

**The Advent of Peace**  
**Luke 2:10-14, Isaiah 9:2-6**

Friends, back in 1969 – a famous musician was visiting a Canadian city and He wrote a song while in Canada that quickly became an anthem for a generation of young people throughout the 70's.

Maybe you've heard this song before – it goes something like this.... “All we are saying is give peace chance.” *Don't worry I won't be giving up my day job – I'll stick to rapping ☺*

But this song was written and recorded by none other than John Lennon, in a hotel room in Montreal, in 1969.

And it resonated with the young people of that time because they were tired of wars, tired of racism and class struggles.

They were tired of the way things had been going and they were looking for a new way of doing things – and this song seemed to suggest that perhaps “peace” might be a solution.

Perhaps governments, and institutions, leaders, nations could “give peace a chance” as a new way of doing things instead of resorting to military action or coercive force.

And forty some years later as the world deals with territory disputes in the Middle East, the possibility of Iran developing nuclear weapons, civil war in Syria and civil unrest in Egypt I'm sure that the chorus of that song still resonates...

“All we are saying – Hamas, President Morsi, President Ahmedinejad, President Assad – is give peace a chance”

But that raises the question friends. **What exactly can peace do?** What are we supposed to give it a chance to accomplish?

Will “peace” resolve the disputes over who has the more legitimate claim to land in Palestine?

Will “peace” make Iran feel secure enough, or address whatever issue makes them feel like they need to develop the capacity for nuclear weapons?

And if we look a bit closer to home, we might ask if “peace” will bring understanding and tolerance? Will “peace” help people love each other?

Will “peace” get our economies going again; will it provide jobs and create work? Will “peace” prevent the US gov’t from going over the fiscal cliff?

What is it exactly that we are supposed to be giving “peace” a chance to do?

Or friends... is “peace” a result of something else addressing and resolving these issues? That’s a rhetorical question really isn’t it? Because we all know that “peace” can’t solve or resolve any of those issues.

Because friends “peace” is a state of being, it’s an end result, it’s a situation which has developed because certain events or certain actions have taken place, peace happens, peace is caused.

You can have “peace” for any number of different reasons.

Children may be at peace because they *are sleeping*. Families may be peaceful because they *love and respect* each other.

Co-workers may get along peacefully because *they are paid* to work together.

One nation may stop fighting another nation because they have a more powerful ally, or there is a threat of nuclear retaliation.

There may currently be peace in the Middle East because Western nations have threatened to withdraw financial aid if both sides don’t agree to a ceasefire.

You can have “peace” for many different reasons, ironically some of which are not very “peaceful”

And 2000 years ago when Jesus was born, there was a long period of peace in the Middle East, all around the Mediterranean Sea in fact.

There were no disputes about land, or territory, no worries about other nations invading your city, you could travel freely,

trade was flourishing, and for most people life was stable and predictable and good.

This period of time was called the Pax Romana – the Peace of Rome. There was peace because of the rule of the Roman Empire.

The Empire protected and defended its territory, it ordered society, it would not tolerate rebellion and civil disruption, there was a uniform language and currency in the empire.

Ironically the Pax Romana existed because Rome had the power of its armies to enforce its rule, all the way from Spain, across Europe, to the Middle East and North Africa.

Peace because of the threat of violence. Ironic.

And I wonder friends, how many **of us experience an ironic peace in this way**. Peace - like the Peace of Rome – as result of something, a peace that comes from external forces or consequences which keep our internal rebellion in check.

In other words your life is free from conflict and upheaval – you're at peace, life is mostly good... but only because something keeps the anger and frustration that you feel inside from boiling over and spilling out on those around you and disturbing the peace.

Maybe you do Yoga, maybe you exercise, maybe you have a Zen garden where you rake the sand, or maybe you just count to ten – and this helps to calm you, and keep you at peace.

Or perhaps when your neighbors play their music too loud and keep you up at night, when your kids exasperate you with their attitude, or when your boss is on your case – you keep the peace because you don't want the consequences of conflict from confronting what is bothering you...

But friends is that really peace? Is that really the kind of peace the Bible speaks about? Is that the kind of peace we celebrate at Christmas?

Not really...

**Biblical peace is when something changes us on the inside** so that we don't get frustrated, we don't feel anxious and we don't get offended so easily? Biblical peace means that external means are unnecessary.

Friends, the good news that I have to share with you today is that at Christmas God wants to give us that gift of peace. God wants to work in our lives so that we arrive at a state of peace.

And I want to explain how God gives us this gift, because it's easy to think that all I am saying is simply repeating that chorus ... "give peace a chance" that "if you want to have peace... well, just be peaceful."

But that's not what I'm saying. There are so many things which prevent a state of peace from occurring in our lives, and in our world, that simply "being peaceful" won't resolve them.

What I am saying is that at Christmas time God has taken a specific action – sending His Word to become one of us – Jesus the Messiah was born, and I'm saying that this particular action will eventually result in "peace on earth."

So how does the birth of a little baby in the backwoods of the Roman Empire 2000 years ago become the agency which brings about a state of peace in our world?

