



Advent **(Week 3/4) Peace: The Prince of Peace**

Small Group Discussion Questions

Connect *How can waiting for Jesus' return be a way to train you more-and-more in hope?*

Warm-Up

1. What aspects of Christmas do you find stressful? What about Christmas (if any) brings you peace?
2. How peaceful do you think the night Jesus was born was? Why?

Read Luke 2:8-11

3. Who gives a message to the shepherds? Why do you think the shepherds were terrified and afraid? Are there any other examples of an angel of the Lord from the Old Testament you can think of?
4. What is the message of good news? What important titles does the angel give the baby?
5. What does a "saviour" do? Why were the people of God waiting for a saviour?
6. What type of peace did the people of God long for? What were the current clues that peace *had not yet* come (hint: see verse 1-3)?
7. What is *shalom*? How is this peace different from political peace? Who is this type of peace between?
8. Why did the people know they needed rescuing *and* that they could not rescue themselves?
9. Do you think you need rescuing? What do you need rescuing from?
10. Do you ever try to rescue yourself? Why do you think you people tend to rely on themselves?
11. What can we do to mend our relationship with God?

Read Luke 2:11-14

12. Who does the angel say this baby is? What does "Messiah" mean? What does "the Lord" mean?
13. What difference does it make that this Messiah is not just *from* the Lord, but *is* the Lord?
14. Who were the people of God expecting to come and save them? How is this Messiah different to who they are expecting? What are the clues at his birth?
15. How does Jesus bring peace? How is this different from how most kings bring peace?
16. Who is this peace for?
17. Who does God's favour rest on? How do you know you have God's favour?
18. Why is it important that peace is *from God* and not from us?
19. How does faith in Jesus as your Saviour shape your experience of peace? In what way is peace with God certain? In what ways can our experience of peace still change?
20. What helps anchor you to the peace Jesus brings, when you are in the midst of challenges and darkness?

Apply *What helps remind you of the ultimate peace that Jesus brings?*

Pray *Gracious Father, thank you for not giving up on our sin and rebellion, but sending us your very Son to bring us peace with you. Help us turn to and depend on the Prince of Peace, and his death for us. Amen.*

GOING DEEPER

Advent **(Week 3/4) Peace: The Prince of Peace**

Small Group Discussion Questions

On Your Front Line this Week

Invite someone along to join you for Carols by Glowstick, this Tuesday & Wednesday night.

For Families

- *Download:* some of the family resources to use at home: stbartskids.org

Listen, Watch, and Read

- *Listen (sermon):* “Christmas Peace” by Tim Keller:
<https://gospelinlife.com/sermon/christmas-peace/>
- *Listen (sermon):* “Heaven Comes to Earth” by Tim Sheppard:
<https://www.st-helens.org.uk/resources/talk/58761/>
- *Listen (sermon):* “The Gift of Peace” by Johnny Dyer:
https://www.allsouls.org/Groups/206375/H009_Christmas_Peace.aspx?show_media=99601&show_file=109304
- *Listen (sermon):* “Peace on Earth” by Glenn Nesbitt:
<https://stebbes.org/sermons/peace-on-earth/#sermons>
- *Watch (video):* “Shalom - Peace” by the Bible Project:
<https://bibleproject.com/videos/shalom-peace/>

Series Resources

- *Read:* “Advent (Fullness of Time Series)” by Tish Harrison Warren. 📖
- *Devotional:* “Sing in Exultation” by Jonanthan Landry Cruse. 📖
- *Devotional:* “The One True Gift” by Tim Chester. 📖
- *Devotional:* “Advent for Everyone: Luke” by Tom Wright. 📖
- *Read:* “What Christians Ought to Believe” by Michael Bird. 📖
- *Read:* “Is Christmas Unbelievable” by Rebecca McLaughlin. 📖
- *Read:* “The God who Became Human” by Graham Cole. <https://bit.ly/3g68RBj>
- *Read:* “On the Incarnation” by Athanasius. <https://bit.ly/3E5gLmB>
- *Watch:* “The Incarnation (Spoken Word)” by Humble Word. <https://bit.ly/3OhgPUP>
- *Listen:* A Carols Playlist (curated by the St Bart’s staff team): <https://spoti.fi/3OaIsTK>

For sermons and additional resources, visit stbarts.com.au

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Luke 2:8-14: PEACE

About a decade before Jesus was born, some Greeks in the eastern Roman empire set up an inscription honouring the birthday of Augustus, the first emperor of Rome. This inscription, known the *Priene Calendar Inscription*, has become well-known for the close parallels between its ‘good tidings’ of the birth of Augustus and the Gospel account of the birth of Jesus. One of the lines in the inscription is this: “Providence ... sen[t] [Augustus] as a savior, both for us and for our descendants, that he might end war ... surpassing all previous benefactors.”

