

**Impossibly Good: Peace**  
**Advent 2**  
**Text: Luke 2**  
**12-4-16**

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**Reflection questions...** [please consider the teaching notes, first, as a basis of your reflections]

*“Is your peacemaking approach simply an attempt to suppress the tensions, or about creating an environment which is healthy enough to allow for them? Are your pursuits of peace coming at the expense of another or helping to encourage their wholeness, as well?”*

*“Are there situations/relationships in your life in which you are avoiding truth in exchange for peace? Where you are sabotaging shalom for relief?”*

*“How might your pre-occupation with your present circumstances be inhibiting your capacity to receive something from outside of yourself--- something of God? Imagine the possibilities that you are squandering because you won’t simply ‘go and see’?”*

*“Why the shepherds as the recipients of the announcement? How does it seem to resonate with Paul’s assessment of those who seem most responsive to the gospel?” (1 Corinthians 1:26)*

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**Teaching Notes...**

Although no one is really certain as to the actual month and date, historically, we have determined to celebrate the birth of Jesus during the month of December.

Historians tell us that around 350 A.D., Pope Julius in Rome, declared December 25<sup>th</sup> the date for remembrance. It was a date associated with the time of the “winter solstice”. **“Solstice”** means, **‘standing-still-sun’**. Solstice is when, because of the earth’s tilt, we are farthest away from the sun... farthest removed from the light.

The symbolism is ideal: during the longest night of the year, at the time when it appeared that we were furthest from the light--- the light that gives light to *“all men”* arrives.

- I think it’s the willingness of the Advent stories to hold in dynamic tension the notions of hope and adversity, light and darkness, chaos and peace which I appreciate most. It’s where the reality of our world meets with God’s insatiable desire for “world peace”. His desires for peace are not some naïve and unfounded optimism, but are rooted in the ways in which he has committed himself to its realization.

*“Peace on earth...”* It even sounds like something an angel would say, doesn’t it?

In the biblical tradition, the vision for how things ought to be is called **shalom**. We translate this word as “peace,” but our understanding of peace is much less robust and often gets reduced to nothing more than just the absence of turmoil.

**It’s easy to confuse peace with serenity.**

It’s often the illusion of functionality: we assume that if we have survived the latest round of cuts at work, that if gas is under \$3.00 a gallon, the kids have solidified their place on the honor role, and that occasionally find ourselves in the same vehicle, sharing a common destination, that we are experiencing peace. We appear asymptomatic.

“**Shalom**” is not simply some temporary moratorium (“cease fire”) or seasonal distraction (“holiday spirit”), but a functionality which characterizes the lives upon whom his favor comes to rest.

Shalom, in the scriptures, means universal flourishing, wholeness, functionality, everything relating well, nothing broken—nothing missing: everything the way it is supposed to be.

One understanding of peace is cessation--- eliminating the discomfort; the other is restoration--- eliminating the obstacles to peace.

Remember that when Jesus was born--- and celebrated as King--- someone else was wearing that title and taking great pains to maintain it. Augustus was the Caesar, and he was, not so coincidentally, given the title “*Lord, son of God, bringer of peace, and Savior of the world*”. The announcement of “his” birth was hailed as ‘good news’.

Rome knew how to ‘keep the peace’ but, for those living under their Rome’s rule, peace was not ‘shalom’ or ‘wholeness’, it was ‘fearful compliance’.

So, the hope for God’s people was the “*Great Reversal*” [theme of the Magnificat]: but, without peace-- without shalom--- the oppressed become the oppressors and we simply end up with a new crop of victims.

It is into this context that we hear the angelic declaration: “*Peace on earth*” and “*glory to God in the highest*” --- inseparable Advent companions.

***glory---- in heaven---- to God  
peace---- on earth--- to humans whom God favors***

**The good news is “peace”, but it typically begins with a measure of turbulence.**

The turbulence of your own present trajectory; your determination to remain your own point of reference--- the axis around which all of life revolves.

Peace is not the product of earth. It never results from our own human strategies and systems. It comes to us from the heavens... from outside of ourselves.

Peace is only and ever God-initiated; it is “grace”. God comes because he knows that we’ll never find peace on our own; we don’t even know where to **look!**

Isaiah calls him the “chieftain” (Prince) of Peace” (Heb. *elder; representative of peace.*) [Ephesians 4:2; Romans 5:1]

**Glory says something about the way God comes to us. Surrender says something about the way we welcome and receive him.**

**Glory:** carries recognizable weight; significance; measure of assessment. It is associated with Presence of God. It was/is to be the Presence which distinguishes us--- which is our glory. That means that we must learn to see all of life as “more than”: our vocations as more than a paycheck, our homes as more than an opportunity for equity, our children as more than a deduction, our marriages as more than an arrangement.

**Surrender**, by definition, is “*voluntarily cooperating with the will of another*”. It is not simply “indecisiveness”; it’s not passivity; it’s not about succumbing to life or resignation, but it is about taking responsibility for who you are becoming. It is the critical first response of repentance.

The beauty of surrender is that it doesn’t require a great deal of clarity, only trust. *Predictability is no longer a pre-requisite for peace.*

The absolute key to submission is the conviction that God would never put my heart at risk. You never have to fear committing yourself to someone who has so consistently and so profoundly evidenced their willingness to seek your ultimate best.

**Peace is not just an announcement or declaration; it’s an invitation to participate in a new way of life that makes for peace right here, right now.**

Shalom has an ethical quality/content to it. It anticipates that we are pursuing the things that “make for peace”.

*“If you only knew, this day, what would make for peace...”* Luke 19:42

Sometimes, God can’t provide the promised peace because the present resources we are utilizing don’t make for peace.

James says, “*Where does all of the relational strife come from?*” (4:1) It comes from within us, so any strategies we attempt to adopt which eliminate the need for a serious reflection about what’s going on inside of us, is destined to result in frustration and failure.

*“peace, peace, when there is no peace....”* Jeremiah 6:14

The worst, most deceptive sensation you can experience is the feeling of peace in the midst of your chaotic choices. God will never give you peace when your decisions and your pursuits are eroding your relationships and chipping away at your wholeness. It’s the most loving thing he can do. The sensation that you are feeling may not be peace, but numbness to truth.

“Why did the angels come to the shepherds?” Because that’s who the message is for: the ones with no leverage; no influence; no voice; no glaring capabilities which might prompt someone to notice, no claims on God. “Outsiders”.

Perhaps it was because they would be the ones most willing to hear: the ones most willing to come to terms with the truth of their own situation and be willing to receive/accept favor from God.

**Not knowing when God will reveal himself or what he will reveal about himself makes each moment a “sacred” moment.**

*“This will be a sign....”* If you will pursue this revelation, there will be signs, indicators that you are on the right path. Seeking and finding.

Our call is to live as if God were King: to live within opposing and divisive allegiances and structures, and amongst people with conflicting values and ‘make peace’. It’s up to us to be transformed into the kind of people who not only expect things to get better, but who are actually helping to make things better and, in so doing, we offer the world **“little pink spoons of peace”** (the sampling of peace we are able to experience is meant to entice us and ensure a continued pursuit); a glimpse of the way things will one day be. Peace-makers (Matthew 5:9).

**Peace on earth-- one broken, chaotic life at a time.**

*“a savior has been born to you”*... salvation birthed into the midst of your present anxiety and fear and hopelessness. Not a saving strategy, but a savior... Christ, the Lord.

They are being invited into a Story that has Messianic implications, therefore, it’s not simply an invitation to respond to a particular plea/offer, but a confrontation with your own self-directed life and a willingness to trust another.