

Influence Ministries

REDISCOVER CHRISTMAS

LESSON 1

TITLE: FINDING PEACE IN OUR STRUGGLES.

Luke 2:8-12

⁸ Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.

⁹ And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid.

¹⁰ Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.

¹¹ For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

¹² And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."

Christmas is a big deal in Finland.

There's a great tradition there that happens every year.

In fact, it has happened almost every year since the 1300s.

That's a serious tradition, going on for more than 700 years. It's called the Declaration of Christmas Peace.

Each year at noon on Christmas Eve, the Christmas Peace is declared in the city of Turku.

The declaration serves as a reminder and encouragement to spend the holiday in harmony, and to threaten offenders with harsh punishments, and to wish everyone a merry Christmas.

What a great way to usher in Christmas, with a reminder of Christ's coming and the peace He brings into the world!

If you've been journeying with us this past week toward Christmas, you know that we have been celebrating Advent.

As a quick recap, the word Advent means "coming" or "arrival," and the season is marked by expectation, waiting, anticipation, and longing.

Advent is not just an extension of Christmas, it is a season that links the past, present, and future.

During Advent we're focusing on a different attribute of God: hope, peace, joy, and love. Each of these traits leads us into a rediscovery of Christmas.

When we think of peace embodied in the Christmas story, we can't help but think of the shepherds. They were the unlikely recipients of God's message of peace.

Influence Ministries

Luke 2:8-12 this is like God's birth announcement to the world

The New Living Translation calls them "the armies of heaven

And then there's the sound. All together these incredible angels are praising God, probably singing, and declaring glory to God in heaven and peace on earth to humanity.

PEACE COMES IN THE MIDST OF OUR STORMS.

Have you ever experienced a hurricane or an earthquake?

Have you ever lived through the eye of a tornado?

It's an eerie experience.

Let me ask you, how is your Christmas season going?

How does your Christmas season typically go?

If we're honest, we might choose words like busy, hectic, or frantic to describe our lives this time of year—or maybe all year round.

Maybe it's an overloaded schedule that robs you of peace.

Or maybe it's something more:

Relational conflict, pressure at work, a lost job, illness.

You name it. We have plenty of options to choose from this year!

For many of us, peace sounds like a long way off. A good idea.

A nice thought for the holidays. Something we long for.

If this is where you find yourself today, let me encourage you that Jesus shows up when the storms of life threaten our peace and hope and joy.

He is there with us when love seems lost, and the way forward is totally unclear.

But this is where God appears.

In the middle of Israel's dark night of Roman oppression and centuries of suffering and wondering, "Where is God?"

In the middle of a world turned upside down for a young Jewish couple who have found themselves at the center of cosmic events.

In all these circumstances, in all of these struggles—this is where God showed up.

And this is where God continues to show up for us. In our pain.

Influence Ministries

In our fears.
In our confusion.
In our grief.
In our loss.
In our uncertainty.

I don't know every hardship you are facing today, or every wince of pain you are feeling.

But God does. He is there, bringing peace to calm your heart, peace that defies your circumstances.

PEACE DEFIES OUR CIRCUMSTANCES.

"That's great for you to say. It sounds nice," you might be thinking.

"But you don't know how much it hurts."

No, I'm sorry, I don't. I can only imagine how awful it is, and I can only agree with how unfair it is. But let me encourage you that there is a peace that is deeper, there is a peace that defies your circumstances.

In the face of all you are feeling and all you have gone through; God's peace just doesn't make sense—but it is real.

And it is healing. And it can guard your heart from continuing wounds.

And it can protect your mind from the onslaught of anxiety.

Let me encourage each of us today, no matter what we are facing, that this process begins with us turning to God, bringing our hurts and questions and doubts and whys and needs to Him.

As Paul says it, "In every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

I don't pretend to fully understand it, but there is a power in prayer and a transformation that grows from gratitude.

It's not the power of getting what we want or convincing God to see things our way.

But much more than that, the power of prayer happens in this experience of peace as our perspective changes and finds an understanding that God is with us, no matter what.

PEACE IS A PERSON.

It all comes back to a person. Peace is a person. Peace is Jesus.

"For he himself is our peace," Paul says in Ephesians 2:14 (NIV).

And long before His arrival on earth, the prophet Isaiah called Jesus the Prince of Peace.

Influence Ministries

Isaiah 9:6-7, NIV

*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**. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.*

Jesus came to be with us, and He offers us this invitation in this Advent season and always:

Matthew 11:28-30, NIV

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Is that not an offer of peace? Let's let those words wash over us.

Let me encourage you to look for the Prince of Peace, even when the winds blow and the storms swirl.

Let me encourage us all to come to Him and worship even when we find ourselves in the darkness or the storms.

Let me remind us to come to Him. Because He is here. The Prince of Peace is with us.

May He be your peace this week, guarding your soul with peace, filling your spirit with wholeness, and ruling as the Prince of Peace in your heart.