

Luke 2:8-20 (1984 NIV)

God's Peace Unto Us

Luke 2

8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

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

11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.

12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

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

14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

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

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child,

18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

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

Introduction

A woman was out Christmas shopping with her two children. After many hours of looking at row after row of toys and everything else imaginable, and hearing both her children asking for everything they saw on those many shelves, this woman finally made it out of the store with her two kids to the lift.

She was feeling what so many of us feel during this festive time of the year—all stretched and tired out.

Finally the lift doors opened and there was already a crowd in the lift. The woman pushed her way in with her two kids, along with all her bags of stuff.

When the doors closed, she let out a big sigh and decided she couldn't take it anymore. So, she said out loud but to no one in particular, "Whoever started this whole Christmas thing should be arrested and hung."

From the back of the crowded lift, a quiet calm voice responded, "Don't worry lady. I believe they not only already arrested Him but also crucified Him."

Who is that "Him"? He is none other than Jesus Christ.

Yes, in the busyness of all our Christmas preparation and celebration, what can be easily forgotten?

- We don't forget the shopping bargains.
- We don't forget the Christmas tree.
- We don't forget the Christmas party and gifts.
- We don't forget the festive greetings.
- We don't forget Santa Claus (of course!)

But we can easily forget Jesus Christ—that He is the reason for the season. He was born a human baby. Later in His life, He was crucified on the Cross so that those who believe in Him as Saviour and Lord can have peace with God and receive the gift of eternal life.

Our passage today brings us back to that first Christmas night when the angels appeared to the shepherds. At that time, the angels proclaimed the deepest peace possible for mankind.

But we ask today, "Did these angels make a mistake? Did they give the wrong message?"

We so question today because after two major world wars and hundreds of minor ones, the world is still far from peaceful. Those who have enough to feed and shelter themselves are still far from being peaceful in mind and spirit. Material abundance cannot guarantee peace.

Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy on 15 Sep. 2008. At the time of its collapse, Lehman was the fourth-largest investment bank in the United States with 25,000 employees worldwide. It had \$639 billion in assets and \$613 billion in liabilities. It was a sombre reminder that nothing is forever—even in the riches of the financial and investment world.

(<https://www.investopedia.com/articles/economics/09/lehman-brothers-collapse.asp>)

Indeed, even the mightiest in this world cannot last forever. Earthly might is not able to guarantee peace. So, many are still searching and seeking to do all they can and what they can in order to find peace.

Perhaps, to hide their lack of peace, they are turning to some hollow celebration at various times in order to pretend that they have joy, peace, and hope in them. And Christmas is one of such times to these people. Are you one of them today?

But you know, the angels who sang that beautiful proclamation of peace on that first Christmas night are still singing the same today. Yes, God's peace is for us to claim this Christmas. This peace is God's gift for us not only for the Christmas season, but for every day of our lives.

No, the angels did not make a mistake or give a wrong message when they proclaimed God's peace unto mankind on that first Christmas night. But to claim and experience this peace of God, we need to understand three things. One is ...

I. Understand that God is no respecter of persons.

On the night when Jesus Christ was born, His birth was announced by an angel. This announcement was not merely about the birth of a son, but the birth of a Saviour. It was such an important event that only an angel was deemed fit enough to announce it.

But notice that the first to hear the news were not the religious leaders or other important figures in Israel at that time. Rather, the first to hear were the shepherds in the field. These were people of low social standing at that time.

They had no proper homes. They were on the move and living outdoors in the fields. They lived a hard life; they watched over their flocks even at night. Because of the very nature of their work, they found it difficult to participate in the social and religious life of Jewish society. And when you can't do that, you are generally regarded as an outcast in Jewish society.

So, why did God send an angel to announce this very important event to these hardly important people? The reason is this—to tell us that God is no respecter of persons. He does not practice favouritism. He has a personal interest in everyone, regardless of class and standing.

