**Advent: Peace**

Luke 2:8-11

Today, we gather to reflect on the second Advent theme: “peace.” In the Gospel of Luke, we find the shepherds living in the fields, guarding their sheep by night. Suddenly, the Lord’s angel appears, the glory of the Lord shining around them, and they are filled with fear. But the angel reassures them, saying, “Don’t be afraid! I bring you good news—wonderful, joyous news for all people. Your Savior is born today in David’s city. He is Christ the Lord.”

As we look around our world today, we see an abundance of violence and conflict. Nations are at war, and even within our own country, we experience discord and broken relationships. Perhaps you feel this lack of peace within yourself—anxiety, anger, fear, and powerlessness. In such times, peace can seem elusive, and fear often takes its place.

The birth narrative of Jesus reminds us that those closest to Him were not free from struggles. Each character faced their own fears and challenges, which is why the angels repeatedly spoke the words, “Don’t be afraid.”

Let’s consider Zechariah, the old childless priest. When the angel Gabriel appeared to him with astonishing news, he was “startled and overcome with fear” (Luke 1:12). He needed peace.

Then there’s Mary, a young girl confronted by the angel’s news that she would bear the Son of God. She was understandably troubled, yet Gabriel reassured her with the same words: “Don’t be afraid.”

We also see the shepherds, who were terrified when an angel appeared to them in the fields. Their need for peace echoed that of Zechariah and Mary.

Joseph, too, faced turmoil when he learned of Mary’s pregnancy. The angel encouraged him not to abandon her, offering him the peace he desperately needed in that moment of confusion and doubt.

And then, there’s King Herod, who embodies the opposite of peace. His jealousy and paranoia drove him to seek the destruction of the very child who would bring peace to the world.

Throughout the Gospels, we see a world desperately in need of peace—not just on the surface, but deep within the human heart.

During this holiday season, many of us are caught up in the hustle and bustle—gatherings, cooking, sending cards, and shopping. While these activities are blessings, they can also lead to stress and a loss of inner peace. It’s crucial to pause, reflect, and invite God into our hearts where we feel turmoil.

What does peace truly mean? The biblical concept of peace comes from the Hebrew word “shalom.” While we often translate it simply as peace, shalom encompasses much more: it signifies wholeness, completeness, and well-being. It’s not merely the absence of conflict but **a restoration of our relationships with ourselves, others, and God.**

Shalom calls us to recognize that our actions affect those around us. No one exists in isolation. Just as pollution impacts distant lands, our personal choices influence our communities. John Wesley spoke of both individual and social sanctification, emphasizing that shalom is not just for the individual but for all creation.

In John’s Gospel, Jesus repeatedly offers peace to His disciples. In John 14:27, He says, “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you.” This is not a mere blessing; Jesus is sharing a part of Himself, a profound peace that can sustain us through our trials.

Consider how Jesus demonstrated peace during His time on Earth. He calmed storms, stood firm against criticism, and even forgave those who tormented Him while on the cross. He offered hope in the face of death, showing that it is not the final word.

This same Jesus is offering you that peace today. You may look in the mirror and see signs of struggle—wrinkles of worry, a furrowed brow from stress, or a heart burdened by conflict. Yet, the angel’s message rings true for you: “Do not be afraid.”

When the resurrected Jesus appeared to His disciples, He greeted them with the same words: “Peace be with you.” He breathed the Holy Spirit upon them, empowering them to live without fear.

This Advent season is a time of longing for Christ’s return, yet we must recognize that He is already with us. The possibility of peace is here, found in God’s presence and the power of the Holy Spirit.

So, I encourage you: Do not be afraid. Invite Jesus into your restless heart. Allow Him to fill you with His peace, transforming your life, your relationships, and, ultimately, the world. Let us seek and embody the shalom that Christ offers, knowing that His peace can change everything. Amen.