

SERIES           Sharing Christmas  
 SERMON        **With Peace (Luke 1.76–79; 2.8–15)**<sup>1</sup>  
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## 1. CONFUSED PEACE

In Orlando, FL, there’s a human trap run by a mouse, and it prides itself on being “fun for the whole family.” Where its (supposed) magic promises to transport people from their routine, hectic, and stressful everyday lives to a place that offers experiences that “make people happy” and create wonderful family memories. But for those who’ve been there and watched or listened to what happens: it doesn’t seem like families are really having fun or truly finding happiness. Instead, they’re exhausted, frustrated, short-tempered, argumentative, and constantly battling over who’s self-interested idea for what to do is better than another’s. Thus, the promised fun, happy, wonderful family memories appear to be elusive—or, at best, only experienced if people can fake it for the duration of the visit.

Sad to say: something similar happens during the Christmas season. Because of our routine fast-paced living, we hope for this time of year. It’s when we can finally slow down. Enjoy the simpler things of life. And experience a sense of peace that is otherwise difficult to find or sustain—even in the home. A hope often fueled by the constant reminders about the “reason for the season”—e.g., personal joy, happiness, blessing; uplifting music and songs of joy, happiness, blessing; decorations, lighting of trees, binge-watching the best Christmas movies. But, as we all know, the strange (*and unfortunate*) irony of this hope is that the Christmas season tends to be one of the most frantic, stressful, and chaotic times of the year. Some families are just a few steps behind the Griswold family Christmas, while others make that one look tame and even enjoyable.

At such points, we ought to step back and ask: Why does this happen? Or better: why does this keep happening? Why so much restlessness, frustration, tension, and disorderliness in a time that’s meant to be none of those? It shouldn’t be this way.... So, what’s the answer? I think part of it is: we’re confused about what truly matters. And this not helped by the fact that we’ve made ourselves to be the definers of both what is true and what matters. More to the point: we’ve redefined the reason for the season so that it aligns better with the reasons we’ve created for why we deserve to be personally happy—fulfilled by getting what we (think we) want or what we feel will produce maximum happiness for our individual selves. But we experientially know: that fulfillment never truly and sustainably happens. It’s elusive to us. Or at best, it appears to exist for as long as we can fake it for the duration of the season.

So, to come back to the question: “what’s the answer?,” I think we instinctively know it. Revealed by our pursuits in life: we seek to provide for ourselves in ways that only God can fulfill—in the truly meaningful and enduring sense of that term. And because of that inability, we typically experience a sense of personal and spiritual discontentment and restlessness. Moreover, it’s from our confusion that we often fail to see how our redefinitions for what matters (and how to obtain what we say matters) not only puts our wants at odds with other people’s wants, but also removes God as the sole provider for all that we truly need. And

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations will follow the New English Translation (NET).

because of that, we typically experience a sense of relational tension, strife, and isolation. All happening during a time that's meant to be happy, joyous, together-again, and peaceful.

So, to rip the band-aid off: while we might confess that the Christmas season shouldn't be chaotic and self-interested; in our confusion, we miss the reality that we've made it what it shouldn't be. We've placed exceedingly more value on the temporal and easily exchanged things or stuffs of life as the means for finding personal happiness, self-worth, and purpose. But in doing so, we've lost sight of the one eternal and irreplaceable provision from God that brings true blessedness, renewed value, and unassailable hope. And in seeking to create our own sense of happiness, joy, peace—either by receiving what we think we want or by giving others what they think they want; we miss receiving and sharing the one thing we truly need. The One thing that's been divinely shared and given by God Himself to bless our lives—not just for a short season on the calendar, but for the whole of life and even everlasting life.

—PRAY—

## 2. GOD'S PEACE ANTICIPATED

We often joke about stores getting ready for Christmas *really* early. It used to begin around mid-November, which prompted this funny meme:

But more recently, starting the Christmas season has moved into October—in some places, about a week or so before Halloween. To which we might wonder: “**Why not move it to mid-June, since that's half way? Or how about January—let's just do Christmas the whole year?**” I mention this because, biblically speaking, God wins on getting His people ready for Christmas *really* early.