We all remember the phrase which the angels sang? "*Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace to all men...*"

Friends it's that last part of the announcement that gives us a clue about how this will take place. It's all about "***On whom his favor rests!***"

It is God's favor that will bring peace on earth, and into our lives. Consider what it means to have God favor you friends...

It means that your challenges and problems are resolved and things go well in your life. It means that there is blessing and provision for what God has created you to do.

When God favors you, issues are resolved and peace is the result in your life!

Even when, and especially when... we must go through hard times, God's favor means that He will support us, encourage

us, comfort us when we suffer – and we have peace that passes understanding in our circumstances.

And we certainly know when we are experiencing this kind of peace, or when we're not don't we?

But maybe we haven't given much consideration to the fact that it is a result of God's favor... and exactly what that is all about.

So let's look at that for a moment. Who are the Angels speaking about when they say "on whom His favor rests"?

**Who does God favor?**

Well, the bible is pretty clear on that – God had established a special relationship with Abraham and his descendents, the nation of Israel. This is what he told Abraham.

<sup>2</sup> *"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.*

<sup>3</sup> *I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Gen 12:2-3)*

And later on when God had increased Abraham's descendents and made them into a nation God said this:

<sup>7</sup> *I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, (Exodus 6:7)*

So, who does God favor? The bible is clear – God favors his people, the people of Israel.

But... before we start complaining that God plays favorites and that it doesn't seem fair, remember why God favors them.

Don't forget the reason why God established a special relationship with them in the first place.

The prophet Isaiah tells us that God intended Israel *"to be a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."* (Isaiah 49:6)

**God favors the few for the sake of the many.** He chose Israel in order to choose us.

And with the birth of Jesus Christ, God was taking actions to ensure that his salvation would indeed reach the ends of the earth, and have his favor be extended to all people – to us, to you and me, and it would result in peace in our lives.

That's why the bible says "*for God so loved the world, that he sent his only Son*" (John 3:16). That's why the Angels can say the birth of Jesus Christ means peace on earth.

It's the result of God becoming one of us in **Jesus Christ and changing what it means to be human from the inside out.**

Yes... Jesus Christ would make peace between God and humans by offering his life to pay the debt of our rebellion – that's typically what we celebrate at Easter.

But... Christmas is equally important (and not simply because Jesus had to be born so he could die) It's the fact that by being conceived and born, Jesus experienced the fullness of what it means to be human.

He took on our the entirety of our human nature right from the start, so that he could be born as a new prototype of a new human being that was not affected by sin or evil, a human being who was at peace from the inside out!

And friends, **this incarnation** is God's favor to all people which will result in peace on earth because it is God taking action to get at the root of all the issues which prevent peace in our world - solving the problem from the inside out by changing human nature.

This is why we say – **"know Jesus know peace, no Jesus no peace!"** Friends, when people come to know Jesus, the Holy Spirit begins to change them into the kind of new human beings that Jesus was. How much more could God favor you than that!

Paul writes about "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*" (2 Cor 5:17)

And with the new creation comes peace. Peace that comes from knowing you are forgiven for the wrong you've done, peace in knowing that you are loved no matter what.

Peace that no matter what occurs in this world, we have the promise of Jesus Christ that one day He will return and make all things new and because of his love and forgiveness we will be a part of that – the Kingdom of the Prince of Peace.

Peace because until that day comes we don't need to be afraid – because God will look after us and protect us,

And we can have peace with others because we have Christ's love in us, we can peace with ourselves because we know the truth of who we are and of who we are becoming.

And I say "becoming" friends because this **is a work in progress.** When God first sent Jesus Christ and the Word became flesh and in principle our human nature was saved in Christ.

But it is an ongoing work in our lives to have that salvation applied to the whole of what it means for us to be human. It happens over time as the Holy Spirit works in us and eventually that work bears fruit.

And each year as we celebrate the birth of Christ when this redemption of our human nature was first started, our prayer and our experience should be that we are experiencing more and more peace... becoming more and more like Christ in anticipation of that day when that work will finally be finished.

And every so often we get glimpses of what that might look like.

Back in 1914 in the midst of the World War 1, unofficial Christmas truces were called between opposing sides all along the Western Front in Europe.

And French and British troops met with German troops on the no-man's land between their trenches and shared food, exchanged gifts and sang carols together.

And each year at Christmas we see people putting aside their grudges and disputes with others and coming together to celebrate.

And friends the good news is **that Christmas truces don't have to be temporary** breaks in the conflict.

The peace of Christ's birth – the peace of Christmas can continue once the Christmas season is done.

If simply because of the fact, that it is God who is at work and will continue to work to bring peace in our world – in spite of us.

The scripture promise us *“that **he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” (Phil 1:6)***

So friends until He returns - may Christ work in you and make you more and more at peace!

May you become immune to the events and circumstances which make you angry, frustrated and irritated.

May you become more resistant to being offended, more willing to forgive and understand others, eager to extend grace and mercy.

May you grow in being at peace from the inside out.

Let's pray.