It is true that the reign of Augustus brought peace to the Roman Empire, especially the Italian Peninsula, which had seen almost continuous war for two centuries. This period of peace is often referred to as the *Pax Augusta* or *Pax Romana* (the Peace of Augustus or of Rome), and it lasted for almost two centuries. For those who had been living under war and the threat of war for so long, this naturally came as a great relief.

However, there was a dark underbelly to the peace that Augustus brought. It was built off the back of violence and conquest. Prior to his reign, Augustus and his allies pursued a program of ‘proscriptions’: the systematic execution of political rivals. He confiscated lands of citizens to give to his mercenaries. There were riots and betrayals. And then throughout his reign, the peace of Augustus was maintained by continually putting down rebellions along the empire’s borders—often very violently so. This was a peace only for some, achieved at great cost to others.

In a sense, this is just the reality of politics: when a nation or an empire is at peace, peace needs to be kept. When at war, peace needs to be established. So the problem isn’t only that we don’t have enough of peace in our world, but that peace for one person virtually always comes at the cost of another. When peace for one is established, it often comes

through the defeat and subjugation of another; when peace is kept, it often happens through violent means.

The peace the angels proclaim to the shepherds in Luke 2 is no such peace. Not only is the peace that comes from the birth of Jesus something much more than a short-lived political settlement, but it comes in an entirely different way. The birth of Jesus, which is a joy for all people, brings about true and lasting peace, and it does so through peaceful means.

This morning, there are four things I want to highlight about this peace:

- (1) This peace *comes* not for some, but for all;
- (2) This peace *comes* not through the exaltation but through humility;
- (3) This peace *comes* not at the expense of the many for the sake of the king, but at the expense of the king for the sake of the many;
- (4) This peace *is* the reconciliation not only nations but of heaven and earth. The peace given to the world is a divine peace—the peace of God.

(1) Peace *comes* not for some, but for all

10 And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

It is likely you have heard these words many times before. So let me highlight, to begin with, one thing about them that I find highly unusual—and that I am imagine the shepherd would have as well: the angel states very clearly that the coming of the son of David, the king of Israel, is good news not only ‘for all Israel’, but ‘for every people’. The birth of Jesus is good news for everyone.

Maybe this is obvious to you, but it is unusual to me. David was himself a warrior; Israel at this time was under the yoke of the Romans. Surely good news for these shepherds in Bethlehem, and their countrymen, would be bad news for those who were so cruelly ruling over them!

But the angels announce that the birth of the Son of David is not ‘good news for Israel and bad news for everyone else’. The Son of David is not coming as a warrior-king and a conqueror of the nations. The Messiah does not look a thing like Augustus or any king of this world—because this good news is not just for some, but for all peoples.

This fact is announced all throughout the Gospel of Luke. For example, when the prophet Simeon is shown the infant Jesus at the temple, he proclaims that Jesus will be “a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel” (2:32). Jesus is a light for the entire world—no exceptions.

The conquering that this king will do is not a zero-sum game: there is not one winner and one loser. The good news is that the king of Israel is also the king of the world—the one who at the beginning, out of love, spoke the world and all its creatures into being. With the birth of Jesus, this same king is working *through Israel* to redeem *his entire creation*—every tribe and every tongue.

If you are tempted to think that Jesus is not for you or for your people, the angels declare the opposite: whether we recognise it or not, Jesus has come as good news to *each of us*. So, this good news of peace—which is praised at the end of our passage—is a peace that is for all people.

(2) Peace *comes* not through exaltation but through humility

The angel continues to announce this to the shepherds: *12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.*” What kind of sign is this? After the appearing of the angel and the mention of good news, we might expect—that is the shepherds would no doubt expect—a great sign. Perhaps a great sign in the heavens. As the angel says, “and this will be a sign for you”, the shepherds are on their edge

of their seat. And then they hear “you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” What kind of sign is this?

