

Saving For Christmas: Jesus is Savior From All (Lk. 2:1-14)

Chris Altrock – December 27, 2009

1In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3And all went to be registered, each to his own town. 4And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. 6And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 7And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. 8And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. 10And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." 13And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" (Lk. 2:1-14 ESV).

We're exploring last Sunday and this Sunday the angel's announcement in vv. 10-11: "*Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord* (Lk. 2:10-11 TNIV). The Christmas angel uses three titles for the infant Jesus: Lord, Christ, and Savior. In this two-week series we are exploring what the angel means he calls the infant "Savior."

Do you remember the song, "Do You Hear What I Hear?" One section goes like this: "*Said the little lamb to the shepherd boy; Do you hear what I hear? Ringing through the sky shepherd boy; Do you hear what I hear?*" The song refers to the refrain of the angels ringing through the sky in Lk. 2. And I wonder, as you listen to the angel's description of Jesus as "Savior," what do you hear? Do you hear what the angel meant? Do you hear what the shepherds heard? Because what these shepherds heard when the angel described Jesus as "Savior" and what we hear when the angels describe Jesus as "Savior" may be very different things. What *do* we hear when we hear that the infant Jesus is "Savior"?

Many of us, at least initially, hear this: *Jesus saves us from sin for heaven*. What many of us hear as the good news of great joy is that one has been born to save us *from sin for heaven*.

And that's certainly part of this infant's salvation. Earlier when John's father Zechariah sings about his baby name John, Zechariah states how John will prepare the way for Jesus "*to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.*" (Lk. 1:77 TNIV). That's part of what we *ought* to hear when we hear the angel describe the infant as "Savior." The infant Jesus will save us from sin. That's certainly part of what the shepherds heard. But is that *all* they heard? What else might be wrapped up in this word "Savior"?

Let's return to the scene once more: *10And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." 13And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"* (Lk. 2:10-14 ESV). Two things happen here. First, the angel calls the infant Jesus "Savior." Second, the heavenly host sings that the infant Jesus has come to bring peace: *"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased."* In reality, the angel and the heavenly host are saying the same thing. Jesus is Savior in that he's come to bring peace. The kind of salvation he's brought can be summarized with this word "peace."

And it is a peace offered to all. There is some difficulty deciding exactly how to translate that last line—*and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!* Some argue that the line is restrictive: Jesus brings peace only on those with whom he is pleased. Others argue that the line is not restrictive. It simply states that through Jesus peace is brought to all people.¹ The Greek reads "on earth peace among humans, with whom God is pleased." The angel is merely saying that Jesus is bringing peace to all humans because God is pleased with humans. This would be in line with the statement in vs. 10 that this good news of great joy is for "all the people." The peace which Jesus is bringing is for all humanity.

Thus, what the shepherds likely heard when the angel described Jesus as "Savior," and what we are to hear is this: Jesus has come to bring salvation to all, and that salvation can be summarized in one word: "peace." The infant Savior does not only come to save us *from* our sins *for* heaven. More broadly, he's come to bring "peace."

What do you hear when you hear the word "peace"? Some of us might think of hippies from the 1960's, long hair, tie-dye t-shirts, rose colored glasses, first two fingers spread apart, "Peace man." Some of us might think of an urban gangsta, pants slung low, bling around his neck and on his knuckles, pounding his chest with his fist twice and then saying, "Peace out" to his brothers as he walks away. Peace has a long tradition in our culture.

It also had a long tradition in the culture of the Bible. "Peace" was a central word used in the Old Testament to describe what God wanted to do on earth and what he would do through the Messiah. The Hebrew word used was "shalom." In the Old Testament, God was working to bring peace or shalom on earth.

And because "peace" or "shalom" was so central to what God was doing, the Jews often used the word "shalom" as a greeting. They would greet each other by saying "Peace."² Jesus himself did this. For example, when the resurrected Jesus appeared before the disciples in [Jn. 20:19](#), Jesus greets them with these words: *"Peace be with you."* A few moments later, Jesus says it again, *"Peace be with you."*

The word “peace” or “shalom” meant “well-being.” And it referred to being well in every area of life. It referred to bodily health, to healthy relationships, and even to material well-being. It meant soundness and completeness in all of life.³

The Old Testament prophets were especially fond of the word “peace.” For example Isaiah writes of a time that will come after the exile and after the suffering of the Jewish people. He writes of a time that will correspond to Jesus’ birth. And as he writes about this future time, Isaiah uses images of “peace.”⁴ Listen to these texts:

- *2 In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. 3 Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house 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. 4 He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. 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. (Is. 2:2-4 TNIV).*
- *6 The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. 7 The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. 8 Infants will play near the hole of the cobra; young children will put their hands into the viper's nest. 9 They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. 5 Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. (Is. 11:6-9 TNIV).*
- *5 Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. 6 For 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. (Is. 9:5-7 TNIV).*
- Later in Is. 48 Isaiah writes of this peace flowing like a river and flooding like the waves of the sea.

When Isaiah and others wrote about God’s dream for people and what God was going to do through the Messiah, they wrote of peace: God ending wars and reconciling people; God stopping conflict and renewing love; God bringing prosperity and abundance; God creating the end to injustice and the beginning of righteousness. God’s mission and the Messiah’s mission was the death of hunger, despair, and poverty and the birth of equity, community, and fullness. All of that was wrapped up in the Old Testament word “peace” or “shalom.”

