

The Heart of Christmas: Peace

Luke 2:8-14; Colossians 1:19-22; Matthew 5:9

Christmas—with all its tinsel, decorations, presents, food, and gatherings with family and friends—is truly a remarkable time of year. For a moment, it almost feels as though we are being invited to step outside the weight of our daily realities and taste the love and joy we long for, but so often find lacking. If we are honest, the emotions we carry into this season are rarely as bright as the lights around us. Part of us dares to dream of a glorious future, yet another part battles the fear of failure, prolonged illness, financial collapse, or rejection from those we care about. We wonder whether we are “enough,” and whether our lives hold any real meaning.

Scripture reminds us that “the mind is the battleground” (cf. Romans 7:23; 2 Corinthians 10:3–5), and we know this to be true. The unknown future is hard enough, but often the past and present feel even heavier. Many are weighed down by the fear that they are not loved; others feel disconnected from a world that seems increasingly chaotic. Add to that the pain of broken relationships and the endless comparison with others, and it is no surprise that so many feel inferior, unseen, or overwhelmed.

Yet the deepest turmoil of all—the one that most robs us of peace at Christmas—is the sense that we are distant from our Creator. For some, this takes the form of doubting salvation; for others, it is the nagging fear that our love for God is too weak, our obedience too inconsistent, to be considered genuine. We confess sin only to stumble again, and the weight of repeated failure leaves us feeling unworthy of the One who gave His life to set us free. And so, even as we gaze upon the Babe in the manger, the peace of God that “surpasses all understanding” (Philippians 4:7) feels just out of reach.

That is why today’s message is such good news. The announcement of Christ’s birth to the shepherds reveals that God’s peace is not reserved for the privileged, the polished, or the spiritually elite. It is offered to all who genuinely seek His face. Peace with God comes only through the blood of Christ, shed on the cross, for “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Through Him we are reconciled, and through Him we can draw near. Christmas is not only about receiving God’s peace; it is about allowing the love and comfort we have received to overflow into a world desperate for reconciliation and hope. The manger leads to the cross, and the cross leads us to peace—true, lasting, soul-steadying peace in Jesus Christ.

The Peace Announced

And to show us just how far His peace reaches, Scripture moves our attention from the palace to the pasture and introduces us to the most unlikely recipients of the greatest news ever proclaimed—the shepherds. Listen now as Luke records the miraculous moment when heaven announced the birth of Jesus:

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. 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.” 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.”

Luke 2:8-14

Luke continues by painting a vivid picture of the angel of the Lord appearing to shepherds watching their flocks near Bethlehem. At the sudden burst of heavenly light and the radiant glory of God shining around them, these humble men were terrified.¹ Yet the angel calmed their fears with a message beyond anything they could have imagined.² Though first-century shepherds were viewed as untrustworthy wanderers³—social outcasts whose work kept them ceremonially unclean⁴—the Lord chose them to receive the first proclamation of the Messiah’s birth (Ezekiel 34:23).⁵ Israel’s true Shepherd and promised Savior had come, offering reconciling peace to all who would fear God and believe (Isaiah 52:7; 57:19).⁶ And to confirm the truth of this good news, the angel told them they would find the Christ-child wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.⁷ Then, as if the announcement itself were not enough, a multitude of heavenly hosts burst forth in praise, declaring glory to God and peace on earth to those who receive His favor.

What makes this moment even more profound is the intentional way God uses the shepherds to reveal His heart and His ways. Jesus entered the world in the humblest of

¹ Darrell L. Bock, [Luke](#), The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), Lk 2:1, 84.

² Walter L. Liefeld, [“Luke,”](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 845.

³ Craig A. Evans, [Luke](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1990), 36.

⁴ Walter L. Liefeld, 845.

⁵ Craig A. Evans, 36.

⁶ Walter L. Liefeld, 846.

