

Title: Peace Baby
Text: Luke 2.8-14
Theme: God's glory and man's peace
Series: Advent 2013, #3
Prop Stmtnt: God is glorified when we are at peace.

50 years ago, Andy Williams released the classic Christmas song, "It's the most wonderful time of the year." It is a fun song, a happy song, and a perky song. And I would probably like it a little more if I didn't hear it 1492 times since Columbus Day. Christmas can be the most wonderful time and it can be the most miserable time of the year as well. In that way it is like how Dickens began A Tale of Two Cities, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times."

Some of you love and hate the holidays all at the same time. You love the decorations, but you hate the pressure to do all of the decorating. You love some of the traditions, but you hate the expectations that you feel to carry all of them on. You love getting together with others, but you hate the pressure that you feel to measure up to the standards that you think everyone imposes on you. You love giving gifts, but you hate the pressure of having to find the perfect gift, at the perfect price at the perfect time. You love the gatherings but you hate the drama that goes into figuring out, where everyone is going to get together, who is going to come, who did it last year, who has never done it and should, who doesn't come and should and who said what to who ten years ago, and who won't let it go? And then there is Uncle Sid. Every family, it seems has an Uncle Sid. You don't know if he is going to come and if he comes, what he is going to be like when he comes, or who he is going to be with when he comes or what he is going to say, or what he is going to do. In fact, you are not sure if Sid is in prison or not.

Seriously, you have family members that if you invite them over you have to hide any and all medications. And then, there is momma! Momma just wants everyone to pretend that they love each other and she is threatening to kill you if you don't. And some of you are sitting here all stressed out because your family is a mess and you are tired of pretending that things are fine. You cannot please every person in your life but you are going to exhaust yourself trying, even if it makes you sick. And of course, now that I have just described your life you are expecting me, in the course of one sermon to tell you how to fix it all, right? Sorry, like you, I hate to let others down, I really do. But, while I think this sermon is good, it's not that good. In fact, ...it may be just above mediocre. ...Ok, it's tolerable.

We can decry the business and the busy-ness of Christmas, and say that we have lost sight of what it is about, and while there is certainly truth to that, I think that what is going on is fundamentally deeper than that. We tend to be a people who are exhausted because we are in a state of conflict with others. We are in this state of conflict because we are not at peace with ourselves. Well, who are we? Are we Hitler or Mozart? Are we Stalin or Rembrandt? Are we Adam Lanza who walks into an elementary school and opens fire, or are we the teachers who shielded her kids with her own body? Are we garbage or are we glory? Are we a train-wreck or a masterpiece? Do you see how

conflicted and confusing we are? No wonder, there is angst in our families when you try to put all of that together. This conflict and dichotomy is not only in the human race, it is in the human. It is in us. We are a broken people. We are fractured. We are Humpty Dumpty. In order for the human race to fix itself, it must fix the human. And there we hit the wall. You cannot be at peace with yourself, until you are at peace with God. And though many of you, if not most of you would claim to be at peace with God, in a positional sense, you need to appropriate your positional peace to your every day life. In other words, you need to put into practice the implications of the gospel. What I am saying is that this baby lying in the manger has everything to do with how you think and respond to Uncle Sid and to every person in your life right now, with whom you are not at peace.

Read Text:

We have this idea that Joseph and Mary are traveling to Bethlehem in the last days of her pregnancy at that just as they arrive in the city Mary starts to go into labor while Joseph is scrambling to find a place for her. Luke does not give us that much detail. The text simply says that while they were there (6), that the time came for her to give birth. They were probably already in the city and possibly staying with relatives in a crowded home.

Another visual that we have is that of the angels. We imagine the shepherds are sitting around the campfire when the sky lights up with angels. The truth is, the text does not say anything about the angels being in the sky. Given the fact that whenever angels appeared to people, that they were usually standing on the ground, I'm guessing that the first angel, and then the entire multitude of the angels were on the ground as well. V.9 says that an angel appeared. That word "appeared" means "standing near or beside someone." And v.13 says that "suddenly" the whole tribe showed up. But, v.15 says "when the angels went away FROM THEM INTO HEAVEN..." This means that while the angels "suddenly" appeared that they gradually left them and went back into heaven which again, leads me to believe that the angels were there, on the ground, right with the shepherds. Ok, now that I have just ruined your Christmas cards and whole host of extravagant Christmas concerts and their flying angels, do not think that this scene is anything short of total amazement.

