

ADVENT | Light Has Come
The Angels Candle: "The Light of Peace"
John 1:4; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46
Pastor Duane Smets
December 24th, 2017

I. The Promise of Peace

II. The Path of Peace

III. The Prince of Peace

Well good morning and Merry Christmas!!! It's wonderful to be with you all on this Christmas Eve Sunday! Today we worship and celebrate the Christ of Christmas. He is the reason for the season, Jesus Christ the Lord, our God and our Savior.

If you are new or visiting today we are so glad you've come. We hope you enjoy yourself a lot this morning. We've been celebrating the Christmas season and Christmas message all month here at our church. We call it the season of Advent. Advent means "coming" and Christmas is all about Jesus Christ coming into the world.

Santa might come down the chimney, but Jesus came down out of heaven into a little manger and for many of us has now come down into our hearts. Today is our fourth and final week of Advent known as the Angels Candle of Peace. We've been looking at the theme of light this year, so my sermon this morning is "The Light of Peace."

There are four accounts of the life of Jesus and His time on earth and in the fourth account, written by a guy named John, he starts out his book introducing Jesus being born as light and then carries that theme throughout the book with several things Jesus Himself said about being the light.

So why I don't I read them real quick, we'll acknowledge them as special words from God and thank Him for them.

John 1:4 "In him was life, and the life was the light of men."

John 8:12 "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

John 9:5 "I am the light of the world."

John 12:46 "I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness."

- Pastoral Declaration: This is the Word of the Lord.
- Congregational Response: Thanks Be To God.

Light. The Light of Peace. Light and peace. Have you ever found yourself driving at night on a dark road that you don't know? Most all of our streets are lit up pretty well here in the city of San Diego. But if you get outside of the city, into the country areas, it's a different story.

A few weeks ago when the fires swept through Bonsall, they ended up coming within 8 feet of my parents' house. I didn't know that at the time but my parents were out of town, so a buddy of mine and I made the trek up there to try and rescue the 1965 El Camino sitting in my dad's garage.

It's a special car because my grandpa drove it off the lot of the car dealership brand new when it first came out. My dad told me it was mine once I owned a house with a garage to keep it safe, but I've had a house with a garage now for seven years and he still isn't ready to give it up yet.

So I thought I'd head up to Bonsall, rescue the car and take what's mine! The problem was when we got there the police had all the roads blocked off, so you couldn't get anywhere near to their neighborhood. But, thanks to GPS my buddy and I found some weird small, off the path country roads that wound up and down through the hills and the trees where we were able to get within a half a mile. These roads had no street lights, they were just dark, eerie and foreboding.

But there is something about having headlights that makes you feel safe. We didn't do this, but if you turned off the headlights it'd make you more uneasy. We were already on the edge of our seats leaning forward.

You know the feeling right? At times I have to go out to the garage to go get something at night and almost always I turn on the patio lights and then once I get in the garage I immediately turn on the lights. That's because there's something about light, being in the light that makes us feel safe and secure. It brings us peace.

God's light brings us peace and it's peace that we truly do long for. So I have three things for us to talk about on this today, "The Promise of Peace", "The Path of Peace" and "The Prince of Peace." And the one thing I hope we walk away thinking about and believing today and this Christmas is that, "There is light in the Son."

I. The Promise of Peace

With this first point, "The Promise of Peace" I'd like us to think about our longing and desire for peace and the Bible's promise of it. The Bible's story is that something went wrong in the beginning of the story of the human race, which ever since has caused a lack of peace in our lives, a lack of peace inside with ourselves, a lack of peace before God and lack of peace with one another.

What's interesting about the Christmas season in our culture is how it seems to invoke and tap into our innate human desire for peace. Anxiety is now said to be the number one health issue in the US with an increasing amount of people living in a regular state of anxiety who wish they could just have peace.

Here's a brief clip done that explains what I'm talking about. <https://youtu.be/M96FS4aeNNU> (cut :02 to :45)

Commenting on this one expert says this, "Alarmist news, the seemingly never-ending war and threats of new wars, recessions, social media and a swiftly changing digital landscape that has changed how we work and interact all fuel insecurity and anxiety." (Joseph Mercola)

Christmas time, with the pressure of presents, parties and extended family can increase the normal anxiety of life we feel pushing peace even farther away. And yet at the same time, the Christmas lights, the Christmas food, the Christmas time off, and the Christmas story can speak to something deep in our hearts where we catch a glimpse and a taste of the peace we long for.

The Bible is no stranger to this feeling. Jeremiah 30:5-7 says God sees and hears our cries, our panic, our terror, our lack of peace, stomachs in knots, pale faces and time of distress. And it's to those feelings and that situation that God gives His promise.

Luke 1:78-79 says this, "Because of the tender mercy of our God, the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Jesus is the promise of peace. He came into the world as the light to give us lives of peace.

