

Isaiah 9:2-7

²The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.
For those living in the land of the shadow of death, the light has dawned.
³You have multiplied the nation. You have increased its joy.
They rejoice before you like the joy at harvest time,
like the celebration when people divide the plunder.
⁴For you have shattered the yoke that burdened them.
You have broken the bar on their shoulders and the rod of their oppressor,
as you did in the day of Midian.
⁵Every boot that marched in battle
and the garments rolled in blood will be burned.
They will be fuel for the fire.
⁶For to us a child is born.
To us a son is given.
The authority to rule will rest on his shoulders.
He will be named:
 Wonderful Counselor,
 Mighty God,
 Everlasting Father,
 Prince of Peace.
⁷There will be no limit to his authority
and no end to the peace he brings.
He will rule on David's throne and over his kingdom,
 to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness
 from now on, into eternity.
The zeal of the LORD of Armies will accomplish this.

Authority, Peace

I.

On Christmas Eve it is nice to talk about a perfect government that brings about peace. But on this evening we are not talking about that kind of peace. We need the guidance of Scripture to understand what true peace is, where it comes from, and what it means for us to be peacemakers in this world.

It seems that there is not much peace to begin with in our world, and just when we start believing that all is well, something snaps the tranquility and brings disharmony. Headlines in your twitter feed or your Facebook feed or on TV all concur with the prophet Jeremiah: "We hoped for peace but no good has come, for a time of healing but there is only terror" (Jeremiah 14:19, NIV84). How ironic it is, then, to sit comfortably in our beautiful church singing about "peace on earth" while the world is at war. Yet the promise of Christmas is a peace which transcends the conflicts raging in the world — a deeper peace, an eternal peace.

Regardless of which nations of the world are at peace tonight, God offers peace to us. Peace comes in the person of Jesus Christ, the Babe of Bethlehem, who reminded his disciples at the end of his earthly ministry: "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, and do not let it be afraid" (John 14:27, EHV).

May the Holy Spirit give us a clearer understanding of what true peace is. In this way, not only will we live at peace in the midst of our tempestuous world, we will also become peacemakers. What a thrill to receive and pass on: “The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding” (Philippians 4:7, EHV).

II.

At first glance, our text would seem to be about a political peace. “There will be no limit to his authority and no end to the peace he brings. He will rule on David’s throne and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from now on” (Isaiah 9:7, EHV). Yet it is important to note that in the Bible, peace almost always has a spiritual dimension. Of primary importance is peace with God. And the government, the rule that brings us peace as it expands and intervenes in our lives, is the kingdom of God ushered in by the King of Kings and Lord of lords, Jesus Christ.

Political peace is hard to come by, and certain generations have never known it. Even today, many people expect God to put an end to all wars and earthly conflicts. Some anticipate a millennial kingdom — 1000 years of literal peace on earth. Yet no society in the history of the world has succeeded in finding the answer to this yearning for worldly peace.

After a Christmas Eve candlelight service, a bitter man once remarked: “How can you sing about Jesus Christ the way you do? Do you really believe the song of the angels: ‘Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests’? Jesus is no Prince of Peace. If he was, there really would be peace on earth!” Some of us may be tempted to echo the cynic’s words at one time or another. If so, perhaps it is because we have misunderstood the promise of God and have set our sights too low — limiting our understanding of peace to the worldly, the material, and the physical.

III.

The peace that comes with the birth of the Christ Child is a peace that transcends and overcomes the problems of this world. It is an eternal, everlasting peace. That is what our text means when it says: “There will be no limit to his authority and no end to the peace he brings” (Isaiah 9:7, EHV).

God is concerned with the welfare of our whole being — mind, body, soul, and spirit. He seeks to remove the barriers which separate us from life in its fullest and restore us. The key to understanding what makes for true peace is described by Paul in Ephesians. It describes peace between people of different backgrounds — Jews and Gentiles — and peace with God.

“He himself is our peace. He made the two groups one by destroying the wall of hostility that divided them¹⁵ when he abolished the law of commandments and regulations in his flesh. He did this to create in himself one new person out of the two, in this way making peace.¹⁶ And he did this to reconcile both to God in one body through the cross by putting the hostility to death on it.¹⁷ He also came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit” (Ephesians 2:14-18, EHV).

The chaos and stress of our day are not caused by a God who is unwilling to put an end to war. They are symptoms of a deeper problem. Our sinful nature separates us from the loving and caring God who desires unity. Peace on human terms will never come to this earth. Peace on *God’s* terms has already come with the birth of the Christ child, who alone offers forgiveness and a salvation that overcomes all tribulation.

Isaiah writes: “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. For those living in the land of the shadow of death, the light has dawned” (Isaiah 9:2, EHV). It is Jesus

Christ who fulfills this as the light of the world. It is Jesus alone who breaks the powers of darkness, pulls us up out of the quicksand of our sin, and saves us eternally.

We rejoice at the gift of the Messiah because Jesus has won the battle and achieved the victory. The war is over. There is no more hostility between God and man. Jesus has given us peace.

At the first part of creation, the world was formless and empty. God created order by the power of his voice. He then exercised his dominion over creation through human beings who were his representatives. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, chaos reigned, and their dominion was distorted. Disunity, fear, blame, anger, and ultimately death followed. The Good News is that the Prince of Peace, our Lord Jesus Christ, came to earth and has restored peace by his grace. The corruption of creation caused by our sin has been met head-on and defeated by the love and forgiveness of our Heavenly Father in Jesus Christ.

There is no better expression of the peace we have under the authority of the Savior than the words of our text. The rule of the Messiah grows and grows, never ceasing to restore joy and harmony. The characteristics of his reign are justice and righteousness. According to the justice of God we are judged “innocent” in the court of heaven, because Christ took our guilt upon himself. Jesus has removed our sin and placed on us his own perfect righteousness.

It is Jesus who affords all wisdom and counsel, and who governs the world by his might for the sake of the church. He alone is the way to the Father. In fact, if we have seen him, we have seen the Father. He is the Prince of Peace, the King of Kings, and the Lord of Lords who grants us his peace.

Chaos, corruption, and crime continue for now in the world. In fact, Scripture indicates that things are going to get worse before they can get better. There will be bloodshed and mayhem to the end of time. The stillness of “Silent Night, Holy Night” will sooner or later be shattered by pain and loss.

Yet Jesus is still the Prince of Peace! What the world cannot give us has been accomplished by Jesus, our Savior and Lord! Now that we have received God’s peace we have the privilege of being ambassadors who spread peace and justice throughout the world. The peace we have is translated into acts of love for others.

IV.

The spiritual satisfaction that is ours and knowing God’s forgiveness in Christ is precisely the reason for us to announce with the Angels: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward mankind” (Luke 2:14, EHV). One of the fruits of the spirit we have is peace.

The Christ Child is born for our temporal and eternal welfare. May he bring that peace into our hearts and homes, enabling us to be peacemakers for the sake of his holy name. Amen.