Some think that they can only come to God if they are someone special with some special qualifications. The findings of a survey on Singapore households once revealed Christianity as very much a middle-income religion in the country.¹ That certainly makes God in the Bible seems like a God of the elite class.

¹ <https://saltandlight.sg/faith/is-the-middle-class-church-of-singapore-getting-too-comfortable-wealth-prosperity-gospel-money-affluence>

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But today, the Bible corrects that and tells us that this is not true of God. He is also the God of the shepherds in the fields, the ordinary (even marginalized) people in those days. God is no respecter of persons. He wants to be the God of everybody regardless of class and standing.

I remember how eager I was to announce the birth of my first-born child (that “first-time father” feeling). But I didn’t run round the wards and telling everyone, “Hey, my baby has come!” I didn’t run down to the road and telling every stranger, “Hey, my baby has come!” I didn’t chase after every person in my neighbourhood and telling each person, “Hey, my baby has come!”

In spite of my excitement and eagerness to tell people the birth of my first-born child, who did I first announce the news to? Yes, I announced it first to my mum, my in-laws, my relatives, my close friends. What I am trying to say is that I first announced it to people close to my heart.

And God first got the angel to announce the birth of Jesus Christ to the shepherds in the field. You know what that means? It means these ordinary (even marginalized) shepherds were close to the heart of God.

Indeed, we need not have to first struggle out of our ordinariness in order to come close to the heart of God, to be special to Him. You know, we can never be good enough to come to God on our own merits.

We can only come to God because of His grace. We come because He accepts us as we are. We come because even in our ordinariness, God sees us as special and we are close to His heart. You don’t need to become someone special to come to God. The only thing you need is the willingness to come to Him, to let Him change your heart and not you changing His heart. God already has a heart for you. Do you have a heart for God?

Sometimes, we are hesitant in admitting our need for God because we want to change certain things first before we come to God—we want God to be the benefactor of what we can do. But God wants us to be the benefactors of what He can do.

You may be the most wealthy, the most intelligent, the most esteemed person in where you are today; or you may be the direct opposite of all these. But we all need God. And He is no respecter of persons—He does not favour the rich at the expense of the poor; neither does He favour the poor at the expense of the rich. He sees us all the same. In His sight, we all start with the same need—i.e. sinners who need to come to peace with Him.

My Chinese name is “Chee Wai”. It means “great ambition” or “great aspiration”. Before I became a Christian, I really tried to live up to my name. I had many ambitions and aspirations. I wanted to be special in so many ways.

So, I was moving in so many directions that I don’t have any sense of stability and rested-ness in me. I was restless; I was not at peace with myself; I was fighting within myself.

One Sunday, I heard a preacher proclaimed that a person without a sense of stability and rested-ness was like a ship without an anchor, being tossed about by the waves of circumstances. He preached that God had sent Jesus Christ so that we could have an anchor in life. With Jesus Christ in our lives, we can experience stability and rested-ness because Jesus gives us a sense of rest in Him. Indeed, the preacher was right—when I believed in Jesus Christ and became a Christian, I experienced a deep sense of rest in me. I was no longer fighting within myself. I was at peace with myself because I discovered that even in my ordinariness, God had accepted me as special and held me close to His heart.

Are you fighting within yourself today? Are you not at peace with yourself today? Are you thinking that you need to be someone special and extraordinary before you can be loved and accepted by God?

If so, God’s peace is for you to claim and experience today. But you need first to understand that God who offers this peace is no respecter of persons. By His grace, He accepts you regardless of your extraordinariness or ordinariness. Would you come to Him as you are today and confess your need for Him?

A second thing we need to understand about God in order to claim and experience His peace is ...

II. Understand that God has come down to us in Jesus Christ.

What’s the intention of God in the birth of Jesus Christ, in bringing Christmas to the world?

- Not because we need another holiday.
- Not because the retailers in shopping malls need customers to buy their goods.