The Christmas story is one of a poor young, newlywed couple who we're in distress. Joseph marries a woman who claims to be supernaturally pregnant from God and they have no place to sleep when the baby comes. But God provides and when He comes, peace fills their hearts and servants of peace, shepherds and angels arrive administering and confirming the peace of God into their hearts.

The promise of peace in the Bible beginning the first book of the Bible, which is actually called "beginning" for that's what "Genesis" means. It comes from God to Abraham, the first Jew, and God promises to bring him into peace in a land of peace. This promise of peace becomes so central to the Biblical story that the word peace, "shalom" in Hebrew has remained the greeting and parting word for the Jewish people for hundreds and thousands of years.

Psalm 37:11 in the Bible says it this way, "The meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace."

The meek are those who humbly turn to God seeking His peace and the promise of God is to give it. Notice that word "delight." Delight has the word light in it. It means to lighten up. The picture is of one's face being lit up. The pale, dark face becomes full of color and life when God's peace enters in.

Today, are you needing the peace of God? Peace in the land and peace in our hearts can only come from Him.

Our own solutions don't work. We had a whole period of history in the 18th century known as the "enlightenment" where an emphasis on reason and confidence in the scientific method was supposed to bring us peace. But it didn't. We're just as uneasy and stressed out as ever before. We need the peace of God.

Where and how do you need the peace of God today? Money, your job, a relationship that either doesn't exist or has gone sour, children? All the above? Know that God is a God of peace who promises peace and tells us where to find it. It's in Jesus, the light who came to give us His peace. There is light in the Son.

Let's transition to our next point and talk about how God's light uncovers the pathway to peace.

II. The Path of Peace

So far we've said we're a people, who universally desire, long for and need peace but we often don't have it. When we don't have peace it's like we are driving on a dark road and where we don't really know where we're going, can't really see the way ahead, which causes anxiety, fear, frustration and a lack of peace in our hearts.

Job 12:25 in the Bible says it like this, "They grope in the dark without light, and stagger like a drunken man." We can't find peace on our own because we cannot produce the spiritual light we need on our own. We need outside help, outside illumination.

One of the pictures and themes we recurrently see throughout the Bible is a picture of life as a journey. There are several men and women who take literal journeys following God through the various lands of the middle east: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. And likewise, we see the nation of Israel, journeying to the promised land, finally getting there but then after awhile being taken over and dragged off to Babylon and then they journey back.

Life as a journey is a well-known theme. In 1957 Jack Kerouac wrote his classic book, "On the Road" which is the story of a man who goes on extensive travels in order to find himself. That idea is still super strong in our culture today, many people think they need to travel across the world in order to discover who they and what life's about.

One of Robert Frost's most famous poems "The Road Not Taken" says, " Two roads diverged in a wood, and I took the one less traveled by." Life is much like a journey we are on and we all travel down different roads. Sometimes we travel together for a time and then part and there are definitely some roads that are more popular.

The truth is none of us really knows what is ahead. We can try and guess and plan but none of us really knows what 2018 will bring into each of our lives. We are in the dark, blind to what's ahead. But for those who look to God, He promises to light the way to the path of peace.

Here's how God says it in Isaiah 42:16, "I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them."

Interestingly, when Jesus says in John 12:46 "I have come into the world as light so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness." He says that after healing a number of blind guys and then talking about being blind as a metaphor for all of us and how we need Him to open our eyes and light the way.

I picture it like this. Are any of you Lord of the Rings fans? I am. Easily one of my favorite book series of all time and I love the movies too. I have all the special edition DVDs for both the Lord of the Rings and the Hobbit films.

In the Hobbit there is this scene where Gandalf is leading this team of elves, dwarves, hobbits, and men through this mountain in tunnels and caves. And he is out in front with his staff that has a light at the end of it so they can see what's ahead and where to go.

In John 8:12 Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

I imagine this kind of like that scene with Gandalf leading the way, only Jesus doesn't have a staff with a little light on the end. His whole body glows and radiates with light. And his light doesn't just put out a little circular orb of illumination but it lights up the entire world completely overpowering and overtaking the darkness.

The world can be a very dark place. A very sad, very lonely, very dark place. But into that darkness Jesus offers light.

Jesus says here in John 8 that if we follow Him will will not walk in darkness. This word "follow" is the word Jesus used to call all of His first disciples, He said "follow me" to each one of them when He invited them to be His apprentices. And that's also most likely the reason why the early Christians were called "followers of the Way" before they were even called "Christians."

What you and I are invited into this Christmas is to follow the Christmas story. We're not meant to remember it as a just a trite story, some myth and a myth with no meaning. We're meant to follow Joseph and Mary and the Angels and the Shepherds to the manger where we look in on Jesus and see a savior who can lead us out of the darkness and into God's wonderful light.

Where Jesus leads us is to a place of peace. A peace for our hearts and a peace that will one day lead to peace in our lands.

Today, what road are you on? Are you just groping around in the dark trying to find and make your way on your own? Or are you following Jesus, looking to Him and trusting Him to light your way?

