

The son had wandered far away from home. He was living as if his father were dead, not willing to wait for his father's death before he collected his inheritance. And he had squandered it all, sunk to the depths of life—feeding pigs and so hungry that he longed to eat their food. Then the son returns home, happy to no longer be considered a son of his father at all, happy to be considered a servant. But the father won't have that. Instead, he *runs* to his son, embraces him, orders the best robe be brought, a ring slid onto his finger and shoes placed on his feet. The time had come to kill the fattened calf, for his son was dead and now is alive! And there was peace in that house.

Of course, you know I'm describing Jesus' parable of the prodigal son. It's no wonder that these words from Christ are so well loved. To see that reunion of father and son without any anger, without retribution, without scolding or any "I told you so's"—that is beautiful. And this is just the sort of thing that Luke loves to tell about in His Gospel. Each of the four Gospels have their own nuances, and throughout his book, Luke delights to recount how Jesus embraces the outcast, how He seeks out the lost and the alienated and brings them near to Himself. In fact, it's been said that the theme for this entire book may be found in Jesus' words in Luke 19: ***"The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."*** (Luke 19:10)

This is the message that you need to hear this Advent season, because you know what it's like to be an outcast, alienated from others. But don't get hung up on such an account simply because it resonates with you. Hang onto these types of accounts because they show you the type of God you have.

And so, we get this same sort of story of Jesus reaching out to the lost and the outcast here in Luke chapter 2. The angel of the Lord sounds forth with a ringing voice: ***"Behold, I bring to you good news of a great joy. For unto you is born this day a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."*** This good news of great joy is very personal. The angel speaks first to a select group of individuals: to shepherds. He says to them that Christ is born "for you." That message is echoed then by the heavenly host, who praise God, saying, ***"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among mankind with whom He is pleased."***

Peace. The angels of heaven speak about peace for us. That's a concept that seems pretty foreign to us these days. We see almost none of us around us in the world today. Even in this Advent season where we slow down and take the time to meditate on the gift of God's child and the peace He brings, still peace seems hard to come by. There are presents to buy, parades to attend, decorations to set out, and here we are with another Advent service to sit through. But it's not an overstretched schedule of too much to do and not enough time to do it that robs us of our peace. We're robbed of peace by the absence of certain family members this Christmas season. We're robbed of peace by concern over a medical diagnosis. We're robbed of peace by a difficult decision. We're robbed of peace by broken relationships, where a cross word was said and feelings have become entrenched. Time does not heal all wounds. Sometimes the wounds fester, and peace becomes even more elusive.

Yet the Lord is true to His Word. Jesus comes with peace for this season and all seasons. He brings peace to us because we naturally just don't know what makes for peace. We're apt to take on the role of Jerusalem, over whom Jesus wept, saying, ***"Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace!"*** (Luke 19:42) Peace remains elusive for us. We can't know what makes for peace. But Jesus does. And so, it's no surprise that we find this message of the angelic host to the shepherds echoed again as Jesus enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, and the crowds sing, ***"Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"*** (Luke 19:38)

Oh, there will be peace because Jesus comes into Jerusalem, knowing exactly what things make for peace. He was born for this. He was born to suffer and die, to be stripped of all peace, so that there might be peace.

When we think of that triumphal entry on Palm Sunday, the crowds echoing the words of the angels, how beautiful it is that that song was first proclaimed to the shepherds. We might have a romanticized view of the shepherds, but the ancient world did not. Being a shepherd was a last resort type of job. If you couldn't get any other job, if you couldn't hold any other job, they were always hiring shepherds. You could always be a shepherd. Why? Because it was a job that lacked any comfort! You were out in the elements—rain, sun, snow—you were there. You had no regular place to lay your head, you were simply with the sheep. And there was no safety! Thieves would come around to steal the sheep. There were wolves that would attack at any time. And there was no time off. It was a 24/7 job. You had to watch the sheep at all times. So, the shepherds were not well regarded, it was a dirty job. And they were despised. Since they were with the sheep all day every day, they couldn't go to the temple to offer the sacrifices that would make them ceremonially clean. So they were Unclean. Not well-regarded. Despised. Outcast. Alienated from Israel. And, therefore, they were the very kind of folk who needed some good news. And here it was: ***“Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”*** Unto you, of all the people on earth, you are the ones, the angels told them. This child of good news was not in the temple where they could not go, but in a barn where even they belonged. Good news, *even* for the shepherds.

Now throughout Luke's Gospel, we find again and again the good news being proclaimed to the poor: the blind, the lame, the lepers, the deaf, the dead, the shepherds. Knowing this means that one thing is certain. You cannot claim that the peace God brings might be for others, but it can't be for you. We might not think that in so many words, but it's easy for us to get the nagging feeling that God may love sinners, that God may even forgive sinners, but He can't possibly mean me, can He? Well, the angels' message to the shepherds shows us that no matter how lowly, how alienated, how despised you might feel, Christ knows the things that make peace for you. And He brings them even to you.

And if you're still not convinced, consider the scope of Christ's peace. At His birth, the heavenly host says, ***“On earth, peace among mankind with whom He is pleased.”*** The angels say that it is for all the earth, for all mankind, not a select few. Everybody. And that includes you.

When Jesus enters Jerusalem, peace is spoken of in another location. The angels sang, ***“On earth peace among mankind,”*** but note how the crowds turned it around: ***“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest.”*** Not just peace on earth, but peace even in heaven. That joy of the father running to His prodigal son is the same joy that God in heaven has for you. Finally, since for your sake Christ took on flesh and blood and was born to bring you peace, and died to reconcile you to God, and rose to proclaim lasting peace for you, there is peace now in heaven. And so the angels sing out exulting, that God now has peace with you. Your sin that had alienated you from the Father has been overcome. You had been the prodigal, but in Christ, the Father receives you back in joy without anger, without retribution, without any scolding. That is beautiful.

So even if your life seems devoid of peace, you may sing with joy. As the angels sing: “Joy, great joy and tidings glad we bring from heav'n resounding, For you, for you and all the world abounding.” That joy and peace is not only for shepherds but also for you and all the world. For “God's own Son is born a child . . . ; God the Father is reconciled.” Amen.