

I.N.I.

“Peace to God’s Favorites”

Homily for the Name of Jesus and 2nd Sunday of Christmas, A -- 1 Jan., A.D. 2017 ✠
St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, 2958-59th St., Sacramento, CA

Luke 2:13-21 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

14 “Glory to God in the highest heaven,

and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” 16 So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. 17 When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. 19 But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

21 After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.(NRSV)

Grace, mercy and peace will be with us, from God the Father and Jesus Christ the Father’s Son, in truth and love. (2 Jn. 3)

Happy new year! Is it OK to say that in church? I looked up the word ‘happy’ in Young’s concordance--it lists every use of every word of the Bible! The word ‘happy’ is found only seven times in the NT, but the word ‘joy’ has 2 ½ columns!--so I wish you all a **joyous** and blessed new year and a blessed Eighth Day of Christmass--I am pleased to begin this new Anno Domini, this new A.D., Year of our Lord, with you here in church where we rightly ought to be. Today is the 2nd Sunday of Christmass and the Circumcision and Name Day of Jesus. We are two thirds of the way through the Twelve Days of Christmas, and our celebration of the Christ Event continues until Twelfth Night, or Epiphany, Jan. 6, brings the visits of the Magi, the Wise Men from the East, and a further deepening of the **wonder** of the birth of the Christ Child.

Today that **wonder**--that wonderful news--is reflected in those lowly shepherds who found the Holy Mother and Babe using directions given by the Angel. What did they see? What did they believe? What was the message they made known to others after they had seen the Holy Child?

First of all, It Was a Message of Peace--Part I.

Imagine being there on the hillside outside Bethlehem that holy night! Imagine your own fear upon seeing a creature, not from another planet--that would be bad enough--but a creature--an angel from God’s high heaven right there before you. And then, to top it off, Luke writes, **13 suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,**
14 “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

When the glory of the Lord--the great light that shined down on them--had gone away, and the night was again quite dark, would **you** have believed your eyes? Would **you** have believed your ears?

How many people believe it today? That is, just how many of us take the message of the angels to heart?

We may think that we trust the news that a savior has been born, and we may think that we believe in the glory of God and that God wants to give us His glory by sending His Son to save us.

But the truth is that time after time when Christians are quizzed carefully about their real hopes and beliefs, it comes out that we trust in our own good works to get us in good with God--true story!

From the promise of glory, move to that word ‘peace.’

Biblical commentators point out that the song of the angels is difficult to translate.

Does ‘peace’ mean that we should end all war on earth?

Is it a gift to people who already are “of good will?”

Scholars studying the Dead Sea Scrolls over the last 50 years have shown that the gift of ‘peace’ is given to “**men of God’s favor,**” that is, it pleased God in his grace to send his Son into the world to save **those people who believe God’s favor.**

I’d say that makes us God’s **favorites**--thus my sermon title, **Peace to God’s Favorites.** Quoting one commentator, “...**peace is not political peace, nor sentimental good will, for Jesus came not to ‘bring peace, but a sword,’ Mt. 10, even dividing families....It is rather the peace of a**

right relation to God, through the forgiveness of sins.” (D.G.Miller, **St. Luke**. SCM Press, London, 1959.p.36)
When Jesus saw his disciples for the first time on Easter day, how did he greet them?
“**Peace be with you,**” he said--and he said it a second time--why? to forgive them! To let them know that they were forgiven for deserting him on Good Friday.
So **peace** carries **first** the **denotation** of forgiveness, even while its **connotations** can extend to peace of mind, keeping the peace in the community, or the end of war.

My youngest brother--I'm the oldest of eight and he's the “baby”--is the only one of us who attended a secular college, SW Mo. State--six of us attended Lutheran colleges, one didn't have the gifts for college--well, my doctorate **is** from a state University. But Wayne, the youngest, is the only political liberal amongst us--**secular university?** and he turns out to be **a liberal? Why am I not surprised?!**

He keeps signing his emails “Peace on earth,” a phrase that is derived from this song of the angels, which literally in Greek is “**on earth peace** to people of God's favor,” but **Wayne** means he wants wars to end.

Never mind that our Lord foretold that there would be wars and rumors of war until the end of time, Wayne wants them stopped now.

I try now and then to straighten him out, but he says something like, “My mind is made up--don't confuse me with the facts.”

So using the word peace in our liturgy always has the first meaning of **forgiveness** and **salvation**.

E.g., when we ‘share a sign of peace’ after the celebrant blesses us with the “**Pax Domini,**” the Peace of the Lord, it is to say to one another, just before we receive personal forgiveness in the Holy Eucharist, that we readily forgive one another and hold no grudges in our hearts.

Hearing and receiving the peace of Christ is hearing the Good News of the gospel of forgiveness, pure and simple.

When we receive it in faith, and we trust our God the Giver, we can be sure that we possess salvation to life everlasting--**we are God's favorites.**

The shepherds went with haste carrying the message of glory and peace, **16 ...and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. 17 When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.** (Lk. 2)

Good job, shepherds, right? Marvelous outcome too? Well, I see only **amazement**--a nice sentiment by the hearers--but not a commitment to **follow** the Prince of Peace. And that is how many celebrate the holidays--looking in **amazement** at all the Christ-mass decorations and gifts--gathering in Times Sq., NY--seeing the fireworks in Sydney, AUS, & Hong Kong and **not** giving God the glory due his name.

Yet the angel's message which the shepherds carried **First of All, Was a Message of Peace, of Forgiveness.**

Last of All, It Is a Message of Salvation--Last Point.

I just mentioned the glory due to God's name, an echo of a verse from Ps. 96, **8Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts.**

Today is the **Name Day of Jesus**; we read: **21 After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.** (Lk. 2, NRSV)

“**Ascribe to the Lord the glory**” of Jesus' name, for the message of **salvation is in the name Jesus**--it means, “Jahweh, the Covenant God, our Heavenly Father saves us.”

It was the name given to Joseph for him to give to Mary's Son, “**for,**” Joseph was told, “**he shall save his people from their sins.**”

And as he was given his name, he was circumcised--even in infancy, our Lord, “**born of a woman, born under the law, 5 in order to redeem those who were under the law**” (Gal. 4) **obeyed** the law as the **first** drops of his blood were shed--he did it for you & me.

When the **last** drops of his blood were shed, it was on Calvary's cross, and he could say in truth, “**It is finished**”--our **salvation** was completed for us, and we have been set free to glorify and praise God as those shepherds did that Holy night.

We are also set free to make known abroad **what has been told us** about this Child.

Let us pray that we see **more than amazement** on the faces of those whom we tell the good news of our newborn King, our Savior.

You are **God's Favorites! Peace be with you!**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.