*(Bearing in mind: what He means for Christmas to be is infinitely better and more meaningful than anything we could ever try to make it to be).* And when I say He gets His people ready *really* early, I'm not talking about a few weeks, months, or even a year. I'm talking over the course of millennia.



In Gen 12, God promises to make Abraham the father of a great nation—even though he doesn't yet have a single child, and he and his wife are far beyond child-bearing years. But then again, God is able to do what we think is impossible. And along with that miraculous fatherhood, God promises to bless Abraham and his descendants, and to use them to bless the nations of the world. Then in Gen 22, God reminds Abraham of the promise—emphasizes the point that: God's blessing is not just that Abraham's descendants will be a great nation, but that from Abraham's seed God will bless the world. A blessing expressed as a redemptive hope: out of Israel, salvation comes (cf. Ps 14.7; Zech 9.9). A hoped-for saving-redemption accomplished through the One who is truly God's Anointed (=Mashiach—“messiah”), for only such a One could ever fulfill God's promised hope in the way God intended.

And of the 300+ prophecies about this promised, true Messiah and what He will do for God's people and the world, a few deal with His birth or miraculous arrival in the world. For example: in Gen 49.10, He is said to come from the tribe of Judah. In Deut 18.15, He is promised to be greater than Moses—the great liberator and law-giver. In 2 Sam 7.12–16, He is the One who

comes from the line of David and rules from the everlasting throne forever (cf. Isa 11.1; Ps 89.35–37). From Mic 5.2, we learn that He not only will be born in Bethlehem as the true King over God’s people but also that His origins are deep in time. In Isa 7.14, He is said to be born of a virgin, and that He shall be called, Immanuel (“*God with us*”). And that “God-with-us”-ness reveals the absolute distinctiveness of the true Messiah—both in terms of His identity and the nature of His redemptive and peace-giving rule over all things.

Thus, in Isa 9.6–7, we hear this revealing word of promise: “For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of [His] peace, on the throne of David and over His kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts<sup>2</sup> will accomplish this” (NASB). This is not only God keeping His word to bless Abraham and his descendants, and that through Abraham’s seed God will bless the nations of the world. This is also God choosing to be personally involved in this blessed fulfillment and the establishment of His eternal kingdom of true, unassailable peace—on earth as it is in heaven.

It might be safe to assume that: such a promised blessing of peace in life and peace on earth from God would surely be desired and welcomed, because—deep down—people know that peace is needed in the world because the world is not at peace. A reality experienced across the span of history and the range of human existence. We know we’re not truly at peace within ourselves or with even others. We know that nations are not truly at peace with other nations, and that nations are not truly at peace even with their own citizens—despite their incessant empty promises to the contrary. And more times than not, this lack of true peace is the result of our desires and attempts to create our own version of peace and expect others simply to forego their version and accept ours as the better option. We see this, too, at work in the personal and national realms. And this is not a modern or new experience. It was also the case in the ancient world—especially in the decades right before the time of Jesus.

After centuries of wars, nations conquered, enemies subjugated, lands acquired, laws rewritten, and cultural norms established (and imposed); beginning with the reign of Caesar Augustus in 27 BC, Rome entered what historians call the *Pax Romana*—“the Peace of Rome.” A period of 200+ years when the Empire was (effectively) at peace with the rest of the world. Meaning: Rome was in charge, and everyone else had to bow the knee. And during this same period, any time a new Caesar was enthroned, not only would heralds declare the news—a declaration known as the *εὐαγγέλιον*—but grand parades and festivals would be arranged and carried out in and around the capital city. All of it done to exalt the greatness of the new ruler of the world—along with the bold and inspiring promises about unity and prosperity for everyone, so as to ensure to protection and continuation of the *Pax Romana*.