Shepherds were the migrant workers of their day. They were not held in high esteem. In fact, since they were perpetually ceremonially unclean, people on the whole did not associate with them. They were untrustworthy and were not accepted into the inner circles. So, here you have these men from one of the lowest classes of people being visited by angels! That is a stunner. It is also, by the way, a familiar theme in Luke's gospel as he shows over and over how Christ paid particular attention to the outcast and broken. Then you have the fact that these men were watching their sheep in the fields near Bethlehem. The angel calls Bethlehem, "the city of David." So, what does that remind you of? Well, about a thousand years earlier David himself was watching sheep, perhaps in these exact same fields! And that shepherd became a king. Several hundred years before that, Moses was watching over a flock of sheep when the glory of God was revealed to him with the message that God had heard the cries of his people and was

moving on their behalf. It all fits. Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd and in the Old Testament he calls upon the leaders of the nation and in the New Testament, the leaders of the church to shepherd his people with love and commitment. Depending on the time of year when this took place, these shepherds may have been raising sheep that would be sacrificed at Passover. There is a lot going on here.

When the angel appears to the shepherds, Luke states, “and the glory of the Lord shone around them...” He did not say this (glory of the Lord) about the angelic appearance to Zechariah and to Mary, who were both afraid. This seems to be even more terrifying. It is at night. It is out in the fields. And not only does an angel appear, but he is reflecting the glory of the Lord, which means, that like the Shekinah glory cloud in the Holy of Holies, this angel was brilliantly, dazzling, like a “burning one” or shining one. No wonder these guys were “filled with fear.” And before they get a chance to get their hearts out of a-fib, they find themselves surrounded by “a multitude of the heavenly host” which in the original Greek language means, “a gazillion!” And look at what they say. “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

1. **This Praise is in response to an announcement of gospel.** (10)

I bring you good news. This could be translated, I bring you gospel. Look at verse 10. “Hey, hold the phone, don’t pass out on me here, I am bringing you good news. In fact this news is so good that it will be the cause for great joy! And the joy is not limited to a few, but this gospel-producing joy is for all the people. Hit pause for a second. I want to point out that the 1st song (Mary) focused on God’s favor to *her*. The 2nd song (Zechariah) focused on God’s favor to *Israel*. The 3rd song (angel) speaks of God’s favor in more generic terms. It is *among those* but is in response to the angel’s announcement that this good news is for “all the people.” And just so we do not miss what “all the people” means, the 4th song (Simeon’s) that we will look at next week speaks of God’s favor to the Gentiles and the Jews. In other words, the salvation of the Gentiles will bring joy and glory to the Jews. Back to the announcement. The angel is saying...

A. **The gospel (good news) is glorious!** – “Glory to God in the highest”

“You’ve got to hear this because this is stunning!” Now, if an angel gets all jacked up about something, you better believe that we should get cranked up as well. So, what is going on here; is like church. The angel is the preacher and he preaches gospel. The multitudes of the heavenly host are like the congregation who respond to the Word of the Lord that is declared by the preacher. And they respond with thunderous praise. They sing, they shout and here they are saying, “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

Ok, let’s think about this statement for a second. “Glory to God in the highest.” Which means that God gets glory in the highest. God is glorified in the highest, meaning, God is not only glorified in the highest place (heaven), but God is glorified by the highest beings (angels). All of these angels have appeared to shepherds outside of Bethlehem and all of them are praising God because this is a big deal. Do you see my point? An angel is a big

deal! Thousands and thousands of angels are a really big deal!! And when thousands and thousands of angels are telling you that what has just happened is a really big, then it is a really, really big deal!!! But, we didn't know it. We still appear to be ignorant.

