

Guess Who's Coming for Christmas:
Prince of Peace
Psalm 72: 1-8, 17-19, and Isaiah 9:2-7

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Psalm 72 New International Version (NIV)

¹Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness.

²May he judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice.

³May the mountains bring prosperity to the people, the hills the fruit of righteousness. ⁴May he defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy; may he crush the oppressor. ⁵May he endure^[a] as long as the sun, as long as the moon, through all generations. ⁶May he be like rain falling on a mown field, like showers watering the earth. ⁷In his days may the righteous flourish and prosperity abound till the moon is no more.

⁸May he rule from sea to sea and from the River^[b] to the ends of the earth.

¹⁷ May his name endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun. Then all nations will be blessed through him,^[d] and they will call him blessed.

¹⁸Praise be to the LORD God, the God of Israel, who alone does marvelous deeds.

¹⁹Praise be to his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory.

Amen and Amen.

Introduction----Each week during Advent we have been considering one of the four names that Isaiah assigns to the coming Messiah in Isaiah 9: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and today, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:2-7

²The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. ³You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. ⁴For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. ⁵Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. ⁶For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷Of the greatness of his government and peace there will

be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

[PRAY]

One day I went to visit my friend Helen. When I arrived, I discovered that she was babysitting her four-year-old granddaughter Camille. Camille was playing dress up. She was decked out in a princess dress, complete with crown and jewels. Helen made introductions: "Lynell, I want you to meet my granddaughter, Camille. Camille this is my friend Lynell."

Without missing a beat, Camille looked me right in the eye and said: "You may call me 'Your Highness'!"

She put me in my place, didn't she?! In her mind, she was royalty and I was a mere commoner, one of zero distinction!

Jesus is called the Prince of Peace. What does that mean? As royalty, Christ alone deserves to be called, "Your Highness" or "Lord"!

What does it mean to rule as Prince of Peace?

At the time Isaiah made this prophecy, we remember that peace was illusive. Political peace in ancient times—and perhaps still—depend on one who can impose power/authority over others—through superior military or economic strength. Strategic alliances may be negotiated when in the interest of both parties/tribes/nations, but these are dependent upon the goodwill and trust between the two. Frequently these alliances are short-lived.

Yet the Old Testament prophets—Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Micah, among them—kept alive a vision of peace. "The rhetoric of peace serves an important function in keeping available a vision of an alternative society in an alternative world." (Walter Brueggemann, Names for the Messiah, p. 57)

We may truly desire peace, however, because we are sinners who live in a fallen world, warfare is our default mode. If all else fails,...fight! World history is replete with examples with which you are all too familiar.

The Prophet Micah casts a dramatic image of peace when he speaks of a radical disarmament (in Micah 4:2-3).

²Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us *his* ways, so that we may walk in *his* paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ³*He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.*

For disarmament of this scope to become a reality, the parties must do so voluntarily. The "Lord Almighty" will be the only One who can broker such a peace! **The reality is that this universal, global peace will come only when the Prince of Peace, returns.** Maranatha, Come Lord Jesus!

The question for today is this: What about us? What about now? What does it mean to worship and serve Jesus, the Prince of Peace, today?

The Hebrew word for peace is "**shalom**". **However it means more than absence of warfare or an end to hostility.** It is translated in Jeremiah 29:11 as "welfare". In a broad brush stroke it means "Wholeness". Eugene Peterson, the translator of The Message, **defines shalom as...**

"the dynamic, vibrating health of a society that pulses with divinely directed purpose and surges with life-transforming love."

(Eugene Peterson, They Run with Horses, p. 152)

How can we experience shalom/ this dynamic peace that comes only from God? What would it look like if we lived into this shalom of "divinely directed purpose and life-transforming love"?

There are three dimensions of shalom that we can experience today.

First, is Peace with God.

As sinners, our relationship with God is broken. There is no way we can repair it. The good news is that “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” The purpose of Christ’s coming was to bridge the gap between God and us created by sin. The cross is that bridge. Paul writes in Romans 5:1, 10:

*Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have **peace** with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...*

¹⁰For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

Jesus has brokered our peace with God, our sins are forgiven, and we can experience that shalom of “divinely directed purpose and life-transforming love”!

Mary Ellen Rothrock was a grad student at the University of Wisconsin. She considered herself an atheist, but found herself seeking to fill a spiritual void in her life. She began to practice Transcendental Meditation and work with a TM Supervisor.

After a year or so, she had a recurring thought when trying to concentrate on her mantra. “It’s a line from Handel’s Messiah. It repeats in my mind: “And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed...”!

She was familiar with the Oratorio, finding the music thrilling and the words joyful and inspiring. But the supervisor told her to ignore the words.

Mary Ellen came to the realization that the very phrase, “the glory of the Lord shall be revealed” was an invitation from a personal God of glory, to seek Him! Why couldn’t he be “wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”?

Within a short time, she met someone who explained how she could have a personal relationship with Christ. God used the words of scripture, set to music by Handel, to bring Mary Ellen into a vital relationship with God, now complete with peace/shalom-- “divinely directed purpose and life-transforming love”! (ME Rothrock, “The Lyric That Saved My Life”, Christian Reader, Nov-Dec 1998)

The second dimension of peace is that Christ can bring us peace with one another.

At this time of year families gather together for meals, for celebrations of various kinds. I have a friend who dreads these events. She'd rather have a root canal. Why? Her family is like our nation—the 'reds' and the 'blues'--politically polarized. Nearly every conversation ends up in an argument. Last year the family agreed in principle, to "agree to disagree" and to place a moratorium on all topics political. They could talk about the weather, sports, and the kids, grandkids, pets. Not much else. It was a good idea, but some had a hard time living into this agreement.