However, despite the fact that this sort of political rhetoric hasn’t really changed in 2000+ years, there’s an equally long-standing dirty little secret. The promised “Peace of Rome” really only applied to legitimate Roman citizens—but especially to the powerful elites of Roman society. They were the ones who truly enjoyed the pleasures and perks of the ruler’s

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<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew phrase here, יהוה צבאות, could be rendered: “the Lord of armies,” which the Greek translation turns into something more like a title (κυρίου σαβαωθ—“Lord of Sabaoth”) rather than a general description.

promises. (After all, why shouldn't they? They put him there—thus, *vox populi* was only an illusion to make people feel good, or that they had a real say in anything). For everyone else under the power of Rome, life was simple. The message from the top was: shut up, obey the laws (even when we don't), pay your taxes (sometimes more so if we want something or we need to fund an agenda item), hail Caesar as lord and savior of the world, don't cause a ruckus, don't mess with the Imperial religion, and don't try to change the way we do things. Do otherwise: you die; no peace for you.

So, as NT scholar NT Wright describes it: when the heralds traveled around the Empire with the εὐαγγέλιον, they “did not go around [to the people] saying, ‘There is this new experience you might like to try on for size—namely, you might like to give allegiance to Caesar, if that suits you and if that’s where you are right now in your own personal journey.’” Instead, the declaration was: “There’s a new Caesar on the throne, and if you want to live under his reign of peace, then get down on your knees and do what you’re told.”<sup>3</sup> Peace through intimidating coercion and with the point of the sword is not peace. And simply calling non-peace “peace” does not make it so. And non-peace is not legitimize because it’s upheld by those in power through non-peaceful means. Calls to mind the rebuke in Jer 8: “They have healed the wound of My people lightly<sup>4</sup> saying, ‘Peace, peace!’ when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed; they don’t know how to blush” (Jer 8.11–12, ESV).

And that inability to see the non-peace being imposed as peace, the inability to see the wrong done by the one doing it, or the mind and heart that freely calls evil “good” and good “evil”, or would redefine what is darkness as light and light as darkness (cf. Isa 5.20); all of that (and so much more) represents what’s ultimately the case when we say we are not truly at peace. And by that I mean: humanity is not at peace with God. A non-peace cause by our rebellion against Him. A reality that began in the Garden of Eden when Satan tempted both Adam and Eve with the promise that they could to create their own version of peace—because they could become like God themselves—and expect God simply to forego His version and accept theirs as the better option. A temptation whose rhetoric has not changed ever since. And the choice of Adam and Eve has become something of a model for all human sinfulness.

A model that reveals a willful rejection of God as God and a willful desire to replace Him with what the self and what the self prefers for what is true and what matters. As Paul flatly declares in Rom 1: “they [sinful humanity] became futile in their thoughts, and their senseless hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for an image resembling mortal human beings or birds or four-

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<sup>3</sup> The first part of the quote is from a lecture I heard NT Wright give years ago. The second part of the quote is my adaptation in order to keep the theme of this message. The untouched quote of Wright says: “The word ‘gospel’—from the term, εὐαγγέλιον—“meant the accession of Caesar. And when Tiberius or Nero came to power, the imperial heralds did not go around saying, ‘There is this new experience you might like to try on for size—namely, you might like to give allegiance to Caesar, if that suits you and if that’s where you are right now in your own personal journey.’ No, they said, ‘Tiberius is emperor! Get down on your knees!’”

<sup>4</sup> The meaning here is: they treat deep injury it as though it’s a minor scratch. And the point of the metaphor is to say: the leaders—who have been entrusted with declaring truth and governing justly (according to God’s definition)—have relied upon the use of lies and false teaching (but presenting it as truth) in order to sustain their own definition and practice of justice (but offering it as though it’s God’s). Thus, through their wicked schemes (which they redefine as good), these corrupt leaders are causing God’s people to sin against God and therefore forfeit their covenant relationship with God. But they treat this deep injury as though it’s a minor scratch by saying (slightly paraphrased): “It’s fine. In fact, what we’re declaring and how we’re leading is the way to peace.” But God, who not only sees the heart but also the truth, rightly declares: “In their word and their way, there is no peace.”

footed animals or reptiles.<sup>5</sup>... They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creation rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever” (Rom 1.21–23, 25). And this reality—this sinful rebellion against and loss of peace with God—was not a problem only found in the rest of the world. It was equally present among God’s people, and brought with it the same result. As the prophets continually reminded them.

