

Luke 2.1-14
Eve of the Nativity of Our Lord
24 December 2020
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

+ Gloria in excelsis deo +

Beloved in the Lord: grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Hear again these words of the Gospel for this evening, "Glory to God in highest and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased."

Oremus: haec, pater sancte, verba tua sunt, etc.

"On earth peace among those with whom He is pleased."

Those words almost want to make you say, "If only!" right?

Especially after a year like we've had. Coronavirus deaths spiraling toward the three-fifty mark—three-hundred fifty-thousand, that is—with your own fellow citizens lining up and drawing lines in the sand—mask or no mask? Vaccine or no vaccine?

An election year that perhaps more than any other exposed the great political rift in our country, leaving numerous people unable to speak with their own friends, with violent conflict around politics and race. Maybe just at a simmer right now in winter, but out waiting to boil over with the first signs of warmer weather.

But make no mistake, the Lord came to bring peace on earth. Just not an earthly peace, but a far higher, far sublime peace: peace between man and God.

For man it was who had ruptured the primal peace with God. Man it was who in his rebel way ran a course ever further away from the gracious Creator. Man it was who, though the fault was his own and grievous, could not be bothered to seek with his God a reconciliation.

But God it was who remained friend even as man made himself foe. Who did not recoil from sinful man, but like a cuckold husband ran after his errant wife. Who accepted a responsibility that was not His own. And Himself reconciled to Himself him who would not be reconciled.

That is the peace brought to earth this holy night. This holy night when eternity bursts into time,

when the infinite God wraps Himself in the puny flesh of a five-and-a-half-pound Baby,

when the omnipotent God exercises His power and might in the flabby infant musculature of a Newborn,

when the God who needs no sacrifice, as if He were hungry, nurses at His Virgin Mother's breast,

when the undying God whose exhalation is the life-giving Spirit now breathes in, each inhalation another tick in the countdown to His own death,

when holy God stoops in compassion to take the side of sinful offender, even to become The Offender and to be made Sin for sinful man,

when He to whom a ransom in blood is owed takes back the bill in His own hands,
when God so joins His divine nature to created human nature that they can never be separated.

So that when the Man Jesus Christ died, it is God who died.

So that when the Son of God rises from the tomb, it is the Second Adam who rises,
shattering the power of death over all sons and daughters of the first.

So that when God's Son runs His course back to the heavenly hall whence His course
began, it is a Man who runs that course, opening the way to heaven for all, man now

forever friended by God,

forever the apple of the Father's eye,

So that, though God, yet as Man He might plead man's cause at the throne of Almighty
God.

Beloved in the Lord—if ever you have thought your estrangement from God a little thing; if ever your redemption, and if ever the great good gifts and fruits of this Incarnation of God's Son have seemed little to you—the forgiveness of your sins, the Word that sounds out with His grace, your Baptism and His Supper. Then only think of this night—for on this night the Offended joins Himself to the cause of the offender in the flesh of Jesus and makes peace with him by whom peace was broken.

That is how greatly God loves you.

But if you would saunter by all of this in the boastful pride of life—past the inn and upper room, past Virgin Mother's womb and holy sepulcher, past humble cradle and humiliating cross lighted by Him who is the Light of men—to the tavern of this world, all the while casting the flickering light of your own lamp on the darkened streets of Bethlehem and whistling a self-consoling "Don't Worry, Be Happy." If you would do that, fellow-redeemed, make no mistake: you cannot receive this peace, this reconciliation, this at-one-ment of Offended and Offender. And you remain unreconciled, at war with God Himself, and dead in your trespasses and sins.

For the first announcement of Christ's birth was made to the lowest of the low—to ignoble shepherds charged with the night watch—to show that He comes only to the humble. Though rich He was born poor, to show that He comes only to those sunken in poverty of spirit. And He breathed His first breaths in the dark of the night to show that He is the light of those who dwell in the shadows of shameful sin and the gloom of death.

No, beloved, if you're not humbled by your sins,

If, satisfied with the paltry pickings of the filthy rags you call your righteousness, you fail to see the eternal impoverishment of your own life,

If you love the gloom of your own sins and will not repent,

Then you cannot receive Christ.

For He scatters the proud in their vain imagination that all is well, and does not gather them into His holy church. For with such delusions of grandeur, what greater thing could be imagined?

The mighty He casts down from the thrones of their own righteousness, and does not lift them up to the joys and bliss of heaven. For from such heights who could possibly rise higher?

The rich and quite satisfied with themselves He sends empty away, and does not fill with Himself, the very Bread of Life. For with such wealth, what else could a man need?

But to those who are helpless He is their Helper. To the hungry He is food from heaven. To the impoverished He is their treasure. To the crestfallen He is their cheer. To those sitting in darkness He is Light. And the humble He lifts up. With the forgiveness of all their sins. With His mercy undeserved and His pleasure unbounded And with His peace Peace on earth, yes. But peace on earth with heaven. Peace on earth extended from heaven. Peace on earth to all in whom the Father has great pleasure through faith in His beloved Son.

Amen.

pax domini, etc.

jsb
sdg