This summer Ben Rothlisberger (QB of the Steelers) was at Cedar Point. I know this because my daughter, Arianna was standing in line for a ride when she noticed him in the same line just ahead of her. He had a baseball hat on and blended in pretty well with the crowd. Most of the people in line had no idea that the winner of two Super Bowls, in fact the youngest QB to win a Super Bowl, was standing right next to them the whole time. Arianna waited until he actually got on the ride, and got buckled in before she said discreetly, "Hey Big Ben." He looked at her, and gave her a thumbs up. Now, is Ben Rothlisberger a big deal? To football fans, yes. But in the grand scheme of life, we'd have to say, not really. There were no reports of angels announcing his birth, or yours, or mine. But, Jesus is not only a big deal, he is the whole deal. The angels not only know Who this is who has been born, but they know the significance of his coming. He is the only one who can bring peace.

B. The gospel brings peace – "and on earth peace...."

The angelic response of praise to the angel's announcement informs us that the good news of great joy for "all the people," is referring to those people with whom he is well pleased. And the people with whom he is well pleased are the people on earth who have peace. So, what does the birth of Christ have to do with peace?

2. This Praise is in response to an accomplishment of God's Promise. (11)

"Unto you is born this day...a Savior"

God has kept his promise to send to this earth someone who will rescue us from the mess that we have made. The mess that we have made begins with our personal sin. We have made a mess with this world because we have made a mess with our lives. We have made a mess with our lives because we are by nature, rebels against God. In other words, we are, by nature, at war with ourselves because we are at war with God. Therefore we cannot live at peace with others until we are at peace with ourselves. But, we cannot be at peace with ourselves until we are at peace with God. Now, psychology, for the most part, understands that you are not going to be at peace with others until you are at peace with yourself. But, that is as far as it can take you. But, you cannot truly be at peace until you are truly at peace. In order to a person who is at peace, you must be at peace with your Creator. How, can you be at peace with your Creator, when because of your sin, you have declared war upon Him? How can you be at peace with your Creator, when in your rebellion you have defied his rule, rejected his authority and have broken his laws? How can you fix that? How can you change your heart so that instead of hating God and his authority, you love him and surrender to him? And if you could, somehow do that, how could you make restitution for your rebellion and sue for peace? Even if, from this point on, you could somehow, stop sinning, how could you ever make up for your colossal arrogance, rebellion, rejection, and soul-polluting sin?

No kidding, people sin against you and that causes immense grief and heartache, bitterness and soul-poison. But your biggest problem is not that others sin against you, but that you sin against God and You sin against others. You need to be rescued from the mess that you have made. You need to be rescued from God. And the only One who can rescue you from the wrath of God, is God! Now, at this point in the story, I don't think that the angels have all of this figured out. They certainly know that something is up. They know that God has made a promise to send a Savior to the world. But their response here by showing up and praising God, leads me to believe that they are amazed. He has kept his promise in a way that no one imagined. The one and only God, the God of all glory, whose glory is in the highest, has fulfilled his promise to his people to send them a Savior, the Messiah, who is nothing less than God Himself.

- A. **A Savior has come** - Savior
- B. **A King has come** – Messiah (Christ)
- C. **God has come** – the Lord (not a lord, but THE Lord!)

The angel puts this together for us. The Savior is the Messiah (Christ) and this Messiah is the Lord. This is not a lord, but the Lord. God has come himself! And the angels respond with praise! But, this announcement of gospel and accomplishment brings with it an admonition to believe.

3. **This Praise is in response to an admonition to believe.** (12)

“this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes” which in an of itself would not be an unusual thing, as you would expect a “sign” to be. Babies are wrapped in clothes that swathe them, that is, they wrap them tightly to not only keep them warm, but to mimic the close quarters that they have been growing in for the last nine months. In fact, you would expect that all of the babies in Bethlehem would be wrapped tightly in a blanket. The sign is not being tightly wrapped But this baby, this Savior, the Messiah, the Lord is lying in a manger! There is only one baby in the city that is lying in a manger.

So, why does the angel tell them that? He expects the shepherds to do something about it. The angel does not command them to go, but he expects them to go and see. He expects them to believe him. And as soon as he says this, then the whole place lights up with the thousands upon thousands of other angels whose response of praise is an affirmation of not only what the shepherds have been told, but it only underscores their need to go and see this child! This is the axis of history, right here. God has come to earth and he is wrapped in a tight blanket and is lying in a feeding trough for animals. And if an angel, and a gazillion of his closest friends hadn't told us, we would never have believed it. And you know what? They went. We see the contrast between angels and shepherds. What do angels and shepherds have in common? Jesus! And of course, the contrast would not be lost on the shepherds who were just blown away by the majesty and awe of being in the presence of these angels, only to track down the baby, the Messiah, the Lord and see him, yes, lying in a manger! That is unexpected humility.

