

PM Sunday, December 24, 2017

Luke 2:1-20

The Peace Child

This is it! The day and evening we have been waiting for. What is prepared is done! What is not will have to wait until next year. For this is the time when we need to say again— Thank you God for giving us Jesus who was born of Mary and loved by Joseph, raised in a faithful family and lived a human life. Thank you God for giving us Jesus an infant King, the Prince of Peace and the one who would become saviour of many people through human history and today too!

Jesus the one promised of God was born to bring light into darkness and hope to all people. He was the one born to Mary and Joseph who were on a journey home and experienced the beginning of their life together in a stable. And we love this story for many reasons: we've heard it many times and can recite the words well; the story brings us comfort knowing that God loved us so much that he gave us Jesus to live a human life and that his purpose was to save us from all sin and it reminds us of years gone by when we celebrated this special day in different ways; and that the story of Jesus' birth is not the end of the story—but a beginning of God's relationship with all people.

Yet the Christmas story reminds us of when we were younger and even helps us to recall where we heard the story and when we were filled with awe because God sent his son Jesus to live a human life! As we grow older our celebrations of Christmas change and transition with tradition and new ideas linked together because each Christmas celebration is different from the year before. This is because each year the Spirit of God speaks to you in a new or different way.

Music might be how God might tell you again the importance of celebrating this day whether you are happy or sad, grieving or anticipating new life in your home. And how much he loves you. It might be in a phrase or two of a song or even a commercial on television. It might be something a character states in one of the many Christmas movies or specials that is broadcast each year or it could even be in the sentiment of a Christmas card you have received. And this moment comes to you like a flashing light- this is Christmas for you this year... a moment captured which will cause you to reflect upon who you are in relationship with the baby in the manger who is the Peace child born for you and the one who became and continues to be Saviour of all who believe.

This past year we have experienced many things in our church community—several deaths of longtime members, a building project that will see us through into the next few years,

baptisms of adults and children, and our outreach work continuing to be fully supported as we help schools, and women's shelters, the Downtown Mission and others reaching out to those in need.

Our city itself is experiencing extensive construction in spite of excessive flooding concerns and growth in some sectors. Our world has seen huge immigration shifts caused by drought, famine and massive destruction due to war. There is also the nuclear threat looming and the economy shifting as new trade deals are discussed with different partners. There is also a shift in attitudes towards how people treat each other and what was once acceptable is no longer. And throughout these events and experiences many have stated- where is God? And have we lost God in all of these events

Jesus came into the world as Peacemaker—a helpless and human infant. Yet this peacemaker is God's Son who was equipped to bring true and lasting peace to all. This peacemaker was named the Prince of Peace by the prophet Isaiah over 400 years before his birth and upon his shoulders was placed the government which would change its rule as was desired. But who is this Jesus?

As we celebrate his birth tonight we say he is the son of Mary raised by Joseph who grew up first as a refugee in exiled Egypt and then later returned to Nazareth where he was not recognized for who he was. He was the carpenter's son who studied diligently and took over the shop. Yet when it was time- he closed the shop door and walked until he found people who would follow him. Jesus taught, preached, healed and caused a stir among the established leaders. He was accused of treason and was crucified between two thieves. Yet this was God's plan for Jesus. He would save His people. Not by battles and wars but by carrying the burden of sin for all people to the cross. Upon his death life as we had hoped stopped. But this was not the end of Jesus- he rose again. And this is why we believe in the Prince of Peace. For Jesus came to earth not to be left an infant in the manger—but to grow up as a human man and live loving others, teaching others what it means to be truly human according to God.

Jesus came so that we might have life and have it more abundantly than ever before. Jesus came so that we might see His life and be lifted out of darkness. Jesus came so that we will feel within us his worth as we seek to be forgiven and renewed in our faith. Jesus came for us to love because God first loved us.

On this Christmas Eve, we remember this peace child who was born in Bethlehem. We rejoice that the star shone brightly in the sky and was seen by others far away from where he was. This tells us that we are to open our hearts and receive his peace and share it with

everyone we know. For this child of peace comes to us to bring hope and love and joy into the world not just tonight but all the time.

When the Spirit of God speaks to you or maybe this has already happened during Advent invite the words the melody or whatever it is that touches your heart to listen and respond with the words Mary uttered, "I am your servant", and wait and see what happens. This feeling that you experience can be yours and known year round for this is what it means to follow Jesus; to be a Christian, to follow the Spirit where it leads your life because your heart opens up and you are changed.

This evening we will light candles or pen lights to signify God's gift to us in Jesus being amongst us- when these candles are lit let us remember that Christ came into the world as the light which takes away the darkness. Christ came as the Peace Child and offers to you His peace. Wherever you are in your relationship with Jesus know that Christ's light is there for the asking- the experiencing, the wonder and the joy. For this too is the message of Christmas—I am yours by faith, follow me and I will lead you in the path of righteousness—or right living. Jesus is worth what you feel as you light the candles this night. His Spirit is what makes Christmas celebration unique for it is through Him that all our fears and hopes are completed because Jesus comes to us once more. Jesus is the One sent by God to change the world again. Let us receive Christ Jesus, the Peace child this night and shine His light wherever we go. Amen.