confess that God took flesh.

He was born of a woman into our world. That is, he became human like us, suffered like us, hungered like us, thirsted like us.

the one who holds the universe by the word of his power, the radiance of God's glory, humbled himself to take on our humanity so that he might lift us up.

This is the peace that is proclaimed. This is the gracious announcement of the angels to all the earth. God noted that it is to all the earth.

[14:48] There is no distinction here in this announcement of the gospel of good news. But it is crucial that we also should note that the peace that is offered is not universal.

Do you see it there? It is announced to all the world. The peace is announced to all the world, but it is only for a particular type of people. It belongs only to those in whom God is well pleased.

That means only those who obtain this peace are those who are favored by God. That is what it means to be well pleased. To be favored by God.

Now the question then is how do you get God's favor? How do you get God's favor? How then do we receive this favor so we may enter into this peace that has been announced?

Well, the answer is that it can only be obtained through Jesus Christ. That is why the angels were rejoicing and announcing his birth. That is why he came into the world.

[15:55] And you then can have this peace by coming to him, Jesus Christ, repenting of your sins, trusting that he has accomplished your rescue by conquering sin and death, by his death upon the cross.

peace, peace, peace, peace, peace, I live with, you. And to all who have placed their hope in him from all nations and tribes, no distinction.

The only distinction is that whether you'll find in Christ or not in Christ. And so to all who have placed their hope in this Jesus, they have peace with God.

And this is why Jesus himself says this to us, peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives, do I give it to you.

We know the peace of the world, don't we? It's everlasting. There is treaties signed and treaties broken. That is the repeat on repeat on human history.

[17:03] There are wars, the first great war, World War I, was not called World War I. It was called the Great War and it was referred to as the war to end all wars. But within a generation there was another world war.

And every century sin, every decade sins, there are more debts than the previous ones because of human strife. And we also know this, the world's peace does not last, even the peace that we try to gin up in our own hearts.

We can deceive ourselves all we want, but we know that there is no peace because we know our conscience speaks against us that God is a just and holy God and we are sinners, unworthy to be in his presence, separated from him because of our sins.

But here Jesus says, peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you because he has accomplished all that is required to make peace with God.

And he says it to us, not as the world gives, do I give it to you. And then he says to you, brothers and sisters in Christ, let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

[18:25] That's John 14:27. Do you have this peace? peace? If you do, eat the word of your Lord. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

Trust in his word. Romans 5 says this, therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

This is the peace that we have. Another hymn writer says this regarding the world's peace, in distinction, in contrast to God's peace.

He says, Yet with the woes of sin and strife the world has suffered long. Beneath the angels strain have rolled two thousand years of wrong.

And man at war with man hears not the love song which they bring, that is which the angels bring. But the hymn writer invites us and says, Oh, hush the noise, ye men of strife, and hear the angels sing.

[19:40] Can I invite you, even tonight, to hush the noise, the cacophony of this world, and hear only the angels sung, glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace among those with whom he is pleased.

May the peace of Christ be with you all. I want to again wish you a very happy and Merry Christmas. Let's have a moment of silent reflection as you turn your life over to the Savior.

Thank you. If you're able, please please hear or sit.

We're going to hear the prayer of the people. After each prayer, we're all excited, silently, or loud, and people to be alive. On this morning, holy night, our Lord's birth, let us pray for ourselves and all those who need our prayers, saying, Lord, hear our prayer.

for peace in our troubled world, that the darkness of war and injustice can be replaced, but the life of peace is in the world.