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**Title: Peace Is The Absence Of Fear**

**Scripture: Isaiah 9:6-7; Luke 2:8-14**

**Topic: Prince of Peace**

**Series: Christ of Christmas**

**Occasion: Advent, Christmas**

## **Peace Is The Absence Of Fear**

**Isaiah 9:6-7 / Luke 2:8-14**

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There is good news for our hectic world: scientists have determined that our earth is spinning more slowly with each passing day. In merely 200 million years, a day will have 25 hours in it; in 400 million years, we'll have 26 hours in a day. Just think what you'll be able to do with the added time.

In the meanwhile, we need peace for our hectic and troubled hearts.

This Christmas week, our president appeared on national television to report on the war in Iraq, as casualties mount and criticisms escalate. Counterfeit bird flu drugs were seized a few days ago in San Francisco. The Senate continued its debate over the Patriot Act. Spain arrested 15 al-Qaeda recruiters in that country.

Whatever you would say about the times in which we live, you would not say that they are filled with peace. To such a world Jesus came to be our Prince of Peace. On the first Christmas the angels announced "peace among those with whom God is pleased" (Luke 2:14). Where do you need such peace in your life and soul this Christmas Day? Peace in the year to come?

Today's sermon in a sentence comes from a friend's recent statement to me: "Peace is not the absence of conflict, but the absence of fear." How can we experience that peace which banishes fear today?

### **Name your fear**

On the first Christmas Day, the first people invited to the celebration were shepherds in the field. When the angel of the Lord appeared to them, "they were filled with fear." Luke's Greek actually says "they feared a mega fear." The NIV says they were "terrified." The English Standard Version says they were "filled with fear"--the translation indicates that they had room for no other emotions but fear.

The dictionary defines the English word "fear" as "a feeling of agitation and anxiety caused by the presence or imminence of danger." The Greeks were more specific. Their word is *phobos*; we get "phobia" from it. The word may have originally meant "hair-raising." *Phobos* in the ancient world meant to be terrified, to be put to flight, to be so afraid that you fear for your life.

I didn't know until studying the text this week that this is the only time in the Bible when people respond to an angelic visit with *mega phobia*, "great fear." Why?

You know that the shepherds were among the lowest class in their society. They so often stole from their employers that you could not buy from them. They were so infamous for lying that they could not testify in a court of law. They did not observe

kosher dietary laws, cleanliness regulations, or any other religious dictates for that matter, so they could not attend a synagogue or Temple service.

We don't have anyone like them in our culture today. But if you knew someone who was so immoral and irreligious that he was not allowed to go to church, you'd know a shepherd. There were the most irreligious people in their world.

Now it makes more sense that they would be "filled with fear" upon seeing "the glory of the Lord."

Imagine an employee stealing from the cash register when the boss walks up behind him, or a student using her cell phone to cheat on a test when the teacher looks over her shoulder, or an adulterer talking on the phone with his girlfriend when his wife picks up the other line. The one time I cut class in high school, I was driving down Bissonnet Street in Houston with some friends when who should drive by the other way but my mother. Dinner that night was less than enjoyable.

Imagine that you've rejected the word and will of God for years, and not darkened the door of a church building since you were a kid, and suddenly an angel of the Lord shows up at your office. How would you feel?

If God could give peace to the most irreligious people in the New Testament, what can he do for your soul this morning? In what way are you a shepherd today? What fear has burrowed its way into your soul? What is stealing your peace? Name your fear; admit your burden or worry or discouragement. And know that the Prince of Peace has come for shepherds the world over, including you.

### **Make God your Father**

Given that the shepherds were paralyzed with terror, it is no surprise that the first word the angel would speak would be, "Fear not." Literally, "stop being afraid." It's a command in the Greek. That's as far as the ancient world could go with fear--stop it. The Stoics and Epicureans, Aristotle and Plato were all convinced that fear was a bad thing. But they had no idea what to do with it except to refuse it. Stop being afraid.

But that's a little like telling a soldier about to make his first parachute jump to stop being nervous, or a man about to undergo open heart surgery not to worry. Saying it doesn't make it so. We're all shepherds today, in need of the peace of God for our fears, doubts, worries, and burdens. What do we do to find the peace of God where we need it most?

