

**Christmas Eve, 2022**  
**Christmas Peace**  
**Joseph and Mary Getting Christmas Right**

**Luke 2:6-7 - And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 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.**

**Colossians 3:15 - And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called.**

Dear friends in Christ,

“Dear Santa, you didn’t bring me anything good last year, and the year before that you didn’t bring me anything good. This year is your last chance.” Signed, Johnny.

And then there was 11 year old Sally who gave her 8 year old brother a nice gift and a card including these words - “Dear Johnny, merry Christmas. I hope you have a nice Christmas. I am glad God gave you to be my brother. Love, Sally. P.S. Don’t read this note out loud, or I will twist your head off.”

You can just feel the love and the joy and the peace in their hearts, right?

The past four Sundays, we have centered on the theme, “Getting Christmas Right.” We’ve been looking for the perfect balance between the secular and the sacred. Last Sunday, our theme was “Magnifying Jesus,” as Mary and Elizabeth made their unplanned pregnancies all about the greatness of God. The Sunday before, the imprisoned Paul invited Christians in all generations to be “rejoicing always” in the simple truths that God is with us and He is for us. The Sunday before that, we saw that getting Christmas right began with “Repenting Sincerely,” and the week before that, Staying Awake, spiritually speaking in these end times

This evening, we celebrate the simple truth that unto us a Child has been born, and unto us a Son is given. And we would explore what it means that this Child was and is and ever shall be the Prince of Peace. And what it means for His peace to be ruling in our hearts individually and collectively.

In his book, “A Long Obedience in the Same Direction,” one of my favorite authors Eugene Peterson suggested at least three threats to the peace of God that is ours by faith in Jesus Christ as Savior.

- Threat #1 - Feelings of depression and doubt.
- Threat #2 - Circumstances of pain and suffering.
- Threat #3 - The possibility that we or our loved ones are losing our faith.

Tonight we would explore how Joseph and Mary fought their way through the feelings and circumstances and possibilities that had to be tossing them to and fro as they carried out their divine assignment to bear and raise up the very Son of the Living God.

*How is it that Joseph and Mary got that first Christmas right? By listening to and responding correctly to the right voices. It was as simple as that. Three lessons we would learn from Mary and Joseph about listening to and responding correctly to the right voices.*

***First, the peace of Christ ruled in their hearts as they listened to and believed the voices of the angels.***

The advice of Gabriel to Mary was clear and concise. Do not be afraid. Stay calm. Out of all the women who have ever lived, you have been chosen to bear the Son of God. The Holy Spirit is going to come upon you, you will give birth to a baby boy, His Name will be Jesus, He will be great and He will be holy and He will be the Son of God. Keep in mind, with God all things are possible. And one more thing. Your cousin Elizabeth who all the neighbors said would never have a child, she's six months' along.

Mary's response is one for the ages. "Behold I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."

The advice of that same angel to Joseph was clear and concise, as well. "Do not be afraid. Stay calm. Take Mary in as your wife. Be a husband to her. That baby is from the Holy Spirit, his name will be Jesus, and He's going to be the Savior of the world.

Joseph got it right. He did as the angel commanded him.

The kingdom of God is like a congregation of believers getting Christmas right tonight. Peace is ruling in their hearts, not because everyone is home for the holidays, but because their Savior was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary in a little town called Bethlehem. That's why. Peace is ruling in their hearts tonight, not because all of their bills are paid nor because all of their loved ones are healthy and living happily ever after here on earth, but because the Prince of Peace paid the price at

the cross on a little hill outside of Jerusalem, the guilt and the power of their sins has been washed away, and their names have been written in the book of life, that's why.

***Secondly, the peace of Christ ruled in their hearts as they listened to and believed the voices of the prophets.***

Not too far away is a family living in a land of deep darkness. The crime rate is high, gunshots are heard on a regular basis, a teenage son was recently beaten up after a neighborhood basketball game, the dad is absent, and the mom is feeling about as alone and as afraid and as angry and as discouraged as a mom can be.

Then she remembers the words she memorized as a child for the church Sunday School pageant, ***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.....for unto us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.....***

Not too far away from her is an elderly couple whose son is at a distance and won't be home for Christmas this year. They and their daughter had a falling out years ago and haven't spoken since. The pandemic that never seems to end and the political differences they have with close friends have added to the emptiness swirling in their souls. They close their eyes, and in the quiet of the night, they hear Jesus whispering, ***“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.***

A second reason Joseph and Mary got Christmas right is that they knew well the predictions of the Old Testament prophets. They knew well that it would be a virgin who would conceive and bear a child. They believed the prophecy that He would be born in Bethlehem, that His Name would be Immanuel, that He would be the Son of David, that He would be a son of Abraham, that he would be presented with gifts by kings from the east, that there would be a massacre of innocents in Bethlehem followed by uncontrollable weeping, and that their Son would be a Mighty God and a Wonderful Counselor and a ruler who would shepherd the people of God through all the ups and downs of life.

