



Advent 4 – December 19, 2010  
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## *It's About Time for Peace* Luke 2:8-19

Does anyone remember which advent candle we lit today as our worship service began? The first candle was the candle of hope, the second candle was for joy, the third candle was for love, and today we lit the fourth candle for ... peace.

The peace candle is certainly an appropriate one for *Sheppard's Gap* don't you think? For generations the Sheppards and the Wisemen had been having their own family feud. Don't you think it was about time for peace? The kids did – they told their parents, "We don't want any part of this feud." And when Jesus showed up with none other than Baby Girl, also known as Eugenia, the man who was 'half preacher' spoke of the beginning of a whole new story – a story of forgiveness, a story of healing, a story of reconciliation ... a story of peace.

One of the kids in the play said that Christmas is a time for peace. Is Christmas a peaceful season for you? Really, is there peace in your world? Some of us are so busy we can hardly remember what day it is; is there peace in that? Some of us are so lonely we can hardly bear the idea of another Christmas; is there peace in that? Some of our families are so broken we actually hate being together; is there peace in that?

A month ago, while we were sitting together at the breakfast table, we got a phone call from Diane's mom. The paramedics were at the house trying to resuscitate Dad, but in an unexpected instant he was gone. Is there peace in that? We've struggled to find it; we'll be struggling to find it this Christmas. And I know we're not alone in that.

Do you ever wonder what the heavenly host really meant when they praised God saying, "**Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests**" (**Luke 2:14**)? Is it true? Is there peace on earth for us? Did the angel really bring 'good news of great joy' or not?

To answer that question we need to understand what the heavenly host meant when they proclaimed peace on earth. The Hebrew word for peace is **shalom**. Shalom means so much more than simply the end of an argument or a cease fire. It even means more than non-anxious state of mind. Shalom means **wholeness**. It means that things are right – that things are the way that God intended them to be. When mommies and daddies have marriages that give life to their families, that's shalom. When the woundedness of your childhood no longer dictates who you are, that's shalom. But it's not just personal or individual. When things are right in your neighborhood, that's shalom. When the poor are being equipped for sustainable success, that's shalom. When systems of evil are being broken apart, that's shalom. The heavenly host proclaimed wholeness; that's the kind of peace they were talking about.

So, how is that kind of shalom connected to the birth of Jesus? It's connected because **Jesus is the shalom!** He's right at the center of it. In his life, death and resurrection evil is conquered, sin has lost its power and death has lost its sting; there is new life, because Jesus is God with skin on, come to make things right with us. And that new life, that peace isn't just in heaven when you die. Did you hear the heavenly host say "**on earth** peace to men"? Jesus' birth meant a new story could begin in the shepherd fields of Bethlehem and in the mountains of Tennessee, and even in the neighborhoods of Gig Harbor.

Those shepherds, after hearing the heavenly host, went to see for themselves. They found exactly what the angel had described. Then the scripture says, "**they spread the word**" (**Luke 2:17**); they became message bearers of the shalom that was coming through the Messiah. Surely that is good news of great joy; God is making things right again, and we get to participate in that important work, the ministry of reconciliation. Each of us who have seen for ourselves that Christ is the Lord are now message bearers of His peace, just like the shepherds some 2000 years ago.

So, if you've never really experienced the truth of this God-with-skin-on baby, then ask God to help you receive the gift that He longs to give in Christ. Don't you think it's about time for peace?

And for those of us who already know Jesus as Lord, don't you think it's about time to be peacemakers? I mean, don't you think it's about time to participate in bringing wholeness to broken places? To your neighborhood? To your workplace? To your family as you gather for Christmas? Or to your school?

One simple way to begin that journey is to simply pray an old prayer by St. Francis of Assisi, "**Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.**" I invite you to pray that prayer everyday this Christmas season. Every time you experience brokenness or despair, ask God to use you to sow his peace.

Beloved, this is the good news of great joy: God has come! He came as a child. And, just like the play, when Jesus showed up everything changed. Now God is at work to bring wholeness where brokenness once prevailed. May you participate in his wholeness work this Christmas. May you be a message bearer of God's peace in the way that you act toward your family and in the way that you live in your neighborhood and in the way that you talk at work. It's about time for peace; God bring it quickly.

***Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;  
where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
when there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
and where there is sadness, joy.  
Grant that I may not so much seek  
to be consoled as to console;  
to be understood, as to understand,  
to be loved as to love;  
for it is in giving that we receive,  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.***

## SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **Read** the passage out loud.
- **Reflect & Apply Individually:** Each person take 5-7 minutes to circle words or phrases that jumped out at them; jot down your reflections; check the notes in your Study Bible for insight or help. Grapple with what the Spirit is saying to you, your group, the church—write down some applications.
- **Reflect & Apply Together:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- **Pray together:** tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for and lay one concern before the Lord.
- **Dig deeper**
  1. What do you think is significant about the angel showing up to tell the shepherds about the Savior being born? Why them?
  2. The angel tells the shepherds Jesus' birth is 'good news of great joy'; are you filled with great joy this season? Why or why not? What does this 'good news of great joy' mean for us?
  3. What kind of peace is the heavenly host talking about in verse 14? Does that kind of peace exist in your household or neighborhood or workplace? What are the implications of you now being a message bearer of God's peace to the world?