

December 23, 2017 Florida Hospital Seventh-day Adventist Church  
 Luke 2:14 Hark the Herald Angels Say: Peace on Earth by Andy McDonald

Tomorrow is Christmas Eve, and just like every year, this Christmas season has flown by, but since tomorrow is Christmas Eve, that means that today we conclude our series of Christmas messages we called Hark the Herald Angels Say.

Each week we've considered the surprising things those herald angels said that night as they announce the Messiah's arrival.

The first words we considered were, "Don't be afraid!" There are plenty of reasons in our world right now to be afraid, but we considered

Four ways to move beyond our fears:

1. Step into the light let knowledge banish some fears
2. Develop a sense of dependency on God
3. Adopt a dominating purpose or vision
4. And finally move to action on that vision plan and live and work to fulfill God's vision that he have first and best place

So Don't be afraid.

The next week we explored the angel's bold declaration: I bring you good news of great joy for everyone.

We recognized that week that there's always the human temptation to judge and exclude, rather than to accept and leave the judging to God.

We can stand on the solid ground of truth that God has revealed. We can be sure of what we know but at the same time be sure that there is more than we know, there is truth beyond the truth we can see. Truth is always bigger than our grasp of it.

Intolerance of another person, or their understanding, is a sign of both arrogance and ignorance. Narrowing the good news of great joy to be anything less than for everyone is a sign that we don't believe there is truth beyond what we can see. God doesn't want anyone to be lost but all to come to repentance. It is good news for everyone.

Last week the angel said the savior was "born." We just scratched the surface of the reality that God, creator of all there is without whom nothing was made. This eternal, omnipotent, embodiment of love, humbled himself and came to our planet, born, arriving as we all do.

In the end we asked "Why?" Why is Jesus born? Because behind the universe is not an austere, self-centered, abstract force, an abstract divinity—but God who is Father, Son and Spirit and their joyful intimate fellowship is this great dance of oneness, unity and love. And this triune God in astonishing grace determined not to hoard this joy but to share it with us. That's why Jesus was born.

The story says, Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to all whom God favors."

What is the peace that was promised by the angel that night? Since that night when the angel visited those shepherds peace, at least between governments and people has been nearly constantly interrupted.

According to Matthew White's estimate on the page Worldwide Statistics of Casualties, Massacres, Disasters and Atrocities., a total of about **123 million** people died in all wars of the 20th Century.

Right now as Christians flood the Holy Land and travel from Jerusalem just under 6 miles down the road to Bethlehem where the angel announced "Peace on Earth" they will leave Israeli territory and have to go through an Israeli check point before entering the West Bank which forms the bulk of the

Palestinian territories. And passing through check points is a reminder that peace seems tentative and unstable and unsure and ever at risk.

So when you think of the term peace what is it that you imagine? A young mother with an infant and toddler may think of peace as just a moment of quiet and not being needed! A city dweller might imagine peace as a serene rural setting. Living in nearly constant conflict with each other may make a couple think of peace as escape from the other.

A member of our church came to visit me in my office this week and relational challenges, and economic adversity, regretful decisions, inner conflict over how she parented were all in her mind as she said I just want some peace.

I had some word fun visiting Roget's Thesaurus regarding this word peace. Maybe these synonyms and subtle variance of meanings can enlarge this word for us.

Peace- quiescence, absence of motion, stillness, quiet, calmness, placid, tranquil, serenity, rest, repose. A simple illustration would be to say that the large clock on the courthouse in the town square clock was at peace.

Synonyms include silence, hush.

Accord, as in harmonious relationship, harmony, sympathy, empathy, affinity, agreement, understanding, likeminded.

Peacefulness equates to freedom from war, peace of mind, pacifism

Truce-armistice, suspension of hostilities

Comfortableness-easiness, restfulness, home likeness, friendliness.

I think for me it is easy to get locked into just one angle on a word like peace. Maybe seeing it just as a suspension of hostilities, like a cease fire, but to come to a better grasp of the peace the angel is announcing we need this more full spectrum of the word.

In Greek the word is Eirānā and is defined as peace, harmony, order as opposed to disorder. But it is even richer in Hebrew the word is Shālôm and it is defined: Safe, well, happy, friendly, welfare, health, prosperity, be well, prosper. So when a person would say, "Peace be with you," it wasn't just about the absence of hostility. NO, this peace conferred by the angel is so much more it is a wish for all the good possible, harmony, order, prosperity and good health.

Even long before the angel announces peace David knew peace wasn't something he could muster up and produce. His peace was found beyond himself and it was very practical. He wrote Psalm 4 and in verse 8 he says, "I will lie down in peace and sleep, for (or because) you alone, O Lord, will keep me safe.

