

“Peace on Earth AND In Heaven”

Luke 19:37-40

December 2,2012

1st Sunday in Advent

Today is the beginning of an important season in the church year. Any who attend worship infrequently may think they've slept through several seasons and are now on the brink of Holy Week with our Gospel reading for today which is the Palm Sunday story. But today is indeed the beginning of Advent.

Advent deals with the same problem that Lent does: sin. How are we to understand this problem? Many people think of sin as merely the bad things we do on occasion. We could also think of sin as an infection or disease that defines who we are. That is certainly Biblical, too. We are more than just committers of sinful acts. All of us, by nature, are sinful. It is from that sinful nature that all sinful actions originate and show forth in life.

But there is another way to look at sin. Sin is rebellion by humanity against the will of God which causes a great cosmic schism. Sin not only affects our relationship with God and makes us guilty before Him. Sin affects the entire universe. I could quote Scripture passages to prove this but I think it is hardly necessary. When you look around our world today, can you not see that it is all broken? Heaven and earth have been rent asunder. There is a total breakdown between God and man and between heaven and earth.

We long for perfect peace and lasting harmony. Some think we can fix the broken down situation by trying harder, passing more laws, or by some new governmental program. However, if we are honest with ourselves instead of being naively optimistic, we would have to admit that we cannot fix what sin has broken. We cannot bring peace and harmony to a fallen world. We cannot reunite heaven and earth again.

But God can. And God promised that He would. From the time of Adam and Eve and onward, God promised somebody would fix our broken world by taking the problem of sin away. People see

this culminating at Christmas. Nominal Christians and even unbelievers look for hope at Christmas because of the birth of Jesus. They latch on to the song of the angels announcing the birth to shepherds, “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.”

What do people think “peace” means here? I think many people hope for a warm and fuzzy feeling at this time of year as people are kind and helpful to each other. All you have to do is watch the Hallmark network to see dozens of Christmas specials with that general theme. If they do experience that (and many don’t), it doesn’t last for very long.

Some people hope that “peace on earth” is some sort of political or military reality. But that’s all it is: hope – unfulfilled and unrealized hope. There have been countless wars since the birth of the Prince of Peace that night. There has never been “peace on earth” in a political or military sense.

Is this then peace between God and man? Has the division between heaven and earth been healed? Technically speaking, no – not yet. While it *is* Good News that Jesus is born, His birth does not accomplish peace between God and man, heaven and earth. It is incomplete. It’s like proclaiming the good news of a huge banquet after you’ve gone grocery shopping. There is no banquet merely because the ingredients have been purchased. The ingredients must be prepared and served, eaten and enjoyed, for it to be a really good thing. In the same way, Jesus’ birth provides the ingredients for good news. There is peace on earth only in the sense that God’s promise to send a Savior has been fulfilled. The Prince of Peace is now here.

The Palm Sunday story has traditionally been the Gospel reading for the 1st Sunday in Advent. Although you might think it strange at first glance, it is entirely appropriate when you stop to think about it. While being born into a peasant family under difficult circumstances was bad enough for Jesus, it is here where He does the really heavy lifting as the Messiah. Here is where all the ingredients for God’s plan of peace come together. The crowds unwittingly proclaim this when they shout out, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest.” They probably thought that Jesus’ arrival meant the restoration of the earthly kingdom of

David by military might so that Israel might leave in earthly peace. God had something far greater and longer lasting than that.

By Jesus coming to Bethlehem as a baby, there was “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace”. The Messiah was here. By Jesus coming to Jerusalem as a man, there would be, “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest.” The Messiah would fulfill God’s plan to heal the division between heaven and earth and between a loving God and His rebellious creatures, thus bringing peace both on earth and in heaven.

There was no “cuteness factor” here as we tend to view Jesus’ coming to Bethlehem as a baby. Jesus work in Jerusalem was to be ugly. The terms for bringing peace were high. The sin of mankind would have to be judged and adjudicated. Death and incarceration in hell for all the guilty would be the only just decision that would satisfy the wrath of a holy God and make peace.

Instead of carrying out this sentence on all of mankind – you and me included – God, out of His unspeakable love, transferred humanity’s sin and guilt to His only begotten Son. Sentence would be carried out upon the cross five days after the glorious parade in our text. Jesus would experience hell and undergo death as the only way to make peace between God and man and to restore heaven and earth again.

Jesus was judged to be guilty in our place. He died the death we should have died. He experienced the separation from His Father which we should have experienced. The Baby who was born in Bethlehem 33 years previously and placed in a manger died as a man and was placed in a tomb.

But He was vindicated. God the Father raised Jesus from the dead and made Him alive again, nevermore to die. This was God the Father showing His approval of Jesus’ work. He had done everything that was needed to take away sin. This was God the Father showing His acceptance of Jesus’ work on our behalf to restore peace. By coming to earth and being born as a baby, there was peace on earth. By going to the cross and suffering, dying, and rising again as a man, there was now

peace in heaven. Heaven and earth were joined again. God was reconciled to sinful mankind. God and man were and are at peace.

There are many who don't know this and many who reject this and thus, in their ignorance or their rebellion, are on a collision course with hell. For us, it's different. We have been baptized into Christ. We have been joined to Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. We have died with Jesus and our sins have been buried in the tomb with Him. Like Jesus, we have been resurrected to new life – at peace with God and with one another.

So live in peace. It may look like war and feel like war out there, but looks can be deceiving. God has declared you and I to be at peace with Him through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, we ARE at peace with Him, regardless of how it looks or how it feels. He provides us with His written and preached Word so that we can see, in black and white, that we are at peace. For example, as Romans 5:1-2 says, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand."

He provides us with the very body and blood of Jesus which gained peace for us in our Holy Communion so that we might experience that peace, not only with God, but with one another. We get a little taste of what heaven will be like. As one of our postcommunion prayers says, "You have given us a foretaste of the feast to come."

Let nothing trouble you. You are at peace with God. If sin oppresses you and guilt plagues you, remember: you are at peace with God. If you are worried about the conflict our country is in financially, politically, or morally, remember: you are at peace with God. If you worried about war and the destruction of the planet, remember: you are at peace with God. If you are afraid of dying, remember: you are at peace with God. This is not to say that these problems are not real or not serious. They simply cannot overcome you. You are at peace with God.

Celebrate Christmas and the coming of Jesus to Bethlehem as a baby. There is peace on earth simply because He has come. But celebrate weekly the coming of Jesus to Jerusalem as a man. There is peace in heaven because He died and rose again for us. He is here to distribute that peace in His Word and Sacraments. Peace on earth. Peace in heaven. It is complete! Amen.