The shepherds, though, seem to recognise the significance of the sign. Directly following from the passage that was read, we hear that they leave their sheep behind and go running to see this baby. Why? What are *we* missing? The shepherds apparently take some pride in their vocation. They know that David himself was a shepherd boy, the youngest and smallest of his brothers. The prophet Samuel found David among the animals. David was an unexpected king. Here we have one being born, called the Messiah, the Son of David: and what is the sign? He is born humbly and announced to shepherds. This is why they understand that this is a sign of true king, the heir of David.

But this sign is something more than that—it is something more to us. The state of the birth of Jesus Christ is an indication to us of his humility. The Son of a King should, by rights, be wrapped in the finest purple, and laid in a golden cradle. His birth should be proclaimed from the balcony of the grandest of palaces. Instead, he is born to poverty, among the livestock, and wrapped in swaddling cloths.

His birth is a sign of how he will bring peace. We expect that a king would do so by exalting over his enemies. But this divine King—this Son of God—chooses to come and live among his enemies, to humbly guide their feet in the way of peace. To articulate an overwrought cliché, attributed to Abraham Lincoln, Jesus Christ seeks to “destroy his enemies by making them his friends.”

If we are going to understand Jesus Christ and the peace that he brings, then it is important to understand this dynamic. The scriptures tell us that we have alienated ourselves from God through our sin and disobedience. We have chosen to become God’s enemies. But this state of affairs is so entirely unacceptable to God that rather than punishing us (as we

might expect), he goes to every length to make us his friends, to make peace with us. We are not capable of doing it on our own, and so he does it for us, by sending his Son to us.

His Son, who from all eternity has basked in the brightness of the Father and the Spirit—who is true God of God, light of light—makes himself small, as one of us. And he does this to make us his friend and to bring us back into the divine friendship of Father, Son, and Spirit.

He makes himself small to show us that he is our friend—to make peace with us. And then he promises to do much more: not only does not exalt himself above us, but in the resurrection he makes us great alongside himself! This is the peace that he brings to us in his humility, in his smallness: a peace between God and humankind.

(3) This peace *comes* not at the expense of the many for the sake of the king, but at the expense of the king for the sake of the many;

When Jesus Christ came with humility to bring peace to all people, he came not through violence towards us to defeat us, his enemies, and so restore peace on earth. He did not come to wage war, where a high price was paid by all who opposed him. Instead, in keeping with the humility of his birth, the peace that he makes for us comes through sacrifice: through him giving himself—his life—for our sake. *We* pay no great price for this peace, since *he* pays it in its entirety.

The link between the peace brought by Jesus' birth and the peace brought by Jesus' death is clear in the Gospel of Luke: As Jesus is entering Jerusalem for the final time, leading up to his crucifixion, the crowd cry out to him, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" (19:38). This is a clear echo of the proclamation of the angels in our passage: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace

among those with whom he is pleased!” (2:14). As Jesus enters into Jerusalem, he recognises that they do not know the way of peace, and he weeps over it: ““Would that you, even you [Jerusalem], had known on this day the things that make for peace!” (19:42).

What is the way that makes for peace, except the way of the cross? While Jesus is still on the cross, he makes peace between heaven and earth, between God and humanity. He sets about reconciling his beloved children with his Father even to his last breath. He prays to his Father for the forgiveness of those who crucify him, seeking to make peace, to make friends, between his persecutors and his Father (Luke 23:34). To the thief with whom he was crucified, he opened the way of heaven and—upon that man’s very modest confession of faith—assured him of the peace that he would have with God upon his death: “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise” (23:43).

The writings of the Apostles ring out with the same fact—that the crucifixion is the thing that achieves the forgiveness of our sins and therefore our peace with God:

- Eph 2:14: “For he himself is our peace, who has ... reconcile[d] us ... to God in one body through the cross.”
- Col 1:20: “through Jesus, God reconcile[d] all things to himself ... making peace by the blood of his cross.”
- Rom 5:1,10: “... we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ... 10 For ... while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.

We rebelled against our good King, our Christ, who out of love created us; we cast ourselves out from his paradise and apart from the life that he gives, we were under the sentence of death. But rather than leaving us to that death or demanding that death from us, he left that paradise and came down suffer that death in our place that we might be spared and be carried back to paradise. He went down to the depths that he might lift us up to the heights.