But those reminders often when unheard and unbelieved. In fact, in the early days of Ezekiel’s ministry (6th century BC), the people believed that God’s presence would never leave them. They viewed that possibility as unthinkable. However, and reflecting what often happens when humans think they knew more and better than God, the day came when the unthinkable became both a possibility and a reality. In Ezek 10, not only did God leave the Temple, but the guarding warrior-angels also packed up and left with Him: “Then the glory of the Lord moved away from the threshold of the Temple and stopped above the cherubim. The cherubim spread their wings, and they rose up from the earth while I watched” (10.18–19a). Then, in Ezek 11, God’s presence and His glory depart from His people completely. Why? Because of the long-standing darkened, sinful, unrepentant rebellious hearts of those who always promised to be His faithful people but continuously failed—thinking they could do better.

And until the time of God’s own choosing, along with the needed transformation of hearts and lives that He would provide (cf. Ezek 36.26–27), His glorious presence would remain absent from the people. An absence that lasted for centuries. Centuries that could easily be called the dark night of the collective soul of humanity. A darkness that confines us from rescue. A darkness that blinds us to any hope of another way of being. A darkness that reminds us of our non-peace with God, which creates non-peace within ourselves, with others, among nations, and throughout the world. A darkness that affirms what happens when we exalt the creation over the Creator, and we seek to make life happy, blessed, and peaceful according to our own designs and wants. And it’s a darkness that hides the reality that: no matter how hard and frequently we try to make that life, we will always fail.

However, and to balance out this wonderfully cheery news to share at a Christmas Eve service: all hope is not lost either for those who faithlessly wander away from God or faithfully endure in the midst the darkness that prevails because of foreign, pagan oppression and domination. What’s amazing about this reality, is that despite humanity’s sinful rebellion against God and the rejection of His true and glorious peace, and especially despite the same rebellious, rejecting, treatment from His chosen people; God chooses not to abandon us (*even those who abandoned Him*), and He chooses to make the way back to Him possible (*especially for those who willfully prefer the path that leads away from Him*). And this chosen way is both infinitely merciful and entirely personal. In Isa 9.1–3, we hear this promise: “The people walking in darkness see a bright light; light shines on those who live in a land of deep darkness. You [God] have enlarged the nation; You give them great joy. They rejoice in Your presence as harvesters rejoice.” And God’s promised presence will not be an abstraction or some private spiritual experience. Instead, it will be unconventionally real and tangibly known.

### 3. GOD’S PEACE DECLARED

A realness and known-ness that reveals itself as Paul says: “In the fullness of time” (Gal 4.4). Meaning: the revelation happens according to God’s intended time and design to bring

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<sup>5</sup> Notice that Paul, to reveal the depth of the sin, moves from the highest form of creation to the lowest.

salvation not only to His people but also through them to the rest of the world; thus, to restore the relationship between Himself and humanity, as well as to reveal and establish His eternal kingdom of true, unassailable peace on earth as it is in heaven. And we find the fulfillment of this in the opening of Luke’s Gospel—and not just in the story of Jesus’ birth, which, in terms of overall content, is extraordinarily brief (see 2.1–7). All told, the birth of Jesus happens in one verse: v.7. The rest of the account deals with Rome doing what Rome does, and Mary and Joseph making the long trek from Nazareth to Joseph’s family home in Bethlehem. A home so jammed with people that Jesus has to be born, not in the “living area” (κατάλυμα),<sup>6</sup> where everyone else would be, but on the ground level where the animals are kept.

