

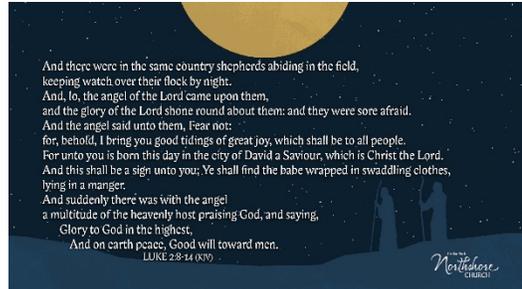
Advent Peace

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

⁹ And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. ¹⁰ And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy,

which shall be to all people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this *shall be* a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

¹⁴ Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace,
Good will toward men.¹



That **is** what Christmas is all about. “And on earth peace”... peace on earth. The second Sunday of Advent is marked by the traditional theme of peace. So we add to the light of last week’s candle (the theme of hope) the light of this week’s candle for peace.



These four simple Advent themes (Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love) are the kinds of things we all want... for ourselves, for those we love, and for all people. With such an expansive view, inclusive of all people, let’s get *the big picture* on today’s theme: **Peace**.

First, we can think of peace in terms of *peace with our environment* (ecology). We have a great deal of power to put us at peace with nature. Just this morning:

- Lights
- Shower
- Clothing
- Dog happy to see me
- Food
- Heated Transportation

¹ [The Holy Bible: King James Version](#). (2009). (Electronic Edition of the 1900 Authorized Version., Lk 2:8–14). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

It takes some work and resources, but we can usually attain a comfortable level of peace with our environment... and when calamity strikes, there is usually help (like the way we help through ministries like Convoy of Hope). Even in some of the most devastating circumstances (like natural disaster), given time, we have a way of restoring ecological peace (anyone see how quickly the Alaska DOT put their roads back together?).

We can think of peace in terms of our *fellow humans* (justice). We have a great deal of power in that arena as well. We build elaborate systems to keep the peace. They run a spectrum including:

- Cultural norms, ways and customs
- Rules of the road
- Civil law
- Criminal law
- And even, on the most macro scale, rules among nations (warfare, trade, immigration)

We are surrounded, even ruled, by elaborate systems to obtain and keep peace. I think we usually take most of these things for granted, until a system fails. And then we have systems for restoring peace, ranging from the most formal in our courts, to mediation and mitigation, to everyday forgiveness or even merely overlooking faults in others.

So in these *broad brush strokes*, we strive for ecological peace (peace with our environment) and justice (peace among people) and then there is a third peace: spiritual peace.

Just as we strive and build elaborate systems for peace with our environment and peace among people... we strive and build elaborate systems for spiritual peace. We work toward peace with our God. We build rules and systems and even cultures designed to make peace with God.

All religions do it. Some do it through disciplines, rulemaking and rule keeping, others by sacrifice, and still others by various kinds of meditation and worship. I suppose that is a clear and simple definition of **religion**: our striving to make peace with God.

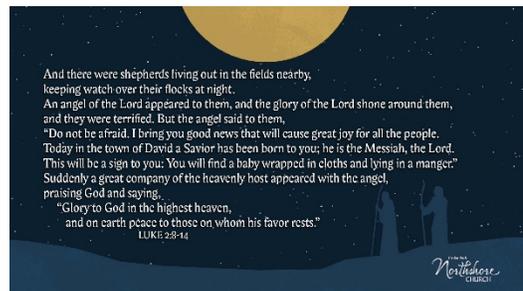
Especially during this season, this season of Advent, of anticipation, leading up to Christmas... this is a season when we are confronted with the reality that our *conceptions of peace* likely need to be realigned. It may be natural for us to think that it is **our striving** for peace with God that is the driving factor. But during this season, as we confront the heart of the Christmas story again, we are reminded again that Advent Peace, true peace with God, is something entirely different.

It turns out that Advent Peace, true peace with God, is not merely an idea or a feeling. It is not a system or a structure... not a formula or even a discipline. Advent Peace isn't anything so abstract or complex. Advent Peace is a person: Jesus, our Savior, Christ, and Messiah.

Advent Peace, true peace with God, is about knowing Jesus, and fully embracing and enjoying the peace that only He brings and freely gives.

When the angels announced His arrival, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor
rests.” ²



It was more than a mere announcement that there would be peaceful conditions... that maybe wars would cease, or persecution or striving dampened. This was an announcement that the Promised Gift, spoken of by the prophets long ago and throughout the ages, was **on the scene**. A child was born. A son was given.

