

“Prince of Peace”

Isaiah 9:6-7

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Prince of Peace is more than just a description, a title, or a name for Jesus, it is a defining characteristic of who He is as God of very God. As we continue through our Advent series, we focus on the reality that Jesus is the peace of the world, the peace which is brought to us in the forgiveness of our sins as we live lives of repentant faith in the One who has died to redeem the lost. Isaiah proclaims the Word of the Lord that the coming Messiah will be the “Prince of Peace” and that “of the increase of His...peace there will be no end.” Our loving God has promised to send us one who will rule over us with an unending peace, and that is exactly what He has done in sending us our Lord, Jesus Christ. We received it when He came in the flesh and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit, as the angels proclaimed to the shepherds on Christmas night, “unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:11),” and we receive it still today in the blessing of His Means of Grace in the Word and Sacraments.

Throughout Jesus’ ministry, He speaks often of this peace which He has come to bring. As the Son who is given to us, He brings peace with God where there would otherwise be none, because our sinful natures are at enmity with Him. Thankfully, the Lord our God has seen fit to give us peace with Him only for the sake of His only-begotten Son, and thus has killed the enmity that we have with Him. We didn’t do that, and nothing we have within us is capable of doing that. Paul says as much in Romans 5:1, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Not, “since we have been so good,” or, “since we have been so hard on ourselves,” but only “since we have been justified by faith” in the one who gives us His peace through His work of salvation on the cross. That is the truth of the Advent season. Peace and joy through repentance and forgiveness flows only from the blood of Jesus shed for us in the mighty work of redemption which He accomplished on our behalf despite our sinfulness.

Advent leads us to the manger and to the season of Christmas, but what that means for the sinful world is something completely different. The peace which they seek is not found in the babe born of the virgin that will sit on the throne of David. They seek a peace that comes through coalescence with each other for the sake of cordial gatherings, powering through a work party and avoiding that one guy that everyone knows will ruin everything, and making sure everyone gets the same number of gifts under the tree so they don’t feel left out. But that peace is fleeting, and only brings a temporary feeling of

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calm and security. Eventually, it fades away, and the fragile peace turns to contempt and sighs of relief that they don't have to deal with any of that until it comes around again next year.

And even the gifts that are given during that time are false gifts that have no meaning within them, meant only to "keep the peace," as they say. We give gifts to one another during the Christmas season, and that is not a bad thing, but the intent behind the gift certainly matters. If we seek reconciliation with someone, that is, if we seek peace with someone with whom we are at odds, the answer is not shiny things that bring temporal joy. The answer is contrition and forgiveness. Thus it is with our Lord as well. He does not seek gifts from us in order to be reconciled to Him. We have absolutely nothing to offer Him as those who still bear the sinful flesh of Adam. He is the one who gives the gifts, and we are reconciled because of His love for us for the sake of Jesus. No exchange, no give and take. We simply unworthily receive His gift of peace that was won for us by His sacrifice.

Never in the Scripture does it say, "Repent, and I'll forgive you, otherwise, you're out of luck." It does say, as we read on Sunday, that we must indeed "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matt. 3:2)." Forgiveness has been won for all by the blood of Christ, and it is received in faith through His Means of Grace. Repentance is a response to our sorrow for our sin, knowing that forgiveness is ours for the sake of Jesus Christ. An unrepentant sinner receives nothing, but when repentance comes, it is not what earns them their peace with God. Jesus says in John 14:27, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you." Jesus gives the gift of His peace freely to all whom are His beloved brothers and children of the Most High God. His love is not earned or taken, nor is it shown in the things that we do for Him. His peace that He gives is shown to us by the love of Christ we receive every time we gather around His Gospel treasures.

He will establish and uphold our faith in Him, as the one who has given all that we might have all of His promised grace. In the gifts He gives we find the peace which passes all human understanding, and that peace is something that no earthly gift can eclipse. No amount of enmity toward one another that we struggle to take away in the world takes away the truth of our reconciliation with our Lord Jesus. He has made peace with God for our sakes, removing His Father's wrathful gaze when He took it upon Himself at the cross. We are changed because of our Savior. Because of His grace toward us we no longer stand condemned for our wretchedness, and for that precious gift we give wondrous thanks and praise. He alone is capable of making such an exchange. We give nothing, but He gives us everything. When He gave up His life on the cross, we

were given our most treasured gift and possession—our eternal inheritance in the heavenly dwelling.

There's no peace that we can find on this earth that will bring comfort to us for our sin-plagued consciences. We will not find the solace we seek in the bottom of a bottle, at the end of a roll of wrapping paper, or in the feasts we prepare during the holiday. The only solace that exists, the only peace which can be found, when we feel trapped in our sins is found the Lord's power and promise to forgive us poor, miserable sinners. And so we come to Him in contrition for our sins, always remembering the truth that what He has given us in this life points us to what is ours in eternal life. It is ours now by faith, and will be then in the fullness of His glory. But most importantly, the Prince of Peace, "the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this (v. 7)." Jesus is the author of our salvation, and He is the author of the declaration of peace with our God, and He will uphold us in righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.

This peace is not fragile, it is impenetrable. It is not temporary, but eternal. No fleeting joy exists in the presence of our Lord, and that is what we find always in His means of giving us His peace. His presence among us is our constant joy and comfort, and it is indeed not our peace which we make with Him, but His peace which He freely gives to us. If not for that gracious gift, we would not know how to make peace with one another. For it is forgiveness that brings peace, and only Jesus can truly forgive the way that brings true reconciliation. The child that is born, the Son that is given, has come to establish peace with God's people, to forgive our sins, and bring us into the heavenly dwelling forevermore, where He rules at His Father's right hand as our "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (v. 6)." Amen.