Again, while the story of Jesus’ birth is indeed foundational to the promises of God to His people and to the rest of the world, Luke brackets that story with two others—both of which offer a life-changing word of peace. The first word comes at the end of chapter 1, following the birth of John the baptizer. His father, Zachariah, bursts forth not only in praise for what God has done, but also with prophecy concerning what God’s work means for humanity. Listen to how he ends his prophetic word: “And you, child, [speaking of John] will be called the prophet of the Most High. For you will go before the Lord to prepare His ways, to give His people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins. Because of our God’s tender mercy, the dawn will break upon 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” (Lk 1.76–79).

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<sup>6</sup> Upheld in English translations, the traditional reading of the text says, “and there was no room for them in the inn.” This has led to portrayals of Joseph and Mary arriving in Bethlehem—after a long (90-mile) journey from Nazareth—searching frantically for a place to stay, because Mary’s about to give birth at any moment. And after being turned away by multiple hotels (or inns) in the city, Joseph and Mary happen upon a somewhat reluctant inn-keeper who offers them his stable out back—just in the nick of time. All of this from the simple phrase, “and there was no room for them in the inn.” However, there are several key details regularly overlooked when it comes to this portrayal from that otherwise simple phrase. First and foremost: the entire scenario is nowhere found in the biblical text. It comes from much later, non-biblical traditions about the text. Second, there’s no declared sense of urgency upon arrival in Bethlehem. In fact, the biblical text gives the impression that they arrived with plenty of time to spare—i.e., “[Joseph] went to be registered [in Bethlehem] with Mary, who was promised in marriage, and who was expecting a child [οὔση ἐγκύω—“and who was pregnant”]. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child” (Lk 2.5–6). Third, there’s not one mention of frantic searching among local inns or dealings with nasty inn-keepers. In fact, historically speaking, the existence of multiple local inns (as commercial lodgings) in Bethlehem is without proof. Local inns in the ancient world were found in populated cities located on major, well-traveled roads. But such roads did not pass through Bethlehem. More to the point, Bethlehem, at the time, was such an insignificantly small village, that the idea of having even one inn would be superfluous—if not a ridiculous business venture. Fourth, there is the crucial detail about the specific language used in the passage. In Lk 10.34b–35a, which is the tail-end of the parable of the Good Samaritan, we read this: “Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper...” In v.34b, we see the specific mention of “an inn” (πανδοχεῖον), and in v.35a, we see the specific mention of an “innkeeper” (πανδοχεύς); and the historical and geographical details of the story makes perfect sense for such a mention—i.e., the road between Jerusalem and Jericho (two major cities) was a major, well-traveled roadway. However, when we come to Lk 2.7, the text says: “And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in strips of cloth and laid Him in a manger, διότι οὐκ ἦν αὐτοῖς τόπος ἐν τῷ κατάλυματι [=on the account of the fact that there was no place for them in the living quarters]” (emphasis added). If Luke meant to describe the existence of “an inn” in 2.7, he would have a ready and specific word for that: πανδοχεῖον. But he doesn’t use that word. Instead, he specifically uses the term, κατάλυμα. This is a particular term used to describe a particular portion of common house-structures in the ancient world. The term referred to the upper level where not only the activities of family life and gatherings happened, but also people slept. (For what it’s worth: the same term is used for the setting of the last supper, which was held in the “upper room” [τὸ κατάλυμα]—see Lk 22.11). Moreover, if Luke wanted to describe the lack of a designated “room” in an inn, he would have a ready term for that, too. But that’s not how he describes things in Bethlehem. Instead, he speaks generally: “there was no place for them” (οὐκ ἦν αὐτοῖς τόπος)—i.e., there’s no space available in the household living area because it’s over-crowded (cf. Lk 14.22, where the same type of language is used to describe a similar situation—only this time in a positive sense: “Then the slave said, ‘Sir, what you instructed has been done, and there is still room [καὶ ἔτι τόπος ἐστίν]”). And all of that leads to the final consideration typically overlooked in an effort so sustain the traditional Christmas pageant view of Jesus’ birth. Based on Lk 2.1–5, the census calls for people to return to their ancestral town to be counted. Joseph (and his family) was from Bethlehem, so he travels there with Mary from Nazareth. And because Bethlehem would be his hometown, in which his relatives would still be living, there would no need to search for alternate accommodations. In fact, to do so would be considered an insult to the family. So, when he and Mary arrive in Bethlehem, along with the other family members who must do the same, they have available lodgings—albeit overly crammed, thus forcing Joseph and Mary, when it’s time, to receive the birth of Jesus in lower portion of the house, where the animals are kept at night.