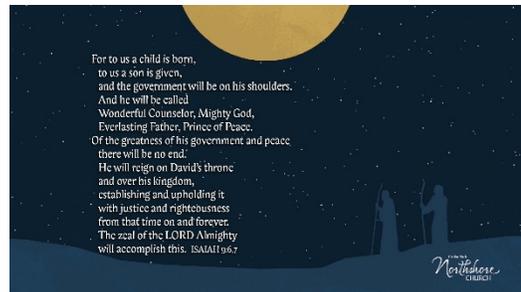
It was *unusual* in that it was so *normal*: a helpless babe born in humble circumstances. Arriving in the most nonthreatening way... the normal way as a baby... not even a royal, rich, or privileged way. God took on flesh. Brown flesh. Poor flesh. Common flesh. But this was certainly an extraordinary child with extraordinary names.

His name, given by Joseph at the direction of God messenger-angel, is Jesus.

² [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 2:14). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

But He also lives up to the names prophesied by Isaiah:

- Wonderful Counselor
- Mighty God
- Everlasting Father
- Prince of Peace



Jesus not only taught about peace, nor did he merely bring peace... Jesus **is** peace. He is the Peace of God personified. He is our peace.

As He lived and grew, He was further revealed to be God in the flesh. A special, holy baby became a remarkable man... fully God and fully man for a special purpose: to be peace.

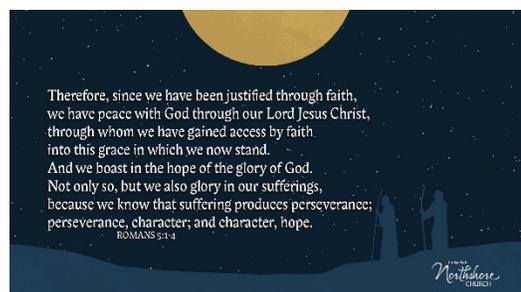
- Was He a great leader, leading people in the way of peace? Yes... but more than that.
- Was He a great teacher/philosopher/theologian showing people the way of peace? Yes... but more than that.

Jesus is our peace, not because he merely taught us a way or even led us in a way; Jesus is our peace because He is the Way. Jesus **is** peace and is the **way** to peace.

More than merely giving us new ideas or rules to make peace with God, He became the Way to peace with God. More than merely telling us how we might deal with our sin and disobedience and shortcomings and failings so we could strive toward peace with God... Jesus took on our sin, disobedience, shortcomings, and failings. He paid the price so that we can embrace and enjoy peace with God.

Here is how we find it in Romans 5:

Therefore, **since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,**² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.³ Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope.³



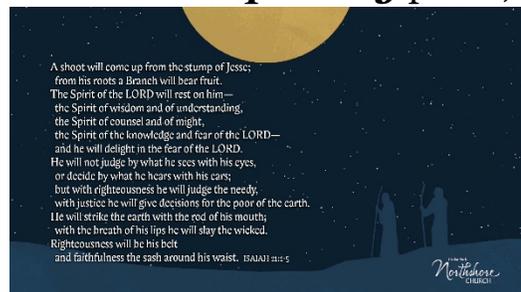
³ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Ro 5:1-4). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Through faith in Jesus, what Jesus accomplished through his coming as the babe in Bethlehem, and living, and suffering death on the Cross, and conquering death with Resurrection... all that Jesus accomplished is credited to us. His righteousness is counted as our righteousness through faith in Him... just as if I had never sinned. The life that Jesus lived is credited to you and me before God through faith in Him. This is peace with God... it is only through our Lord Jesus Christ. Not through our **striving** or whatever religious things we might do... but through Jesus by faith... God's mercy and grace freely given to us... first showing up on the scene, born of the Virgin Mary, the Babe in Bethlehem.

Not only does this profound fact that we celebrate at Christmas change our perspective on peace with God, it impacts those *other ways* of considering peace that we talked about earlier as well. God's word promises comprehensive, all-encompassing peace.

There are various, Bible passages that speak to **all-encompassing** peace; let's look to the Prophet Isaiah, who so clearly foretold the coming of Christ 700 years before Jesus was born.

- A shoot will come up* from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
² **The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him**—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD—
³ and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.



Jesus brings justice. Are we experiencing that justice now? Maybe in some small part... but this justice is a promise for His coming again at the final resolution of creation. Full justice will be realized when:

- He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears;
⁴ but with righteousness he will judge the needy,
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.
He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.
⁵ Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. ⁴

⁴ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Is 11:1–5). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

The justice that we strive for, peace among all people, will in that great day be delivered as an act of God's mercy and judgment... an exclusive act of God just as our peace with God is fully realized.

And peace with *all nature* will be so realized in that great day as well.

for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. ⁵

The peace with our environment that we strive for, ecological peace, will also be delivered as an act of God's grace.

- ⁶ The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling together;
and a little child will lead them.
- ⁷ The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.
- ⁸ The infant will play near the cobra's den,
the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.