First, we make God our Father. We step into that personal relationship with him through which he gives us his peace. He cannot give what we are not close enough to receive. If the shepherds could become the children of God, so can you.

The angel was clear on this: "behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people."

"I bring"--this remedy for fear comes from God, not man, so you can trust it. It is the Greek word for evangelizing or preaching, and could be rendered "I proclaim as the word of God."

"You"--the Greek is plural, for all of them. And it is specific--to you, as shepherds, in your fear and failings and irreligious immorality, where you are today. It is "for all the people."

"Great joy"--*mega* joy, to replace their *mega* fear. What is this good news of great joy?

"Unto you"--for you, this gift is intended for you.

"A Savior"--one who will save you from your sins, your irreligious immorality. But there were many so-called saviors in their day; this is not just any "savior." Instead, he is "Christ"--the Savior promised by God, his Messiah, the One who would fulfill his prophetic promises made over seven centuries.

"The Lord"--the ruler, the boss, the authority of the universe. Because you couldn't find God, he found you. Because you could not climb up to him, he climbed down to you. If you were a Katrina victim and learned that the President of the United States was coming to help you with all the resources of the American Treasury, you would be no less blessed than they.

If your father were Bill Gates or Warren Buffett, you'd have no financial fears. If your father were the general of the army, you'd not fear your fellow privates. If your father owned the company, you'd not fear your fellow employees. When the Almighty God of the universe is your Father, you can give your fears to his peace.

### **Make his provision yours**

Make God your Father, then know that this Father always provides for his children. I found some 60 biblical examples of that fact, 60 times when God tells his people not to be afraid, for his provision is ours.

*Trust his presence:* "That night the Lord appeared to Isaac and said, 'I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you'" (Gen 26:24). "I am God, the God of your father," he said. 'Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there'" (Genesis 46:3). "Moses answered the people, 'Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again'" (Exodus 14:13).

*Trust his protection:* "Do not be afraid of them; the Lord your God himself will fight for you" (Deuteronomy 3:22). "When you go to war against your enemies and see horses and chariots and an army greater than yours, do not be afraid of them, because the Lord your God, who brought you up out of Egypt, will be with you" (Deuteronomy 20:1).

"Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the Lord says to you: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's'" (2 Chronicles 20:15). "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the king of Assyria and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us than with him" (2 Chronicles 32:7).

*Trust his provision:* "See, the Lord your God has given you the land. Go up and take possession of it as the Lord, the God of your fathers, told you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged" (Deuteronomy 1:21). "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27).

### **Conclusion**

When we trust God's presence, protection, and provision, we can have that peace which is not the absence of conflict but the absence of fear. Such peace is available for your soul today, because of Christmas. Because the Prince of Peace entered a human body 20 centuries ago, he can enter yours. Because he could make a body the temple of his Spirit in Bethlehem, he can make your body the temple of his Spirit in Dallas.

If you will trust in his presence, ask for his protection, and claim his provision, they will be yours. And with them will come your peace.

I learned that fact firsthand on the loneliest night of my life. I had been serving as a summer missionary on the island of Borneo for two months. Rainstorms had washed out the roads, and I was stranded in a remote village our team had intended to visit only for a few hours. It was unsafe; in fact, headhunters were known to the area. There was no electricity or running water. I was hungry, tired, and isolated. I had not spoken to Janet or my family for weeks. I felt more alone than I had ever felt in my life.

That night I took my guitar out to the makeshift porch of the hut where I was staying. I began to sing the only Malay song I knew, "Jesus loves me, this I know." But I didn't know it. I didn't feel it. I was tired, frustrated, lonely, and broken. I began to cry. I closed my eyes to the tears and kept singing, hoping my heart would believe my words, but nothing happened. No peace at all.

Then I heard a strange noise. I opened my tear-filled eyes to see that children were crowding onto the porch with me, attracted to the sound of my guitar. They picked up my song and began to sing it with me. In their smiling faces I found the face of God. In their presence I felt his. In their company I felt his protection and provision. Because I sang "Jesus loves me, this I know," and believed it was true, it was.

Sing it with me now. And find in its truth the Prince of Peace, come again at Christmas for you.