We are far too accustomed to hearing of *many young men* dying for the sake of a temporary peace—and I hope we are grateful for this sacrifice and honour it. But this

sacrifice is different. The death of this one man is not the death of a humble servant ‘for king and country’ (such that king and country are preserved); instead, the king sacrifices his own life that his people might live. This is remarkable: the king conquers without himself bearing arms. He brings about peace through peaceful means.

(4) This peace is the reconciliation not only nations but of heaven and earth.

In the Gospel of Luke, we hear of peace on heaven and peace on earth. We have heard both of these already. When the angels hail Christ’s birth, they sing, “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” (2:13-14). When Christ comes into Jerusalem that final time, the crowds cry out, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” (19:38). Together, these passages speak of the peace that Christ brings when he is born: when the very Son of God, begotten eternally of the Father, is born in Bethlehem, he brings down to earth the peace that exists eternally in the heavens. God is himself continually and eternally at peace; when the Son of God comes in the flesh, that peace begins to extend down to earth.

This peace that Jesus brings down is a peace that we were created for—peace with God and peace with each other. We were designed to walk with God and with one another in the cool of the day, without shame, without strife. In the garden, Adam and Eve were pleased to *have a share in God’s peace*. When they were cast out of the garden, their family life descended into strife and bloodshed. With the first sin, peace was done away with and war began. God came down in the flesh to reinstate the same peace that Adam and Eve shared with God in paradise.

Throughout Scripture we hear that all of creation is designed to be filled with the glory of God. The Seraphim cry: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is

full of his glory!” (Isa 6:3). God himself promises: “all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD” (Num 14:21). The coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh is the beginning of the fulfilment of this promise. This is why the angels herald his birth with this song: “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased” (2:14). With the coming of Jesus Christ, “the kingdom [is beginning] to come, on earth as it is in heaven.”

The incarnation is the definitive beginning of the coming of God’s glory and so God’s peace. The Prince of Peace comes down to earth and shares that peace. Christ continues in this mission of peace-making with his resurrection and ascension: humanity is raised up into the heavenly places, reconciling heaven and earth, God and humanity. Christ continues in this mission of peace-making when he sends his Holy Spirit, which is the peace that he leaves with us (John 14:27).

By the work of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, we begin to share in God’s peace once again. And just as Adam and Eve were made to be co-workers with God in the act of cultivating the garden that God had made, so Christ has called blessed “the peacemakers” (5:9), and calls us to share in his task of peace-making in this age, as we await his coming.

As I have been trying to say, this is a very different kind of peace than we are accustomed to reflecting on. And I have been struggling to consider how we become peacemakers *of this particular kind*. Let me give just a few suggestions:

First, we can pray for this peace: of course we should pray for God to bring peace to places ravaged by war. But I mean something more. I mean praying these lines Lord’s prayer says, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” We ought to pray that God’s reign will continue to extend through all creation and that there will be peace between heaven and earth.

But we can also make peace by doing what the Lord's prayer says: forgiving others as we have been forgiven. To forgive and to be forgiven is to be reconciled—to make peace. It sounds straightforward, but we know even in our families how difficult this work can be. For making peace through peaceful means does mean making a sacrifice; it does mean humbling yourself.

This may seem a little thing, but when we forgive others—and when we seek forgiveness from others—we begin in a small way to participate in Christ's peace-making. When we do this, we allow our lives to become a testimony to Christ's peace-making—in the manger and on the cross.

So – peace has already been brought to us by Jesus Christ. Those of us who have faith in Christ, and who have been incorporated into his body by the Holy Spirit, enjoy this peace now and may participate in it.

But especially as we find ourselves in the season of Advent, let's end by reminding ourselves that God also promises that when Christ comes again, as he promised, all of creation will enjoy the same peace. In this vein, let me close with these words from book of Revelation: “And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.”” (Rev 21:2-3).

Let's pray: *Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for your tender mercy towards us in the coming of your Son: that in him you have given light to us who sit in darkness and the shadow of death. We pray, O Lord, that you would guide our feet in the way of peace—that having participated in your peace, on the last day, we would come to life and rest everlasting. In Christ's name. Amen.*