Isaiah the prophet had come to the realization of how to be peace filled.

"You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, whose thoughts are fixed on you!" The old King James translation said, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee."

It was in the upper room the night before his crucifixion. Jesus has just instituted what will come to be called "The Lord's Supper" the "Eucharist" the service of "Communion". And he tells his followers;

"I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give isn't like the peace the world gives. So don't be troubled or afraid." John 14:27

A little while later that evening he said, "I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."

John 16:33

William Barclay, in his commentary on John reminds us that "Peace equals everything which makes for our highest good. The peace the world offers us is the peace of escape, avoidance troubles,

refusing to face things. But Jesus peace is the peace of conquest. It is independent of outward circumstances.” (John Vol2 p. 171)

Here’s too often the reality. We let our peace get all tied up in our circumstances and focusing on our circumstances can rob us of peace.

Rachel Anne Ridge writes about the five top peace stealers: I want to run through these five and I want you to see if you can catch their common ground.

**Worry** - about our kids' choices, the job market, the bills, the pesticides in food, pollution, terrorism, our health, ...on and on!

**Fear** - The "What If's:" what if one of my children dies, what if there is a fire, what if we lose the house, what if my marriage fails, what if I get cancer, what if there is an accident?

**Shame** - I made bad choices, I should stop whatever vice you want to fill in the blank, I was abused, I cheated, I failed, I quit something important, I come from a poor background. I eat too much.

**Regret** - I should have been a better child, parent, spouse, friend, student. I should have known better. I should have listened. I wish I could do it over. Why did I do \_\_\_?

**Busyness** - My calendar is so full there is not a moment to rest or reflect, unless I go on vacation. I can't say no. I am burdened by doing too much.

If any, or all of these peace robbers plague you, can you catch the common ground? Where’s the focus? The focus is on you. And let’s go back to the ancient wisdom of Isaiah and the promise we read, ““You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, whose thoughts are fixed on you!” The peace the angels promised was directly related to focus on the baby born in Bethlehem.

You and I are not our solution—God is. Focused on our worries, our fears, our shame, regrets or busyness is not going to produce peace.

Focus on you, your short comings, your failures, even your success won’t bring peace, but when you focus on Jesus everything changes. At Simon the Pharisee’s home a woman with a less than stellar reputation came in and she weeps over Jesus’ feet her tears washing them and drying them with her hair and anointed them with rare perfume. Jesus told Simon, “I tell you her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love.” Then Jesus said to the woman, “Your sins are forgiven, your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

It is with the forgiveness of sins that peace comes to us. In the prophecy of Jesus birth to Joseph he was instructed to call the boy Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

This is why the angel announces “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace good will to all people.”

Paul captures the marriage of who Jesus is and what Jesus does and our coming into peace.

Romans 5:1, “Therefore since we have been made right in God’s sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us.”

We can pursue peace. We can run hard after it. We can attempt to schedule it into our lives. We can fight against the top five peace robbers. But peace, true peace, the peace that passes our understanding, can’t be caught by chasing it. But it is this elusive quality that God gives to us when we seek him, when we pursue God and others in love, it is then we receive the gift of peace.

Peace is the calm of depending not on what we can do for ourselves but on what God has done for us. What will it take for us to get over ourselves-rest in God and enjoy peace.

Hebrews invites us to run with endurance the race that God has set before us by keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from start to finish.” Hebrews 12:2

Paul writes to the Philippians “Don’t worry about anything; instead pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. If you do this you will experience God’s peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. And now, dear brothers and sisters, let me say one more thing as I close this letter. Fix your thoughts on what is true and honorable and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you learned from me and heard from me and saw me doing, and the God of peace will be with you.”

The angel wasn’t crazy. The angels know the peace this baby will bring to our earth is not dependent on circumstances. That in this world we will have trouble. But focused on Jesus, fixing our eyes on him, loving God by loving his creation we will experience peace even on earth.

And now, may the God who gives u his peace, be with you all, Amen Romans 15:33



When was a time when your peace was really disturbed?

When you think of being truly at peace what is that memory?

How audacious does the angel's pronouncement seem to you?

If you declared "peace on earth" how crazy would people think you were because of the many ongoing wars in our world?

What's your idea of being at peace?

Since peace isn't something we can generate how can we have peace?

What do you think about peace not being dependent on outward circumstances?

What steals our peace?

How can you focus more on Jesus?

What do you think about having peace with God because of what Jesus has done?

How is serving "the least of these" a way to focus on Jesus?



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