

Pastor Don Nelson

Sermon: December 8, 2013
Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“PEACE”
Luke 1:26-55

○ {Ro 1:7} **“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.”**

○ {Lk 1:79} **“Filled with the Holy Spirit”** Zechariah prophesies that the child in Mary’s womb will **“guide our feet into the path of peace.”**

○ {Lk 2:13} On the night of Christ’s birth **“a great company of the heavenly host [appears]”** to some shepherds, **“praising God and saying,**

**‘Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom
his favor rests.’”**

○ {Luke 2:27-29} Forty days later Joseph and Mary go to the Temple for purification after childbirth. **“Moved by the [Holy] Spirit”** a man named Simeon approaches them, takes the infant Jesus **“in his arms and [praises] God:**

**‘Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant
in peace.’”**

○ {Is 9:6-7} Fast forward to 2013: we proclaim that **to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his
shoulders.**

**And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, *Prince of Peace.*
Of the increase of his government *and peace*
there will be no end.**

☑ {Veni Emmanuel} During this season we sing:

**O come, Desire of nations,
bind all peoples in one heart and mind;
bid now our sad divisions cease,
and be thyself our *King of peace...***

☑ {It Came upon the Midnight Clear} We sing:

**It came upon the midnight clear,
that glorious song of old,
from angels bending near the earth
to touch their harps of gold;
“*Peace on the earth, good will to all*
from heav’n’s most gracious King!”...**

☑ {Silent Night} We sing:

**Silent night! Holy night! All is *calm,*
all is bright ... sleep in *heavenly peace.***

○ The Lord Jesus **“is our peace.”** **“Making peace”** is **“his purpose.”** He has **“[come] and preached peace to those who were far away and peace to those who were near”** (Eph 2:14-15, 17). Jesus **“preached [*shalom*].”** This is a thicker, fuller expression than our English **“peace.”** It has layers of nuance and undertones and overtones.

📖 To be blessed with *Shalom* is to be complete and sound and to live well. *Shalom* includes: a contented heart, a sound mind, and a healthy body; success and fulfillment; prosperity; right relationships and social harmony; and the absence of war.

Shalom begins in the vertical dimension, between us and God. It grows inwardly, so that we are in harmony with our own selves. And it expands outward, so that we are reconciled with our neighbors.

Shalom is goal *and* process, end *and* means, destination *and* journey. It is noun *and* verb, adjective *and* adverb. It is a quality to experience, an action to take, and a manner in which to act.

All this (and more) is wrapped up in the title Prince of Peace. This is what God has for **“those on whom his favor rests.”** This is what Jesus came and preached.

Isn't this the desire of our hearts? Isn't this the kind of peace for which humankind is desperate?

? *Why, then, was the advent of the Prince of Peace 2,000 years ago so un-peaceful?*

☐ Luke 1:46-55 points to some answers.

■ In verses 46-47 Mary begins to “[glorify] **the Lord and [her] spirit rejoices in God**” for his generosity and mercy toward her and **“those who fear him.”**

■ The immediate cause of her adoration and gratitude is the angelic message in verses 31-33: **“You will conceive and give birth to a son... He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”**

■ This despite the fact that Mary is a virgin: as Gabriel informs her (verse 25), **“The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.”**

■ {Lk 1:30} Of course, Mary rejoices that she has **“found favor with God.”** Yet her joy is not self-centered. She **“glorifies the Lord and [her] spirit rejoices in God”** because the child she carries is the Prince of Peace who will bring *shalom* to the world.

☑ {Bonhoeffer; Away in a Manger} We might imagine Mary as a **“gentle, tender, dreamy”** girl, a naïve youngster caught up in fantasies in which her **“baby awakes, but little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.”**

☑ {Bonhoeffer} Her song is **“passionate, [wild] ... the most revolutionary Advent hymn that has ever been sung.... There is none of the sweet, wistful... tone of many of our Christmas carols... This is the sound of the prophetic women of the Old Testament – Deborah, Judith, Miriam – coming to life in the mouth of Mary.”**

■ In verses 50-53 she speaks in the Holy Spirit:

**His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.**

**He has performed mighty deeds with his
arm;**

**he has scattered those who are proud
in their inmost thoughts.**

**He has brought down rulers from their
Thrones**

**but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.**

- ? *What does this have to do with peace?*
- Hear the word of the Lord in Isaiah 32:16-17:

**The LORD's justice will dwell in the desert,
his righteousness [will] live in the
fertile field.**

***The fruit of that righteousness will be peace;
its effect will be quietness and
confidence forever.***

✪ *Shalom*, peace that is more than the superficial lack of conflict, hinges on righteousness and justice.

○ {Is 48:22; 57:21} Hence, the Scriptures warn that **“there is no peace for the wicked.”** Immorality, greed, and economic and judicial injustice are incompatible with fulfillment, security, health, wealth and safety.

✪ In order to usher in *shalom* Messiah must transform **“the wicked”** who accept reconciliation to God – and he must **“scatter,” “[bring] down,”** and **“[send] away”** those who refuse it.

○ {Lk 2:16} Herod the Great was ignorant of the Magnificat, but he was not stupid. As one who was unwilling to be reconciled to God, he recognized the threat posed by the Prince of Peace. That is why **“he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under”**?

Herod was not the last to reject *shalom*. During Christ's incarnation more people repudiated his Gospel of

Peace than received it. The Jewish religious establishment and Roman government even set aside their mutual hostility and conspired to kill him.

They wanted peace – but not at the expense of their immorality, greed, and injustice. They wanted to receive the benefits of *shalom* without fulfilling the conditions of *shalom*.

- ☑ To quote Dietrich Bonhoeffer,

For those who are great and powerful in this world, there are two places where their courage fails them, which terrify them to the depths of their souls... the manger and the cross here thrones begin to sway, the powerful fall down, and those who are high are brought low, [since] God is here with the lowly. Here the rich come to naught, [since] God is here with the poor and those who hunger. God gives the hungry plenty to eat, but sends the rich and well-satisfied away empty...

Few people are as depraved as Herod the Great. Even so, many people sacrifice peace on the altar of pride or money or pleasure or influence or security.

They put themselves first – and then wonder why their soul feels like it is coming apart.

They devote time, energy, and life itself to building a kingdom for themselves – and then wonder why success is hollow, why prosperity is not enough, and why relationships are merely satisfactory.

They strive to fill the empty corners of their soul with busyness, possessions, food and drink, sensuality – and then wonder why they are not satisfied.

Peace is the desire of their hearts. They thirst for it, like everyone else. But apart from the Peace of Peace and his Gospel of Peace they will never find it.

‡ *What about us?*

Are we united with the Prince of peace?

Is the Prince of Peace lifting us up with the humble?

Is the Prince of Peace filling us “**with good things**”?

Are we, by the grace of God, opening ourselves to his *shalom* by walking in righteousness and justice?

Peace can be ours! Let’s not miss out on it!

“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.”