

Isaiah 9:2-7
Titus 2:11-14
Luke 2:1-20

Sermon Christmas Eve 2021

Jesus' Gift of Peace

We can feel anxious around the Christmas season. From wandering through crowded malls and stores looking for the perfect gifts for our loved ones. To packing up the children and half the house in the van. Trekking across the rugged Canada landscape to reconnect with family and friends. Hoping not to find ourselves in one of those beautiful but nasty Christmas snow storms.

We can feel anxious around the Christmas season. From making sure the house is clean for all our guests. To cooking that Turkey just right. And to have back up measures in place just in case we cook that Turkey a little dry. Like, making sure the gravy is delicious. As well as having enough cranberry sauce on hand. Just in case we mess up both the Turkey and the gravy.

We can feel anxious around the Christmas season. From having to juggle which set of parents we will see Christmas Eve, and which ones we will see Christmas day. To coping with being in the same room with that relative who always seems to get on our every last nerve. Maybe you are sitting beside that person right now.

We can feel anxious around the Christmas season. From waking up with a sore back after sleeping on that pull-out bed in the basement. To popping allergy medications to deal with the dandruff of our grandmother's cats. Of course, we could have stayed in a hotel. That would have gone over very well with Grandma who hasn't seen us in almost a year.

We can feel anxious around the Christmas season. And let's be honest. This pandemic hasn't helped. Last year we were dealing with Delta. This year we are dealing with Omicron. Don't know if I am pronouncing it the right way. Can you believe there was a whole article written on that? I hope next Christmas we don't have to be dealing with another variant. But, am interested in what they name it if we do.

We can feel anxious around the Christmas season. For Mary and Joseph, they are feeling anxious as they try and find a place for Mary to give birth to Jesus. Now, the labour and delivery experience cause enough anxiety within us without having to worry about finding a place to have this experience.

Many of us who have experienced the labour and delivery process are nodding our heads in unison right about now. Frantically packing everything up and getting to the hospital on time. In the city it can be a little less anxious getting to the hospital then

driving in from a rural area. Though needing to get there during rush hour could pose a few problems.

I remember during one of our experiences there was flooding near Radisson that blocked the main road to Saskatoon for us. Luckily, when it was time for us to go, there was a good enough detour around this blockade for us to make it to the city with plenty of time to spare.

During another one of our experiences though, we might have waited a little longer than we should have, and I remember watching YouTube videos on how to deliver a baby as I packed up the vehicle. By God's grace, we did make it on time. It didn't help my anxiety when in the weeks leading up to this moment some of the farmers were telling me how one of their children were born on the highway. It was like a right of passage to deliver at least one of your babies on the highway.

Mary and Joseph are feeling anxious. As are the Shepherds who need to protect the sheep from getting stolen or eaten by predators. Being a Shepherd came with a lot of anxiety. Not only in dealing with the responsibility of caring for the sheep, but also, dealing with the stresses of everyday life. Shepherds didn't get paid much. They lived below the poverty line. They lived in a constant state of anxiety as they worried about where they would get their next meal. They worried about being mistreated by Roman Soldiers and cheated by tax collectors. The shepherds are very anxious people.

Well, in our gospel this evening, we see that a heavenly host of angels come to the Shepherds, and deliver a proclamation. The birth of the messiah has happened in Bethlehem. A town not far away from where they are working. The messiah who will bring peace to their lives. Calming their hearts from all this anxiety.

This is one of the central meanings of the Christmas message, and of the entire gospel message. Jesus will come to bring us peace. To calm our anxieties. We see this message reiterated through Jesus' ministry when ever Jesus encounters people who are anxious about their circumstances.

In his final words to his disciples, he leaves them with this gift of peace as they deal with the anxiety of Jesus' suffering and death.

In the resurrection stories Jesus brings a gift of peace to the disciples to calm their anxieties over the threat of persecution.

The apostles continue to preach this message as a way of calling the believers to non-violent action against the Empire.

Every Christmas we celebrate this gift of peace. We intentionally reflect on where we experience this peace in our lives.

For Mary and Joseph, the moment where they look at Jesus as he lays in the manger is a gift of peace for them, as well as the news that the shepherds bring to them. Mary ponders these words of peace in her heart.

For the shepherds, the beautiful music of a choir of angels singing gives them a gift of peace. A moment where they feel calm from their anxieties. Hope for their future. Inspired by this peace to go and see for themselves the baby Jesus.

When I reflect back on the four times we went through the experience of labour and delivery I think of the time where we arrived at the hospital around 9am. We thought we would be holding our baby by noon. Instead, hour after hour we heard the cries of other babies around us, but we were still left waiting. Finally, close to 6:00pm our bundle of joy arrived. What was unique about this situation is that the unit was so quiet, because everyone else had delivered their baby. So, we had the opportunity to sit with our baby, and enjoy the peacefulness of a rarely quiet labour and delivery unit. It was beautiful, and just what we needed.

Jesus comes to bring us peace, and though we don't see this in its entirety. We do have moments of peace in our lives. Moments of peace that we try to live out so others can experience this peace.

As I was watching old Christmas commercials on YouTube, I came across this video called "ten memorable commercials." One commercial really stood out for me.

It was a commercial put together by the British royal legion. The setting is Christmas Eve 1914. In the British and German trenches that were half a kilometer away from each other soldiers started singing Silent Night. Some in English. Some in German. They end up hearing one another, and for a moment feel unified in this common hymn. Even though they are trained to see each other as the enemy.

On Christmas morning a British soldier takes a huge risk and steps out of the trench. At first the German soldiers are ready to shoot. Then a German soldier tells them to put their guns down and does the same. The rest of the soldiers on both sides follow. And soon they are shaking hands, showing pictures of their loved ones, and playing a game of football (soccer).

After a while, they hear the guns going off in the background. Sadly, they turn and say goodbye, and return to their trenches. Even though the first world war was only beginning, and would last till 1918. In this moment, these two groups of people experienced God's peace.

Jesus comes to bring us peace. May you feel Christ's peace this Christmas season as you reconnect with loved ones over that juicy Turkey Dinner. And may you step out of your trenches and spread this Christmas peace to others.

Let us pray, loving God, we give thanks for the peace that your Son brings to our lives. When we feel anxious calm our hearts with your gift of peace, and help us extend this gift of peace to one another. **Amen.**

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