The kingdom of God is like a congregation of believers who are getting Christmas right this year. Christmas peace is ruling in their hearts as they realize one more time, in the stillness of the night - that the gift of a Savior is primary and everything else, and I mean everything else is secondary. Again and again, through all the seasons of life, they listen to the voice of God through the prophets, the apostles, and the evangelists - and as

often as they do so, the Word of God is a lamp unto their feet, and a light unto their paths.

***Third, the peace of Christ ruled in their hearts as they listened to and obeyed the voice of the Emperor.***

A third voice Mary and Joseph listened to was that of the Emperor Caesar Augustus. From a human perspective, the timing of this imperial decree requiring the census and taxation was the worst possible. A seventy mile trip through rough terrain, on foot, no doubt uphill both ways (as our parents used to say about walking to their one room schools) in the ninth month of pregnancy? Are you kidding?

God wasn't kidding. Never was He more serious about doing what He had long promised to do.

As a proclaimer of Jesus Christ as Savior, Luke wanted to explain how God arranged circumstances so that the Promised One would be born in Bethlehem, as prophesied. The census was the first in Roman history, but it led to periodic enrollment of the population of the empire every 14 years. It was a pattern that continued for two centuries. Generally, the Romans just counted the people where they lived, but in the land of the Jews, the arrangement was that people were required to travel to the place that was their "family center," the locale associated with their clan. The circumstances that God used to arrange for the Christmas story involved people, such as the emperor and fellow travelers and an innkeeper, and the list goes on. Folks who had no idea they were being used as part of a grand plan called the good and the gracious will of God. A plan for a Savior to be born in the city of David, who would be Christ the Lord.

Joseph and Mary got it right by submitting to the government, even though the trip was as inconvenient as it could be. Years later, the subject of being taxed by an evil and oppressive government would come up, and Jesus would give advice concise and clear, "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, and unto God that which is God's."

It's interesting, and perhaps productive to speculate on what Mary and Joseph were thinking about as they went up from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judea to be registered and taxed. Luke makes it clear that Mary was thinking things through when he records in verse 19, "But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart."

Max Lucado recently did some pondering from the perspective of the angel Gabriel.

*“Do you know who you hold, Mary? You secure the author of grace. He who is ageless is now moments old. He who strides upon the stars now has legs too weak to walk. The hands that held the oceans are now an infant’s fist. To him who has never asked a question, you will teach the name of the wind. The source of language will learn words from you. He who has never stumbled, you will carry. He who has never hungered, you will feed. The king of creation is in your arms.”*

There’s no doubt in my mind that if you are truly listening to God’s Word tonight and soaking in the familiar Christmas hymns, that the peace of Christ will be ruling in your hearts and minds as you live these next 12 days of Christmas.

But there’s also no doubt in my mind that the forces of darkness will be pestering you and your family and your friends and your neighbors with a vengeance.

One of my Facebook friends back in Minnesota described her darkness in this way this past Tuesday, *“Most of my so called relatives aren’t “manure.”No wonder why I moved out of this state, (profanity). After checking out of this room, I will be outside with no where to go. Probably find me dead outside in this bs negative degree temperatures. My own mom and siblings don’t give a darn about me. Keep your fake love. I don’t want it....It’s so heartbreaking to grow up being told by your own mom that you’re a mistake. And she wishes you were never born. Don’t mind me, just up overthinking my feelings.*

Would you do me a favor? Before you go to sleep tonight, would you say a prayer for my friend Ashley? And while you’re at it, for the Ashleys in your life?

Three takeaways in closing tonight:

Takeaway #1 is that getting Christmas right starts with listening carefully all year long to the Word of God. Blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it.

Take Away #2 is that getting Christmas right isn’t just about you and I having the peace of Christ ruling in our hearts. It’s about that peace being contagious and spilling over into the lives of family and friends who are going through all kinds of trials and troubles.

Takeaway #3 is that getting Christmas right includes being intentional about getting out of comfort zones and living in such a way that hurting and broken people are attracted to Christ, to His promises, and to His Church. In Jesus’ Amen.