Trying to find our way and make our way on our own never brings peace. Just frustration, hardship and pain. There is light in the Son if we look to Him.

So let's do that for just a couple minutes in our last point, "The Prince of Peace."

III. The Prince of Peace

The "Prince of Peace" is one of the many titles the Bible gives to Jesus.

Isaiah 9:6 says this about Jesus, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

The other week we sang the Christmas hymn, "Hark the Herald Angels Sing." These Christmas carols are packed with meaning. The third stanza says,

Hail the Heaven-born Prince of Peace
Hail the Son of Righteousness
Light and life to all He brings
Risen with healing in His wings

Jesus is the light, the prince of heaven who gives His peace, His righteousness, His light, His life and His healing to all who receive Him.

In John 8:12 where Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." Interestingly, He says this just after helping this woman who cheated on her husband out.

Back then adultery was illegal, well actually it still is in 21 states as a misdemeanor. Anyway, this woman was caught in bed with another man and the law of Jesus day said she had to be stoned for it. But before they could stone her Jesus stepped in front of her, bent down and began to write in the dirt with His finger.

The Bible doesn't say what He wrote, some think He just drew a line in front of her, some think He was writing down the secret sins of those who were wanting to stone her. What we do know is that after writing in the dirt for awhile He stood up and said, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." And slowly everyone who was standing around one by one walked away.

When they were all gone Jesus turned to the woman and forgave her of her sin. Many think that woman was Mary Magdalene, the prostitute whose life was forever changed by Jesus and who became one of His most devoted followers and ambassadors.

Now talking about adultery doesn't seem like the most Christmassy thing...but I brought it up not only because that's what sets up Jesus saying He's the light and it shows how He's the light...but also because I think that story helps us see the significance of the manger.

You see, if it's just a nice story about a poor couple who had a baby then there's really nothing special about that. But if that baby was actually God in the flesh and if that baby could really forgive sin and bring true peace to our hearts, then that story means everything to us.

What makes it more than just a story is if you believe it actually has meaning and significance in your life. Jesus came to shine His light into our hearts and to give us peace. But peace doesn't come without confronting real issues and having real resolution.

What God did in sending Jesus was sending a savior, sending His own Son into the world so that He could be born in order to grow up and die on a cross for sin and sinners and rise again offering forgiveness. Receiving that forgiveness brings us into relationship with the God of peace who then enables us to extend that peace to others.

Earlier we talked about the word delight and how it literally means to have our face light up. This is what happens in us when we receive Christ and follow Christ.

2 Corinthians 3:18 in the Bible says it this way, "We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another."

"Glory" is often synonymous with God's light and "image" is the word the Bible uses for who we are as human beings, persons made in God's image. Jesus restores us to our true humanity. Lighting up our lives with His love, His grace, and His peace.

How it happens for us is by "beholding the glory of the Lord." So that's my challenge and my petition for us this Christmas, to behold the glory of the Lord. Look into the manger this Christmas and when you look in, see the face of your savior, who was born to bring you forgiveness and peace and to light up your life with His grace.

Jesus truly is our Prince of Peace, the Son of God and in Him, we see and receive the light of life. This Christmas, tonight and tomorrow. Make it about more than just presents, more than just food, more than just family friends...make it about Jesus Christ. Behold Him and enjoy His wonderful light.

Merry Christmas, everyone.

Conclusion

Well, I started out telling you today about driving down a dark road trying to get to my parents house to save my El Camino. We could only get so close with my truck and then we started hiking about another quarter of a mile in. There were helicopters flying over head dumping water. The wind was whipping and embers were flying everyone. We got to where we could almost see the neighborhood but it was surrounded on three sides by fire and we would've had to cross a containment fire line the firefighters have made. So for the very first time in my life I backed down from something.

We drove out that dirt road and then the police let us out onto the 76 going east toward the 15 freeway to come back down to San Diego. The 76 was shut down and as we we're driving out there were flames on both sides of the freeway, literally just driving through walls of fire. It was pretty insane.

One thing though, we could see the road real good...didn't need any headlights at all.

Life can be like that. Sometimes there's flames on the sides of the road we're traveling. But with Christ in us, in front of us and behind us...we have no reason to fear. We are safe. He will carry us, light the way and lead us into the land of peace.

We're going to respond in a minute as we do each week here at The Resolved Church by coming to one of the tables throughout the room and receiving the Lord's Supper. By taking a piece of bread and dipping it in the wine and eating it what we are saying is we believe Jesus was born as God in the flesh, the perfect man who lived the perfect life and then we're saying we believe He was born to die and died on a cross for our sins so that we could be forgiven and given His peace.

The special act of faith in Jesus is us saying we believe Jesus is the light of the world and the light of our lives.

To prepare our hearts let's read these words of Confession out loud followed by some words of Assurance.

Confession

Lord, without you we are in the dark and cannot find our way. Be our light and our salvation we pray.

Assurance

Jesus came into the world as light. Jesus lights our way and shines His light into our hearts. Glory be to His name.