It would be easy to regard this as merely some sort of poetic fantasy... but I believe it is more than a metaphor. This is a promise of the all-encompassing redemption that the Lord has in store for creation and those who have peace with God, justified through faith in Jesus.

That will be then, in that great day, and this is now... what do we do in the meantime?

This season reminds us that the Peace of God has come and lives, personified in Jesus. And that Peace is ours to embrace and enjoy through faith. But the full and final, all-compassing promised peace is not yet among us, and will not be ours until Jesus returns in that great day.

What about today, and our tomorrows until that great day?



⁵ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Is 11:6-9). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

I think we can start with the words of Jesus, doing what we can to fulfill His calling in our lives.

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus calls us to be peacemakers. Jesus said:

⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God. ⁶

By faith, we have peace with God; we are children of God. Children of God are peacemakers.

I like the way James puts it:

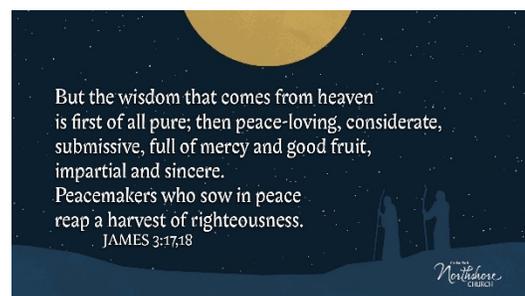
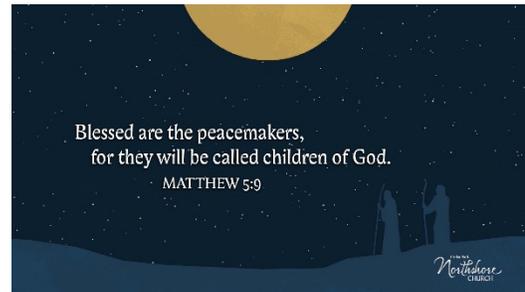
¹⁷ But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

¹⁸ Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness. ⁷

We are peacemakers who sow in peace. I think that is the perfect picture for us. God's children, justified by faith in Jesus, recipients of God's grace, bear the seeds of peace.

Jesus is peace, our peace with God and ultimately delivering full and all-encompassing peace and justice to all creation. But until then, we bear these seeds.

We sow and cultivate seeds of peace. And just like the parable that you may know from the Gospels (the Words of Jesus) about seeds and a sower, some of those seeds fall on good ground, while others fall on hard ground or rocky soil. Some of the seeds result in fruit, while others never take hold and yet others are overtaken by weeds or stolen away by birds or other enemies of seeds. But there is fruit (good fruit) because the farmer faithfully sows seeds.



⁶ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Mt 5:9). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁷ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Jas 3:17–18). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

I like the picture of sowing seeds of peace for all sorts of reasons, including:

- Our responsibility is to sow; the harvest is not all in our hands. We plant and cultivate as we can, but just like sowing any seed in the ground is an act of faith (even a risky act of faith) sowing seeds of faith are an act of faith.
- It takes time. We can so easily be so very impatient when we are sowing seeds of peace. We are looking for a *magic seed* that works every time, right away. But that is not the way in God's creation. Sowing and reaping takes time.
- It often takes a team effort. Some sow, others cultivate, still others may water, and it could be someone else who reaps. But in all of it, God is glorified and peace ultimately prevails.

So as we go about our days and work, striving to make peace in our various environments, among our people, we do well in whatever ways we can to think of our striving in terms of sowing seeds of peace.

When we are dealing with challenging relationships, let's ask God to help us think more in terms of sowing seeds of peace rather than merely surviving another day.

When we are balancing a spreadsheet, or repairing a machine, or renovating a building, or pruning a tree (whatever our hands are doing), let's ask God to help us think and act more in terms of sowing seeds of peace. This is our calling as peacemakers, children of God.

So as we close in prayer today, let's purpose to both receive peace and sow seeds of peace.

- Today is a day to believe! This could be your day to turn to Jesus, or turn back to Jesus.
- There are people prepared to pray with you today. You may be suffering today. It could be a war with the environment or circumstances (sickness or other difficulty). It could be a broken or difficult relationship that needs peace.
- We all can purpose and repurpose to sow seeds of peace.



I have in mind again to close with the Advent Hymn *Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus*. We sang it last week, and we'll likely sing it again a time or two.

Let's not merely sing the song; let's pray it.

We sing a lot around here. Nearly every time we get together. Most sing. Some don't. It seems that some are really into it... while others may just tolerate it at best. When we sing it may just be part of the festivities or we are into the art of it all. But at its best, singing like this the way we do in Church is praying. Especially a song like this that expresses our desires for God and to God, a song that invites Jesus to come into our lives and change us.

Come, thou long expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
Dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a King;
Born to reign in us forever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
By thine all sufficient merit,
raise us to thy glorious throne.