That should sound familiar. Specifically, Isa 9.1–3. Zechariah is declaring the fulfillment of God’s own promise. But let’s not miss what this word means or downplay its significance. It says: there is one place of true peace. There is one way to that place, and no other way. It’s the one way that leads people out of darkness and death—the place of non-peace. A leading achieved through a merciful provision of God. The provision of God’s darkness-dispelling light. The light that reveals not only the assurance of God’s forgiveness of sin and knowledge of His salvation, but also the redeeming ways of God that faithfully epitomize the Person of God—the One who is the true Light and giver of life (cf. Jn 1.4). The very person John is to proclaim and prepare the way for people to know this One who comes and brings God’s true peace. The only One who is the true forgiving, saving, rescuing and redeeming Lord.

#### 4. GOD’S PEACE REVEALED AND SHARED

The second word of peace comes right after the birth of Jesus, and it’s found in Lk 2.8–15. In v.8, we find: just outside of the village of Bethlehem—hardly a speck on the Roman Empire’s map—there were shepherds, who are described as living in this particular region (out in the open). But there’s something else they’re doing at this particular moment: they are keeping the night-time guard over their flock. This night-time guard means they are attentively watching for threats or dangers that are common in night. However, as far as we can tell (or reasonably guess), this night seems to be an easy night. Quiet. Still. Relaxing. Maybe even peaceful. That is until something unexpected happened. Something for which they were not watching or guarding against, nor was it something for which they were entirely prepared. Look with me at what Luke describes:

“And an angel of the Lord appeared to them,<sup>7</sup> and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, ‘Fear not, for behold I bring you good news<sup>8</sup> of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David: the Savior who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find the baby<sup>9</sup> wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.’<sup>10</sup> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host<sup>11</sup> praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased.’ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened,<sup>12</sup> which the Lord has made known to us” (Lk 2.9–15, ESV).

<sup>7</sup> The term here is ἐπίστημι, which means “stand before” or “be in the [immediate] presence of.” Thus, this appearance is not some from-a-distance experience that might be easily confused. This is up-close-and-personal.

<sup>8</sup> The Greek here says ἰδοὺ γὰρ εὐαγγελίζομαι ὑμῖν (“for behold I declare the gospel to you” or more literally: “I am evangelizing to you”).

<sup>9</sup> The term here is βρέφος, which means “infant” or “newborn.” It’s the same term used of babies in the womb (cf. Lk 1.41).

<sup>10</sup> The term here is φάτνη, which also means “feeding trough.” Not the expected place to find the God-incarnate Savior, Lord, and King over all of creation.

<sup>11</sup> The Greek says πλῆθος στρατιᾶς οὐρανόυ (“the multitude of heaven’s armies”; cf. Isa 9.7). However it’s rendered, we tend to read this and not think much of it. But all of it together carries a crucial detail that cannot be missed. What the sudden appearance and sudden departure of the massive number of angelic soldiers means is: they are present and ready to do their King’s bidding—a truth that Jesus Himself confirms when one of His disciples tried to force His hand against Roman power. Jesus said: “Put your sword back in its place! For all who take hold of the sword will die by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot call my Father, and that He would send Me more than twelve legions of angels right now?” (Mt 26.52–53). “Twelve legions” is more than 72,000 angels. How many of that multitude appear to the shepherds on this night, we have no clue. And worrying about the number misses the point. The point is: God’s salvation plan is not carried out by force or warfare—even though it could be. And the scene that unfolds before the shepherds is an early announcement of that reality. While the massive number of angelic soldiers is prepared to do battle, they stand down. Because they don’t come to fight. That’s not God’s plan for giving or establishing his peace. He has other plans. Plans that are more down-to-earth, shall we say. Or better yet: plans that are more personal and relational. Plans that define “peace” in a different way. And it’s a way that starts in a different place. A place of worship, praise, and celebration.

