

Isaiah 9:1-7

“Our Peace Rests on Him Alone”

Advent Midweek 3

December 20, 2023

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, West Salem, Wisc.

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Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

When we are young, wrapping paper on a gift means nothing. Bows are made to be thrown away and paper is made to be torn in a second. Ripping open that box and getting to the gift inside is our goal.

But when we are older, we pause over the wrapping paper and the bow. If it's a child's first attempt to wrap a gift, we admire how well he did and how secure it's all taped. He must have used half a roll of tape to make sure it stayed together. Or, if the wrapping is a true work of art, tell them that he has outdone himself this year. It's almost too perfect to open. The gift inside is important, but at first, we can pause to appreciate the wrapping. But as we age, we may attempt to open that gift wrapping a bit slower in hopes of re-using it next year.

In this third midweek of Advent, we pause to appreciate the wrapping of the gift of the Prince of Peace. He comes wrapped both in beauty and in darkness. He is the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. That's the wrapping of glory and greatness we expect when God gives us His Son. But He also comes with the simple wrapping of a manger quietly hidden underneath the Christmas star that speaks of peace to those with ears to hear.

By now, you have your plans for Christmas set in place. December 25 is so close that you can't be guessing and wishing anymore. It's Monday. But you still need to plan. Who is coming to your house for Christmas? When are they getting there? Is everyone staying with you? What are you eating? How are you going to balance everyone's particular diet? Remember, everyone invited to your table will be sitting for the same meal. This takes some planning.

Of course, all this depends on you getting them to the same table at the same time. You've got the guests who always come a half hour early and then there are the ones who think that 1:00 p.m. means 3:30 p.m. And don't forget what happened last time Cousin Sue sat next to Uncle Frank. So, plan your seating chart carefully.

Christmas can call for control. Maybe peace can come if we can get these people into the right place and at the right time. It's a bit like the circus master who directs jugglers, acrobats, lions, dogs, and elephants.

If everyone would only listen and do what you tell them, there would be peace. This is the hope of every grandmother who plans Christmas dinner for the whole family. Control is the theme of our peace tonight.

Tonight, we finish the points on our star. We've been pursuing peace. Our first point at the top of the star was the pursuit of more possessions. If only we could get all we dream of, we would have peace. But God stops us with the gift of a baby born in a stable. With Him laid in the manger, we have more than enough, and we can find peace. Last week, we sought peace in the two horizontal points of the star. We were looking for peace in distance. If only we could get away to that perfect retreat. Or if only we could get away from our past, then we would find peace. But again, God catches us and gives us peace in the present. Our peace is not in a distant retreat but in this very moment. God's peace is present even when the storm is still here.

So tonight, we have the last two points of our star. These are the bottom points where the weight rests. To manage all that weight and all our plans, we need to take control. And if we had that control, then there could be peace. Wouldn't it be reasonable that God would help us in this? God should want us all to get along and get through at least one weekend in peace.

After all, isn't that the very name by which we know the Messiah, the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6)? Wouldn't it be fitting that the celebration of His birth would be celebrated in peace? We can hear this call for peace in the inspired writer to the Hebrews: "***Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord***" (Hebrews 12:14). Through the Holy Spirit, Paul also gives clear direction: "***If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all***" (Romans 12:18).

Can we bring enough control over our world so we have this peace? Getting everyone to follow our plans can be the second of the two bottom points of the star. Control of others can become our purpose. When we are so busy getting ready for Christmas, we might ask ourselves, "*Why am I doing all this? It takes a lot of work to get ready for Christmas. Why bother?*" If you're wondering that yourself, it's time to find peace and purpose. What will be enough to give us meaning in all that has yet to be done before Christmas? Find that, and we imagine that we will have our peace.

But God stops our search for control and purpose. Peace is not in our tight grasp over others. Peace is not in our plans. Peace comes *only* through the Prince of Peace.

It's His kingdom that brings peace and His work as the Wonderful Counselor and Mighty God that gives order to our world. If we seek that peace of control, Jesus shows us another control.

In Matthew 10, Jesus asks if we expect Him to bring peace. He says that He came to bring not peace but a sword. He came to set two against three, three against two. He came to divide family members one against another. This is the very opposite of our goals of control and outward peace.

We want the peace that comes from getting everyone to agree with us. But what brings peace to the world? Only Jesus brings true peace. Jesus brings peace by stepping into the middle of our troubled world and letting Himself be the center of the world's anger. In that center, He brings us peace through the cross. Peace has come through what seems to be chaos.

Being the Prince of Peace, His peace has endured thousands of years. Our best plans won't always make it through one meal, but His peace, like His kingdom, is without end. He comes as the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, and the Everlasting Father so that His peace might reign over the world. This gives us a new purpose and a new peace. The star of peace does not rest on our plans and our control. God's peace doesn't come by our control of others. Peace only comes by hearing His Word—*the Word that comforts us. The Word that controls us.*

We might not be able to corral everyone at the right time and place. Our plans might not be fulfilled. But our real goal is to focus on God's plans—*the plans that have come true.*

It's like the story of our gifts. When we were young, we simply wanted *the* gift. But when we became older, it was the story of the gift that mattered. It was hearing how long someone looked for the right color or size and how the gift was hidden in the back of the closet. The gift was good, but it was the story that was the key. We find God's gift in the simplicity of the manger and a newborn baby. But the key to peace is hearing the story of how He made our peace. He built it by the straw of the manger and the wood and nails of the cross. He made that peace through the ages of promise and the waiting of His coming.

The gift of the Prince of Peace came by the perfect planning of God, who arranged the whole world for the birth of His Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

So, the gift of peace has come through the birth of the Child, the Son of God. The Prince of Peace has come with His gift of peace, and the story of that peace lives on. What will bring you peace when so many of your plans are still undone? We find our peace rests not in our work but in following Him, the Prince of Peace. He filled the manger and the cross. That's where we find our peace. Peace rests on Him, and we rest in faith in all that He has done for us. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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