



FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

"Hail the Heaven-Born Prince of Peace"

Scripture Lessons: *Isaiah 9:2-7: John 14:25-31*

***This sermon was preached by The Rev. Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on
Sunday, December 18, 2022 at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in
Charleston, South Carolina.***

John 14: 25-31

'I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, "I am going away, and I am coming to you." If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe. I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us be on our way.

The birth of Jesus captured the attention of much of the world! And if we look closely, we can begin to see some busyness around the stall.

Right now, it is merely a small rock hewn stable / a place where animals pause and shelter together; but in the coming days, that little feeding trough will become a manger.

Sadly, Mary and Joseph will have to make use of it on account that there will be nowhere else for them to stay in Bethlehem.

A census which was taken while Quirinius was Governor of Syria required each family to return their ancestral home to be counted, and, Joseph, being from Bethlehem in Judea, is on his way with Mary, who we know is also a pregnant, but not just with any child. No! Hers is a heavenly child!

It won't be long before certain shepherds are told that amazing news - that unto them was born in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah! And they will come running!

Wise men from the east have seen his star at its rising and they too are on their way, though it will take them longer than we think to get there, because these men - these magi - they come from somewhere in the East.

When they do arrive, they stop off first in Jerusalem, because unlike many modern men we know, they need directions and they will ask for them.

And it is interesting to note that while the star got them to Jerusalem, it is the Bible that will get them the rest of the way. The directions come from the Scriptures and specifically from the prophecies of the late 8th early 7th century prophet, Micah, who declared:

"But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origins of old, from ancient days."

When the wise men finally arrive, all Jerusalem will stir at their arrival! And why not? I mean, an entourage of foreign gift-givers...are they representatives of a new occupying force? Do

they come in peace with their gifts suitable for a king, though not for King Herod?

One could argue that King Herod has a better sense of what it all means. Having Jewish roots, he knows the Hebrew prophecy which spoke of the one who was to come — the one that would make the crooked places straight and the rough places plain — the one that would be called Wonderful Counselor, mighty God, everlasting, father, prince of peace.

But when it comes to searching for the child, Herod will be completely disingenuous - oh, he will say to the wise men to return and tell him where the baby is so that he can go and pay him homage, but Herod has no intention of worshipping the child...he will want to kill it. Oh, if the truth be known, Herod wanted neither a prince nor peace.

Such conflicting images of peace and destruction often leave us confused. Perhaps we would do well to remember those lines written by a great poet of the church, Edmund Hamilton Sears, who in a little-known verse of that well-known Hymn, It Came Upon the Midnight Clear - he put it like this:

“Yet with the woes of sin and strife the world has suffered long; beneath the angel-strain have rolled two thousand years of wrong; and man, at war with man, hears not the love-song, which they bring: oh, hush, the noise, you men of strife, and hear the angels sing!”

It begs the question: how do we find peace in a world where there is also strife? How do we reconcile the silent night / that blessed and dreamless sleep as the stars go by -- how do we reconcile that with the screams of desperate mothers as the Roman soldiers carry out their despicable orders? How do we come to terms with the angels who from on high sing, and that so-called King Herod who shouts?

Well, we begin with the baby - and we consider who this Prince of Peace really is, and what it means for him to be born in the first place. What it means that into a world of power and might and cold and dark — that there in the midst of all — is a little baby, nestled in the elbow of his mother!

So, who is this baby? Well, to begin, this baby / this Prince of Peace ...he doesn't reside in the heavens -- he's not untouchable or unknowable -- Jesus is a baby, he's a person just like you or me.

But this child is also the descendant of Israel's greatest King...and lest we forget, he is a King himself, because while he may be human like all of us, he is God like none of us; indeed, Jesus is God with us!

In the city of London, in a house alongside the City Royal Chapel, there is the place where John Wesley lived, and where he died in March 1791.

Sometime before his death, Wesley tried in vain to speak to those who stood beside his bed. Yet again and again his efforts failed. He kept silent for a time, and then, gathering all his strength, he uttered words that will never to be forgotten, “The best of all – God is with us!”

Because God was, in fact, with us in the person and work of Jesus, we now know that God understands well the human condition – the Bible tells us that he was tempted in every way as we are, and yet was without sin, but because he lived among us, we know and affirm and believe that God is personal and relatable...

Just ask the woman caught in the act of adultery, Jairus' daughter, the Syrophoenician woman, Nicodemus, Zacchaeus, or the woman who simply touched the hem of his garment. Ask any of the people who had their sight restored, or their bodies cured or one of the thousands of people who had their bellies filled. Ask any of them, and they will tell you that Jesus entered into their lives and made a difference.

And the difference Jesus made, the fact that he was personally with them; ah, this was not

simply a matter of being involved in their earthly life. No! Jesus was involved in their eternal life...

For just as Jesus experienced pain and suffering and rose above it, he makes the way clear for us to do the same -- to ultimately come through the suffering / to get to the far side of pain and grief / to experience the joy that comes in the morning...and sometimes / sometimes that peace is born into the midst of strife.

If Bethlehem is not evidence enough of this reality, consider a story that comes to us from Christmas of 1914...a very unlikely place for peace / a World War I battlefield. On the one side, and deeply embedded in trenches, were primarily the Germans, and in the trenches across the way -- sometimes 30 yards apart / but generally more like three-hundred yards apart -- there were primarily British soldiers...and in-between there was "No Man's Land!"

In the early days of the war, it was not uncommon to hear the men shout out from their respective trenches to the other side. And I have little doubt that much of what was said was probably crude, but on that Christmas Eve, and as both sides could be heard singing Christmas carols / and after a few Christmas trees had donned the top of some of the German parapets, a German soldier is said to have shouted to the British: "Tomorrow you no shoot -- we no shoot."

What followed the next day has come to be known as the Christmas Truce. Soldiers from both sides posed in No Man's Land for pictures...it has been said that a couple hundred soldiers ended up kicking a soccer ball!

And so, it happened that even during war, there was peace...and it happened because it was Christmas! It happened precisely because of the Prince of Peace! And His was not a semblance of peace, but a real peace...and the world would come to know about it.

But, friends, know this -- that peace is not of the world / the world cannot create it -- Jesus said it himself, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

About the peace that only God can give, Presbyterian Clergyman Henry Van Dyke wrote the following poem...

"With eager heart and will on fire,
I strove to win my great desire.
'Peace shall be mine,' I said, but life
Grew bitter in the barren strife.
My soul was weary, and my pride
Was wounded deep; to heaven I cried.
'God grant me peace or I must die';
The dumb stars glittered no reply.
Broken at last, I bowed my head,
Forgetting all myself, and said,
'Whatever comes, His will be done';
And in that moment peace was won.

The birth of the Prince of Peace is not simply a matter of what the angels hailed; it is that for which we too prepare! It was peace that came and it is peace that dwells -- it is a peace that changed the course of human history...and can still do that today!

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