How does God bring us peace? He humbled himself, when he did not have to. He walked in our shoes so that we could live in his robe. Whatever you thought the Savior and the Messiah was going to be like, look at this. He has come as a baby, and he is in a manger. In the early days of the church, there was a group of believers who had formed a church in the city of Philippi. There were many things to commend about this church. It was not a rich church at all. In fact, the people in this church were described as being in extreme poverty. And yet, in the midst of their poverty they were the most generous people that the Apostle Paul knew. But, something happened. Two people, two women in the church who had served alongside of Paul, had a falling out. The issue does not appear to be the problem because Paul never addresses it. The problem is seen in how they respond to the problem. Neither will budge. So, what do you do? Ahh, forget about it – right? Things happen. People will be people. Ignore ‘em. Don’t worry about it. Mind your own business, right? Nope!! There are two people who are professing followers of Christ and they are not at peace with each other. And that makes no sense. Because the Savior, the Messiah, God Himself has come to that “on earth” there would be “peace among those with whom he is pleased.”

So, these two women, Eudia and Syntche are not getting along. So Paul writes a letter, not just to them, but to the entire church, because we are to be a people who live out the implications of the gospel. And do you know what he does? He takes us back to this event and implores us to look at Jesus. (Phil. 2) Who though he was God, did not consider his equality with God and his consideration and treatment as God to be something that he was unwilling to let go of for a time. In fact, he did. He took upon himself humanity. He allowed himself to be conceived as a human in the womb of his own creation. He grew from a zygote to fully developed baby and was birthed, nursed, nurtured and taught. He was raised in obscurity and lived in poverty. He had rights! He actually had rights and he set them aside because the only way that we could ever be at peace with God was if God would go to war with His Son and kill him in our place. Christ chose that for you. He chose to be treated as you and I deserve to be treated for our rebellion so that we could be pardoned, forgiven, declared righteous and adopted into the family of God. When God opens your eyes to this glorious truth, then, and only then do you discover who you are, because now you know what you were designed for. When you come to faith in Christ as your Savior, you are made whole. You are made new. You are reconciled with God because and only because of Christ. Now, that you are at peace with God, you can be at peace with yourself which enables you to be a peacemaker.

Leaders in Iran have publicly declared that they want Israel wiped off of the map. Now, they are developing nuclear weapons. Israel is alarmed, and has made it clear that they will not wait to be bombed. World leaders gather to discuss what should be done about this. So, if Iran wants to develop nuclear weapons, how can the leaders of some of the countries who have them say to Iran, that you cannot? The argument is, that if Iran possesses nuclear weapons, it will threaten the stability of the Middle East. The problem, as you can see, is not nuclear weapons. The problem is the hatred that exists in the human heart. There are some people in Iran who hate the people in Israel so much that they are willing to develop nuclear weapons and appear to be willing to use them. What can you

do about that? Israel says, we cannot afford to wait and see if they will use them. It will be too late. We have to have war, in order to have peace. If you do not have war, you will not have peace, now. If you do not protect your family, someone is willing to attack them. If you do not protect your nation, someone is willing to attack you. You are forced to defend yourself because of the sin of others. People piously say that “War is not the answer.” No, but it is all that our world has until it has Jesus. And when we have Jesus, there will be true peace because it will be peace with God, which means that it will be peace on the inside and peace therefore, between one another. The angels are saying that the coming of Christ brings the coming of peace. But this coming of peace comes to those with whom he is pleased.

Who are the ones with whom he is pleased? Those who believe him. Heb. 11.6 says, *“And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God, must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”*

The way that Christ brought us to peace informs us how to pursue peace. Christ lived in our shoes. He did not have to, but did that ultimately to save us. But he did that also to experience our humanity. He lived in our place. He walked in our shoes. How can you walk in the shoes of another? Before you express your opinion to another, do all that you can to understand their perspective, first. Therefore, when we pursue peace with God and with others, we are pursuing the glory of God. That is when we humbly pursue peace we are reflecting the glory, the beauty, the shining, and the dazzling display of God’s perfections.