Two brothers lived on adjoining farms. For thirty years they had lived in harmony, sharing machinery and trading labor and goods as needed. No problem. Then their long collaboration fell apart. It began, as if often does, with a small misunderstanding and it grew into a major difference until it exploded in a war of words, followed by weeks of silence.

One morning there was a knock on the older brother's door. He opened it to find a man with a carpenter's tool box. "I'm looking for a few day's work—perhaps you have some small jobs I might do for you."

"Yes," replied the older brother. "I do have a job for you. Look across the creek at that farm. That's my neighbor, in fact, he's my brother. Last week there was a meadow between us. Recently he took his bulldozer to the river levee and now there's a creek between us. He may have done this to spite me, but I'll do him one better. See that pile of lumber over there? I want you to build a fence 8 feet tall, so I won't be able to see his place, or his face, anymore!"

"I think I understand the situation," replied the carpenter. "Show me the nails and the post-hole digger and I'll be able to do a job that pleases you." He helped the carpenter find the materials he needed, then the older brother set off for town.

The carpenter worked all day—measuring, sawing, and nailing. About sunset, the farmer returned. The carpenter was just wrapping up the job. The farmer's eyes opened wide. His jaw dropped. There was no fence at all!

Now a BRIDGE spanned the creek, connecting the two farms!

The younger brother approached the older one: “You are really something, to build this bridge after all I’ve said and done.” His outstretched hand was met by the other’s. They turned to see the carpenter hoisting his tool box onto his shoulder.

“No—don’t go, we have some other jobs you could do.” But the carpenter replied: “I’d love to stay, but I have many more bridges to build.”

Friends, Christ has set an example for us of bridge-building. It was costly, but how worthwhile, how life-giving. Now we are called to be bridge-builders and help others be reconciled to God and to one another.

Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20

¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of **reconciliation**: ¹⁹that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.

God has given to us the ministry of Bridge-building! We do not do that literally, but like the friend who shared Christ with Mary Ellen when she was spiritually searching, we too can **help people connect with God**. Invite them to worship, to Bible Study. Pray for them to enter into a vital, transformative relationship with Christ.

Reconciliation—making friend out of enemies—is not easy. But God’s Spirit can transform our pride into humility, our need to be right vs. our need to be in relationship, and we can move toward forgiving because we have been forgiven. God must first bring transformation to our own hearts before we can become reconcilers and bridge builders for and with others.

How does God do that?

We are familiar with walls. The older brother’s solution to the issues he had with his brother was to build a wall. The **Berlin Wall** was a guarded concrete barrier

that physically and ideologically divided Berlin from 1961 to 1989 (28 years). The **Iron Curtain** was the name for the physical boundary dividing Europe into two separate areas from the end of World War II in 1945 until the end of the Cold War in 1991. Today there are those who would build a wall between the US and Mexico.

Walls are not new. In fact, Jesus came to tear down walls! Paul writes about a wall which existed between Jews and Gentiles. **It was more than an ideological wall, it was an actual wall that separated them in worship.**

If you have ever seen a schematic drawing of the Temple, it is almost like concentric rectangles, if you will, starting with the inner sanctum, the Holy of Holies, where the Arc of the Covenant was kept. No one entered this place except the High Priest, and then, only on the Day of the Atonement once a year. There were further walls/divisions: The Court of Israel or the Men's Court, beyond the sanctuary gates was the court of Women (Jewish women), and they beyond that was the Court of the Gentiles.

The good news is that Christ abolished ALL of these divisions—each one of us can enter into God's presence directly, because Christ has taken the place of the High Priest. **Christ is our bridge-builder, our Peace-maker. All of these divisions—men/women, Jews/Gentiles—are abolished as we become ONE in Christ.**

Ephesians 2:13-15

¹³**But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.**

¹⁴**For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,** ¹⁵by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace,..."

Finally, the third dimension of Peace is the Presence of God in our lives today!

Jesus said: **"I am leaving you with a GIFT—Peace of heart and mind. And the peace I give isn't like the peace the world gives. So don't be troubled or afraid."**

John 14:27

In this season of gift giving, I find that the best gifts of all are not purchased on Amazon or wrapped up and put under the Christmas tree. All of those will soon be forgotten, by the time the tree and decorations are put away.

Are you seeking this lasting peace of heart and mind?

Finding it is as easy as A-B-C.

Admit that you are a sinner in need of God's grace. Christ can remove the wall of sin that separates you from God.

Believe that Christ died for your sins and the cross is the bridge that brings to God that brings forgiveness and new life.

Commit your life to Christ, the Prince of Peace.

Perhaps you are familiar with the painting of Jesus by Holman Hunt, which hangs in the British National Gallery in London. It portrays Jesus standing in front of a closed door, patiently knocking. If one looks closely, one will notice that there is no doorknob on the outside. **This door must be opened from the inside! The Prince of Peace does not take the human heart by force, but waits for us to open the door and invite him in.**

Jesus' promise (Revelation 3:20) is that if we open up to Him, he will enter in and share that shalom of fellowship, forgiveness, and new life. What better gift could one receive this Christmas?!

Let us pray: Lord we know all about walls and barriers. We put them up all the time to distance ourselves from ourselves, from others, and yes, even from you. If anyone hears you gently knocking on the door of their heart this morning, may they have the courage to open their lives to the only one who can impart true and lasting peace. Help us to be bridge-builders –in our families, our community, our world. We pray this in the name of the Prince of Peace, Jesus. Amen.