⁷ Darrell L. Bock, Lk 2:8.

circumstances—not in a royal palace, but in an animal’s feeding trough.⁸ His birth reminds us that God does not measure human worth by social status or bank accounts.⁹ The One who knit us together in our mother’s womb (Psalm 139:13–14) looks beyond outward appearances and sees the posture of the heart. Those on whom His favor rests are those who allow Him to lead them in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake (Psalm 23:3).

In the shepherds we see ourselves, for we too are “average Joes”¹⁰—sinful, unclean, and unable to offer God anything but the filthy rags of our own supposed righteousness (Isaiah 64:6). And yet, in unimaginable grace, He welcomes us. He is willing and able to cleanse the inside of our cups, to mold and shape us like clay in the hands of the Potter (Isaiah 64:8), restoring in us the glorious image in which we were made—HIS.

Yet as astounding as God’s choice of the shepherds is, the scene becomes even more breathtaking when we consider the glory that broke into that quiet night. Imagine tending your flock in the still darkness when suddenly an angel stands before you and the glory of the Lord blazes all around. The burst of heavenly light would terrify anyone—not only because of its brilliance, but because you find yourself standing in the presence of divine authority.¹¹ Yet the angel’s first words assure you that there is nothing to fear when God moves in grace.¹²

Then comes the message: Someone infinitely greater than Caesar has arrived. God’s people, oppressed not only by Rome but by the roaring lion who seeks to devour them (1 Peter 5:8), have been given a true Champion—One who alone bears the titles Savior, Messiah, and Lord. And as you listen to the great company of the heavenly host proclaim, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom His favor rests,” you realize this peace is not reserved for the powerful or the polished, but for ordinary people—those who simply rise each day seeking to live humbly before their God.¹³

Such a scene should fill us with awe—but it also confronts us with a question: when we hear this story, how do we respond to the Child in the manger? For many, the Christmas

⁸ Thabiti Anyabwile, [Exalting Jesus in Luke](#), Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2018), 42.

⁹ Darrell L. Bock, [Luke](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 88.

¹⁰ Darrell L. Bock, [Luke](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 84.

¹¹ Darrell L. Bock, [Luke](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 84.

¹² Darrell L. Bock, [Luke](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 84.

¹³ Darrell L. Bock, [Luke](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 87.

narrative is so familiar that its truth no longer stirs the heart. Like the church of Laodicea—neither hot nor cold (Revelation 3:16)—we can hear the message without being moved by it. Christmas becomes less about worship and more about shopping lists, schedules, and social obligations. These things may demonstrate our love for others, but what of the first and greatest command—to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind (Matthew 22:37–39)? We may be rich in material blessings, yet neglecting Christ on His own birthday reveals a spiritual poverty far deeper than we realize (Revelation 3:17). So, the question before us is this: how do we truly love God and respond rightly to the gift of His Son during this season?

Peace Accomplished

The peace announced to the shepherds that night was not sentimental or superficial—it was costly peace, accomplished through the very One who lay in the manger, as Paul explains:

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.

- Colossians 1:19-22

We were created in the image of God and given the dignity of free will. And while Satan spoke truth when he told Eve that eating the forbidden fruit would open humanity’s eyes to the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3:5), he hid the devastating consequence—that disobedience would alienate us from our Creator.¹⁴ Sin drives a wedge between us and God, for in Him there is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5). Every one of us has chosen rebellion, and as a result we became enemies of God in our thoughts and behaviors.¹⁵ We are trapped in a bondage of decay from which we cannot free ourselves (Romans 7:18–20). No matter how desperately we try to keep God’s righteous commands, we fall short, for all have sinned (Romans 3:23), and the wage of that sin is death (Romans 6:23). Such hopelessness inevitably leads us to cry out with Paul, “Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24).

So that we might once again enjoy the relationship with our Creator we were designed to have,¹⁶ Christ came to offer us the most precious gift imaginable—the gift of reconciliation with

¹⁴ Curtis Vaughan, [“Colossians,”](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 186.

¹⁵ Curtis Vaughan, [“Colossians,”](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 186–187.