The intention of God is spelt out for us when the angels sang out in praise from heaven, “Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to men on whom his favor rests” (Luke 2:14).

This verse tells us of the stature of God. We are told that God is one in the highest. He is the highest, ultimate being who is beyond comparison and competition. This is the God who spoke, and heavens and earth came into being.

How big is the universe? The universe is so big that it contains our whole world and more. But you know what the Bible tells us of this God who created the whole universe? This God contains the whole universe—that's how great He is!

This God is in the highest. Such a God does not need us. He can live and do all things by Himself, and be totally independent of us. But you know, He is not so high up there that He has no interest in lowly and lesser beings like us.

I can say this because v. 14 not only tells us that God is in the highest, but goes on to say "on earth peace to men". "Peace to men" means peace to people, and that means you and me. This God who sits in the highest is interested in you and me having peace.

But what kind of peace are we talking here?

- Peace with yourself
- Peace with others
- Peace with circumstances
- Peace of mind

It is all these and MORE—it is peace with God Himself!

This God who sees all our ugliness both inside and outside of us is saying to us, "I want to offer you peace—with yourself, with others, and most important of all, with me."

We are not at peace with God because we want to rule our own lives. But God has a higher purpose for us—He wants us to let Him rule our lives so that we can become "men on whom His favor rests". We are not at peace with God because our natural desire is to war against God's desire.

But many think that they can please God by doing all kinds of good things. All these are futile if we regard them as merits to help us reach up to God on our own.

My family and I visited Kuala Lumpur (the capital city of Malaysia) one time, and met the tallest man in the Guinness Book of Records then. He's at least 8 feet tall (almost 2.5 metres). When we met up, there's no way for me to look at this giant eyeball-to-eyeball. The only way we could meet at eye level is for this giant to lower himself down to my level. That's what he did—lowering himself down to speak with me as he signed his name on a souvenir picture.

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In the same way, God is in the highest and there's no way we can reach Him no matter how hard we try on our own. We need help. Thus, God helps us reach Him by lowering Himself down to us.

That's why Jesus Christ has to be born in the likeness of human flesh. That's why we need and have Christmas. Jesus Christ born as a human baby, lived as man, identified Himself with man, and spoke man's language. Why? So that man can know God, find favour in God's sight, and experience peace with Him.

Indeed, Christmas is God's intention of bringing peace to us as we find favour in His sight. It is God coming down to reach us with His peace because we can't reach Him on our own. Christmas is a time to remember the one thing only God can do—i.e. coming down from the highest to reach lowly earthbound human beings like you and me. Christmas is also a time to remember the one thing man can never do—i.e. trying to rise up from his earthly level and reach God on his own.

I wonder how many Christmases you have celebrated. You know something, we can celebrate Christmas year after year, and yet not really celebrating Christmas. Why so?

Because when we celebrate Christmas as merely a holiday or a shopping season, we miss the true intention of God in the Christmas event—i.e. to let us experience His peace as we stop fighting with God, stop trying to be good enough to be accepted by the perfect God, and start turning our lives over to His rule and control.

God's peace is for you to claim and experience this Christmas. As you celebrate Christmas, would you stop fighting God and let Him rule and control your lives? In Jesus Christ, you can have peace with God. This is because God has come down in Jesus Christ to the world so that we can have peace with God and have peace in God.

A final thing we need to understand in order to claim and experience the promise of God's peace is ...

III. Understand that God is calling you to respond to what you have heard today.

The thing about hearing exciting news is that they can keep you spellbound and rooted where you are. When the shepherds heard the news of the birth of the Saviour, of God in the highest, and of peace to men on earth, they were amazed.

They could have pleaded with the angels not to go away and tell them more and more of this wonderful news. But notice what they said to one another when the angels had left.

- Not “Let’s go back to work.”
- Not “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that MAY have happened.”
- But “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that HAS happened.”