<sup>12</sup> The Greek says τὸ ῥήμα τοῦτο (“to see this word”)—i.e. this announcement of the promised truly anointed Savior-King.

Notice what happens and what all of it means—it's so much more than a feel-good Hallmark card from an angel.... God's glorious light not only breaks into the darkness of the world but also pierces the darkness that overwhelms the souls of humanity. A light that, because it's been missing for so long, initially strikes fear, but that fear is dispelled by a heavenly word of comfort and assurance. A word that says: the light that's come does not threaten to take life but promises to give it anew. A promise from heaven itself, and declares the one true εὐαγγέλιον (the true gospel) that is the cause of great joy because it is truly for all people. Does that mean everyone's going to accept what's offered, and wouldn't that support universalism? Nope, and the Bible doesn't support unbiblical ideas. Instead, it means: no one is excluded from what God graciously offers. And Him freely offering it to everyone is infinitely better than anything Rome (or any other human-government or empire) could ever do or promise.

And what is it that's given? At the very least, it's the gospel of Isa 61,<sup>13</sup> which declares God to be the One who brings true justice, righteousness, and blessing upon the earth—a gracious work that guarantees His true salvation, His restoration of His people, and His eternal peace. But there's more to it than that. There's something infinitely personal about what's given. And that is the fulfillment of promise and prophecy concerning one who is not some life coach, social-media influencer, guru, political candidate, good teacher, social reformer, or some motivational speaker; but is instead the true and only Savior, the true and only Christ—the Lord Himself. The only One who has the power and authority to forgive our sins, to save us from corruption, to rescue us from the darkness, to restore us to glorious communion, and to redeem us—the lost—to an eternal relationship with our graciously self-giving Creator.

The Creator who did not intend for us to be alone, to be without Him and apart from His glorious presence and removed from His life-giving peace. Instead, He is the Creator who desirously came to us—despite all that we had done to Him—and opened the way to return to Him. The way that is the only true way to true life in His eternal kingdom. The way that is God Himself, the One who truly is the “[Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace](#)” (Isa 9.6). And the peace He brings is not one of political or imperial conquest through military action or oppressive governmental control. That solves nothing. Instead, God's peace is a rescue mission for the imprisoned souls of humanity, who have for too long lived a grim, hopeless, and dark existence—one characterized by strife, separation, disorder, and unrest. A life devoid of true peace. God's shalom.

Thus, the real reason for the season—true meaning of Christmas—is about God sharing His peace with us (*mercifully and personally*) by declaring the end of the chaotic divisiveness that's been allowed to exist for far too long. A non-peace within ourselves, with others; in our nations, in our world; but most especially: in our relationship with God. Christmas is about God graciously humbling Himself to be “God with us” and to be the One who (through His self-sacrifice) forgives, saves, rescues, restores, redeems, and guarantees a life filled with unending shalom. And that is the message of peace we are to share with the world.

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<sup>13</sup> This prophetic word begins by declaring: “[The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news \[ἐχρησέν με εὐαγγελίσασθαι = “anointed me to declare the gospel” \(i.e., to evangelize\)\] to the poor; He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captive, and the opening of the prisons to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor](#)” (Isa 61.1–2a, ESV—a prophecy that Jesus quotes at the start of His ministry and plainly says is fulfilled then [cf. Lk 4,16–21]). The recipient of God's gospel are the ones the powerful elite of Rome would say are useless and unworthy, and should be left in the dark corners of society—along with those who seek to overturn the peace of Rome. But there are the ones God has in mind to save and make worthy before Him, by bringing them out of the darkness and into His glorious light so as to receive a place in His kingdom of peace.