



The Coming King: Prince of Peace

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

John 14:27 (NIV)

Peace seems to be in short supply these days. Whether in the geopolitical sphere, the socioeconomic sphere, or within our own families, chaos seems to be the order of the day. It sometimes feels as if the entire world is ablaze and our lives are in freefall.

The 24-hour news cycle keys in on every awful thing happening in the world. Social media is pretty much designed to rob us of peace, relentlessly channeling us toward rage bait. It becomes harder and harder to have a conversation with anyone that doesn't veer into whatever we find most upsetting. When my eyes rest on things, whether large or small, that leave me angry, despairing, or even simply unsatisfied, peace flees.



Even when we try to find a sense of wellbeing in our hearts, the events of our lives and world can leave us feeling shattered. Yet, Jesus, the Prince of Peace, told us that He was giving His peace to us. If He gave it to us, why does that peace seem so hard to find?

When the angelic host appeared to the shepherds to announce the birth of Jesus, they said, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favor rests." Peace? Bright lights and clamor and multitudes of angels singing at full volume and... peace. In the midst of all that wild activity is the declaration of peace. How is that even possible?

Perhaps it's a matter of focus. The center of the angel's proclamation was the infant Savior, the One who brings peace. In his letter to the church at Colossae, Paul said, "... set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." The world can be bad, very bad, but if that badness is what captures the majority of our attention, not only do we lack peace, we are unable to radiate God's peace to those around us. Focusing on Jesus allows us to access the peace He gives.

The world may not, and probably will not, change. Our jobs, our families, our circumstances may not change, but "the peace that passes understanding" is within our grasp if we set our eyes on the Prince of Peace.



In what areas of my life do I need God's peace this week?

What can I do today to take hold of the peace that Jesus says He has given me?

Exercise:

1. Commit this time to God, asking Him to speak to you throughout this exercise.
2. Read the passage.

Luke 2:8-18

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

3. Now read the passage below which includes prompts to help you imagine yourself there with the shepherds. As you allow your imagination to create the scene, pay attention to the details: sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and feelings.
4. When you've finished the exercise, journal about the experience, your prayer, your conversation.

Note anything that struck you, especially the unusual or unexpected. Ask yourself:

Why did I feel or think or react the way I did?

Does what stood out to me show me anything about the way I see God, myself, or others?

Note any desires or concerns that have come up as a result of this prayer.

What, if anything, did God show you?

...there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

Imagine you are among these shepherds. It's deep in the night. Feel the cold air in your nostrils, on your skin. Hear the sounds of the night creatures: crickets, perhaps owls, maybe the howl of a wolf in the distance. Smell the grass and even the scent of the sheep. What other sounds and scents do you detect? What can you see by the light of the moon and stars? Are the other shepherds nearby, or are you alone? How do you feel about being here?

An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them.

Suddenly a huge being surrounded by blazing light appears before you! The light is so bright you can't bear to look. Every sound—the sheep, the crickets, even the faint rustle of wind through the trees—has ceased. As if the world is encased in total silence. Then a booming voice fills the air.

...the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid.

Your heart is pounding, and you're faced with a terrifying creature outside the boundaries of anything you ever could have imagined. Yet with these words, you grow calm. You know in the depths of your soul that this being speaks truth. You need not fear.

I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

A savior? The Messiah! Can it be? You've heard stories your whole life about a messiah coming. Is it possible He has finally come in your lifetime? But this being speaks the words of God. It *has* to be true! What emotions arise in you?

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

The skies, from end to end, are filled with creatures unlike any you've ever seen: wings and eyes and colors. The faces of strange creatures all upturned and joyous. Arms raised in praise, mouths wide in jubilant song. It's a party, it's a dance, and you've been invited! And you join in. Hear the uproarious songs of praise, feel the wind of their rushing wings against your skin. How do you respond?

And suddenly—as suddenly as it began—it's over. The skies are simply filled with stars again. The air holds the sounds of crickets, not the praises of the heavenly host. You can feel a light breeze on your face rather than the gale of angel wings. Was it a dream? You look at the other shepherds. They're gazing around as astonished as you are. No, not a dream then.

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

You and your companions head to Bethlehem to find this child who will bring peace. As you walk toward the Christ child, what is God saying to you? And how do you respond? Talk with God as with a friend you trust, in a very close and intimate way. Let the conversation continue as long as it needs to.