This is a statement of faith. The shepherds heard, they believed, and so they went. You know, it’s not easy for a shepherd to leave his sheep behind. He has a responsibility over them. But these shepherds were going off to look for someone more important—Jesus Christ.

They knew what they heard was not just a story to excite them, to entertain them, to keep them rooted and amazed, to stir them to ask for more and more. Rather, they knew that it was an invitation to act. And they believed enough to act and they acted quickly. The story tells us that they “hurried off” (v. 16). And they found and saw the baby Jesus—it was all true!

You may have heard the Christmas story many times over. But this is not a story to be retold year after year so that you can be entertained afresh either through a sermon, a drama, a skit, or a musical. This is a message which issues an invitation to act with urgency like the shepherds who left in a hurry and saw that what they had heard was true.

If you have yet to put your trust in Jesus Christ; yet to claim and experience God’s peace, He invites you today to act and act now. He invites you like the shepherds who hurried off to Bethlehem. The flocks were important to them, yet they believed enough and chose to act. They were not disappointed. They saw that it was all true.

I wonder what concerns you find too important to put aside in order to accept God’s invitation to act today and receive His peace. God wants you to be like the shepherds on that first Christmas night—after hearing, they chose to act without delay.

For those of us who are Christians, today’s story is a reminder to act again. Notice that after the shepherds saw the baby Jesus in Bethlehem, what did they do?

- Luke 2:17 says, “When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.”
- Luke 2:20 adds, “The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.”

They spread the word concerning Jesus. They glorified and praised God for all that they had heard and seen. Simply put, with their words and worship, these shepherds acted as witnesses for Jesus Christ.

Yes, the reminder call to Christians today is to act as worthy witnesses for Jesus Christ during this Christmas season. This is not necessarily a call to the lost tribes and unreached people far away. More specifically, this is a call to people in our immediate and familiar surroundings.

- To the person whom we call “neighbour”
- To the person whom we call “colleague”
- To the person whom we call “friend”
- To the person whom we call “dad or mum”
- To the person whom we regularly meet in the human traffic of everyday life

Conclusion

On that first Christmas Day, God’s angels appeared to the shepherds. The angels proclaimed God’s peace unto them. The shepherds heard and acted in haste—they went, they saw, and they spread this news of God’s peace. Therein lies how we can best respond to the message of Christmas.

- If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, don’t keep the good news to yourself. Be a worthy witness for the Lord again—spread His peace and love to those around you with your words, worship, and works.
- For those of you who are not yet believers in Jesus Christ, you can come to Jesus today in three simple ABC steps.
 - **A**cknowledge that you are sinner.
 - **B**elieve that Jesus Christ came to die for your sin on the Cross, that He was buried and then arose from the dead.
 - **C**ommit yourself to Jesus Christ by asking Him to forgive your sin, and to come into your life as your personal Saviour and Master.

If you desire to believe in Jesus Christ and receive Him today, I want to ask you to say this prayer with me silently in your heart. Say it to Jesus Christ and not to anyone else here. Repeat these words after me slowly:

Lord Jesus,

I know that I am a sinner. I thank you for dying on the Cross for my sins. I believe also that you were buried, and three days later risen from the dead. I now confess my sins before you. Forgive me and help me to live a new life in you. I now invite you into my

life as my personal Saviour and Master. Take control of my life.
Help me to live in obedience to you.

Amen.

If you have repeated this prayer after me, I like you to meet and talk with our counsellors over at this corner immediately after the service. We like to rejoice with you for taking this very important step to believe and receive Jesus Christ into your life, to share more with you, to encourage you, and to pray for you as you begin this new journey with Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Master.

If you have not prayed after me, but you want to know more about Jesus Christ, we encourage you to speak with any of us or the Christian friend who has invited you here today as you enjoy the Christmas lunch with us at the table later on.

I wish you a very Blessed Christmas and Immanuel, i.e. God be with us!