And all of that is what the shepherd’s heard when they heard the angel describe Jesus as “Savior” and heard the heavenly host sing of his “peace.” All of these Old Testament images came flooding into their minds. And all of that is what we are to hear as well. This word “peace” leads us to a final aspect of what Luke means when he writes of Jesus as “Savior.” Last Sunday we explored how the infant Jesus is Savior *above* all—there are no equals; and how Jesus is Savior *for* all—young, old, rich, poor, and all in between may receive his grace. But this morning the word “peace” leads us to this: *Jesus is Savior from all that is wrong for all that is*

right. As Savior, Jesus has come to bring “peace.” And “peace” is the ending of all that’s wrong and the renewing of all that’s right. The infant did not merely come to save us *from* our personal sins and *for* a heavenly home. He’s come to save us from *all* that’s wrong: wars, conflict, broken relationships, disease, and disaster. He’s come to save us not merely from our *personal* sins, but also from the corporate sins, from the government sins, and from the cultural sins that create hardship and pain and inequity across the world. And he’s not merely come to save us *for* a heavenly home. He’s also come to remake our earthly home—filling it with community, reconciliation, harmony, abundance, prosperity, and well-being.

This kind of salvation is the very thing we long for. This kind of peace is the very thing we dream of. The popular rock group U2 wrote a song entitled “Peace on Earth.” The song was written in the aftermath of a bombing in Northern Ireland in 1998. It was later played as the United States recovered from the attacks of September 11, 2001. The group sang: *“Heaven on Earth; We need it now; I’m sick of all of this; Hanging around; Sick of sorrow; Sick of pain; Sick of hearing again and again; That there’s gonna be; Peace on Earth...Jesus could you take the time; To throw a drowning man a line; Peace on Earth; Tell the ones who hear no sound; Whose sons are living in the ground; Peace on Earth; No whos or whys; No-one cries like a mother cries; For peace on Earth...Jesus this song you wrote; The words are sticking in my throat; Peace on Earth; Hear it every Christmas time; But hope and history won’t rhyme; So what’s it worth? This peace on Earth”* The song was a lament. It was a cry for the very thing the heavenly host promised. It was a plea for peace—no more sorrow, no more pain, no more crying mothers, no more violence. That’s the very thing this infant Jesus came to bring.

A well-known Christmas song is entitled “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day.” Much of it was composed by American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow on December 25th 1864. Wadsworth was painfully familiar with what’s wrong in this world. His wife died tragically. His son died from wounds sustained in the Civil War. And that Christmas in 1864, the Civil War still raged. As Wadsworth heard the Christmas bells ring that day, he reflected on his pain and on the country’s conflict, and he wrote the poem which became the song: *“I heard the bells on Christmas day; Their old familiar carols play; And wild and sweet the words repeat; Of peace on earth, good will to men.; And thought how, as the day had come, The belfries of all Christendom; Had rolled along th’ unbroken song; Of peace on earth, good will to men.; Till ringing, singing on its way; The world revolved from night to day,; A voice, a chime, a chant sublime; Of peace on earth, good will to men.; And in despair I bowed my head: “There is no peace on earth,” I said, “For hate is strong and mocks the song; Of peace on earth, good will to men.”; Then pealed the bells more loud and deep: “God is not dead, nor does He sleep; The wrong shall fail, the right prevail; With peace on earth, good will to men.”* There are things that may lead us to believe that peace is not possible, that there is no peace on earth. But the song of the Christmas angels rings out that *“God is not dead, nor does He sleep; The wrong shall fail, the right prevail; With peace on earth, good will to men.”* Peace. It’s what we most long for. And even in the most difficult times, it’s what the infant Jesus stands for. He came to bring an end to every war, to fill every need, to right every wrong, and to flood the earth with prosperity, abundance, and well-being.

Another song, “Grown Up Christmas List,” paints a similar image: *“No more lives torn apart, That wars would never start, And time would heal all hearts. And everyone would have a friend, And right would always win, And love would never end. This is my grown-up Christmas list.”* What we wish for now as grown-ups is what Jesus came to bring. Peace. No more lives torn apart. That wars would never start. That everyone would have a friend. And right would always win. He’s come to save us from all that’s wrong and for all that’s right. He’s come to bring peace.

But where is that peace? Why hasn’t the promise yet been fulfilled? One of the most popular Christmas songs answers it this way: *“Let There Be Peace on Earth and let it begin with me; Let There Be Peace on Earth, the peace that was meant to be! With God as our Father, brothers all are we. Let me walk with my brother in perfect harmony.”* What the infant Jesus came to bring, we’ve now been commissioned to also bring. We’ve taken up his banner of peace. We’ve enlisted in his mission of peace. And so, our prayer as followers of the Prince of Peace is this: let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me. May we leave this place filled with and working for the peace of the infant Jesus.

¹ Fred Craddock Luke Interpretation (John Knox 1990), 36.

² Achtemeier, Paul J. ; Harper & Row, Publishers ; Society of Biblical Literature: Harper's Bible Dictionary. 1st ed. (Harper & Row, 1985): 766.

³ Warren W. Wiersbe, Be Compassionate (Chariot Victor, 1988), 25.

⁴ Elwell, Walter A. ; Comfort, Philip Wesley: Tyndale Bible Dictionary (Tyndale, 2001 (Tyndale Reference Library)): 1004.