

The Peace of Which the Angels Sang  
Luke 2:14

“I’m sick and tired of hearing people talk about love.” So said a bitter young man from Harlem to the person who was trying to tell him that God loved him. He went on to say, “I want to see love with skin on it.”

Love with skin on it—that’s what Christmas is all about. Christmas is not God writing out a definition of what love is. Christmas is not even God telling us how much he loves us. Christmas is “love with skin on it.” “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us”. And if anyone, whether in the crowded ghetto or in the lonely quiet of the nursing home, whether poor, hungry, and dirty, or rich, fat, and sassy, cries out and says, “Doesn’t anybody care about *me*?” Christmas says, “Yes, God cares.” He cared enough to send his very best, his only-begotten Son, to be our Savior.

In other words, God’s love, as we see it in the manger at Bethlehem, is love in action. And if we are to effectively communicate this love to others, then our love must be a love in action. We won’t get through to people about his love and what it means to us if we let them starve while we simply take antacid tablets to ease our indigestion after Christmas dinner. The missionaries in Ghana will not understand if we tell them we can’t give more to missions because we need another television for the den. And our message becomes meaningless when we pray for the people of Sudan but won’t shake hands with a person who looks or lives differently in our own hometown. Our love, too, must have skin on it.

Now, if we want that kind of love—and I’m sure that as people of God we do—then we must look at the real meat and potatoes of the Christmas story. And we find it, among other places, in the song of the angels sung to the shepherds on the night the baby Jesus was born: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests” (Lk 2:14). It is especially three words in that heavenly hymn that we want to look at on this Christmas Day “peace on earth.”

The angels on the fields of Bethlehem sing of peace. It is first of all peace between God and man. And they sing of peace at the birth of this Baby because it is he who is to bring peace between God and man. He will bring God to man and man to God. He will repave the road to God and to eternal

life that had been dynamited by man’s disobedience. He will build the bridge that will span the abyss between heaven and hell. Do you remember the titles that Isaiah gave to this Baby in the manger? The last one was “Prince of Peace” (Is 9:6). Prince of Peace! This is the mission of this Child: to make peace between God and man.

But just how can this little Baby accomplish this? Not by negotiation at a round table where each must give a little and take a little. This is an all-out war, and there can be peace only if the sin that caused the war in the first place is removed. The Christ Child is the Second Adam, who is to make good what the First Adam made wrong. And that is why he had to be just like us, that is, he had to be a true human being. So he was “born of woman, born under the law”. He had blood. He could suffer and feel pain. Indeed, he was “wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities . . . and with his stripes we are healed”. As a real live person, with skin on him, he took our place, suffered our punishment, and so removed once and for all every remembrance of our rebellion from the sight of a holy God. And this is what St. Paul meant when he said that Jesus made “peace through his blood, shed on the cross”.

How could one mere man put an end to the war that had shaken this earth for all the centuries that had gone before? The angel tells us, “Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord” (Lk 2:11 KJV). It is the *Word* who was made flesh, the Word, who is God and by whom all things were made, who had skin on. Away, then, with all those who at Christmas want to sing about peace on earth through the birth of a mere man. Only the God-man can keep the Law in our place. Only the God-man can make peace. That is why we do not stand when we enter the stable on this Christmas. We kneel. We kneel before the crib of him who is our Lord, our Maker.

And now there is peace. “Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1). God’s anger has been put away, and we, who have been led to believe the promise and to confess this Child as our Savior, we, too, are at peace with God.

This is the peace that the world of our day needs to hear about and know about and rejoice about. So much of what is happening in our world today is people shaking their fist at God. Many are still in

revolt, and they need to know that Bethlehem is God's "cease-fire" order. And our task, also in this congregation, is to plead with people to be reconciled to God through this Christ Child. We can invite them to accept God's terms for peace. He who lies seemingly helpless at his mother's breast is truly your God, your Savior, and your Friend. He came for you. Turn to him and find peace with God."

"On earth peace!" The second thing the angels meant when they sang of peace was peace between man and himself, between woman and herself. When a person accepts God's offer of peace through Jesus Christ, there is peace of mind, and peace of the heart. But in the minds of millions of people today there is a desperate search for peace. They are not satisfied with their lives, but they don't know what to do about it. There is no sense of fulfillment, no real meaning to their lives. And because they haven't found it in God, they look for it elsewhere—some in drugs or alcohol, some in partying and immorality, some in keeping themselves so busy at work that they don't have time to think.

Christ brings peace! As we take him in faith and believe his promise of forgiveness, we see ourselves as we are: sinners, yes, but also saints who have been declared free from all sin by the blood of the cross. And so we accept ourselves for what we are: weak and far from what we want to be in our behavior, but strong in the grace of God who has made us his sons and daughters. That is what Jesus was talking about to his disciples in his last discourse when he said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. Now don't say, "That can't be me, because I have all kinds of trouble." This peace does not mean the end of trouble. It does not mean the end of doing battle with doubt and temptation. It doesn't mean there will be no more tears and no more sorrow. It *does* mean that even though the sea of life may boil and foam, there is deep down that "peace of God, which transcends all understanding" (Phil 4:7), the peace that comes with sins forgiven and the assurance that he who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all will also with him freely give us all things. It is the peace that tells us that he will never leave us or forsake us. So, if we want that peace this Christmas, let's go to Bethlehem. Look into the eyes of the little Baby and know that in him you have peace.

WE PRAY: Lord, we thank you for giving us this peace in the Christ Child. We pray that this peace may ever live and rule within our hearts, even in the day of trouble. And we ask that in the name of the Baby of Bethlehem we may live peaceably with all people, that all may see that we are your children and, beholding our good works, may glorify you, the God of all peace, in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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