¹⁶ Douglas J. Moo, [The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), 134.

God. Paul tells us that “God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Christ” (Colossians 1:19), for only the sinless Lamb of God could satisfy the Father’s righteous wrath and free us from the wages of sin, which is eternal death. Peace—true, divine peace that surpasses all understanding—is offered to us by the One who not only lay in a manger but willingly shed His blood on the cross to atone for our sins (Romans 5:1).¹⁷

Yet Paul is not teaching universalism, as if Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice automatically reconciles every person to the Father (Hebrews 10:10).¹⁸ Nor does he suggest that anyone can earn salvation through good deeds or merit (Ephesians 2:8–9). Reconciliation is offered to all, but it is applied only to those who believe—those who trust that Christ alone has atoned for their sins and who embrace Him as the only way, the truth, and the life (John 3:16; 14:6). Only then is a person presented “holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation” (Colossians 1:22), living under the gracious rule of Christ their King. Have you received peace with God by having faith in His Son? There is no other way!

The Peace Displayed

Because we have received such costly peace through Christ, Scripture now calls us to display that same peace in the way we live, as Jesus teaches in Matthew 5:9.

“Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.”
- Matthew 5:9

Those who are meek and poor in spirit, who hunger for righteousness and extend mercy, are the very ones God equips to be peacemakers in His kingdom.¹⁹ The reconciliation we have received through Christ is complete. To be in Christ is to be made new—the old has gone, and the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17). Though we were spiritually bankrupt²⁰ and dying in our sins, those who have received the Holy Spirit have been transformed, and with that transformation comes a sacred calling. Paul declares our new identity and mission when he writes:

¹⁷ Arthur G. Patzia, [Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 34.

¹⁸ Curtis Vaughan, [“Colossians,”](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 186.

¹⁹ D. A. Carson, [“Matthew,”](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 135.

²⁰ James Montgomery Boice, [The Sermon on the Mount: An Expositional Commentary](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 44.

“We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making an appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: be reconciled unto God.”

- 2 Corinthians 5:20

Having been reconciled unto God, we now strive to bring the good news of His reign to the world. We take the comfort, forgiveness, and peace we ourselves have received and carry it to others, echoing the heart of our Father who “is patient... not wishing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). So let us seek peace—

- In our homes: with humility, apology, and gentleness.
- In our churches: guarding unity, which matters deeply to Christ (John 17).
- In our communities: modeling grace in an age of hostility.
- In our own hearts: preaching the Gospel to ourselves daily.

Conclusion

The heart of Christmas has never been found in circumstances, traditions, or even our best attempts to create a season of joy. It is found in a Person—Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). The angels announced Him, the cross accomplished His work, and the Spirit now empowers His people to display the peace He purchased. The shepherds remind us that no one is too lowly, too broken, too ordinary, or too sinful to receive this peace. The cross reminds us that this peace came at the highest cost—the blood of God’s own Son. And our calling as peacemakers reminds us that this peace is not meant to be hoarded but shared with a world still stumbling in darkness.

So the question that echoes through Bethlehem, through Calvary, and through this very room is this: Have you received the peace that Christ came to give? Peace with God is not achieved through effort, goodness, or religious activity. It is received by faith—by trusting the Savior who came for you, died for you, and rose for you. And for those who have received Him, Christmas is a renewed invitation to walk in that peace—to let it steady our troubled hearts, soften our relationships, shape our homes, unify our church, and shine through our lives. The peace of Christ is not fragile or fleeting; it is firm, costly, and eternal. It is the peace that meets us in our weakness, guards us in our fears, and keeps us until the day He comes again.

This Christmas, may we come to the manger with humility, to the cross with gratitude, and to the world with a mission. May we proclaim with the angels, live as Christ’s ambassadors, and shine as His peacemakers.

For unto us a Child is born...

unto us a Son is given...

and of His peace there will be no end. (Isaiah 9:6-7)

Amen.