

Luke 2:8-20; John 1:1-14

“The Diamond Found in the Manger”

The Nativity of Our Lord - Christmas Day

December 25, 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:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made. ... The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1-3, 14).

Merry Christmas! Christmas is more than one day. Christmas is twelve days. And those days only began today. So, as the world will move on from Christmas tomorrow, the Christmas celebration continues until January 5th!

Today, on the first day of Christmas as the carol proclaims: *“my true love gave to me: a partridge in a pear tree.”* This partridge is none other than the Son of God, who became flesh and dwelt among us as the Savior. He came in order to fulfill the Law, and to suffer and die our punishment and rise again, so that all who cling to Him would have the victory over our evil foes: sin, eternal death, and Satan. God became man for us and for our salvation.

But on this Christmas Day, we will focus on today. Christmas Day has so many little pieces that are important, no matter how small. Every parent has to assemble a toy that has bags of tiny pieces and an instruction manual with seemingly never-ending steps. Add an eager child helping to open those bags and spread out those parts, and you’ve got some excitement on Christmas.

It’s easy to lose a piece or two in all that. Especially when you are battling it out with layers of crumpled Christmas wrapping paper and a piece or two could end up in the trash can. It is often the piece that’s really needed.

But what if the missing piece is more than that one tiny piece of plastic? What if it’s a diamond engagement ring with all the promises of love and life together? What if that diamond is suddenly missing from the ring? Somehow it fell out of the setting and is lost among all the wrapping papers, boxes, plastic, and directions. *Stop everything and start looking! We need to find that diamond!*

That's our situation on Christmas. Christmas comes with God's wonderful news of a lasting relationship – the piece that joins us with Him for all time. In all the excitement of Christmas, we might miss that diamond and have only the outward setting but not the treasure of His love and peace. We can find so many small pieces this Christmas, but only one piece, one treasure, is truly needed.

This is what completes our star of piece. Throughout our Advent midweeks, we were seeking peace with the five points of the star. We imagined that peace can be found if we get enough possessions, or peace might come if we can escape to a far-away retreat on a lake, or lock out our past equally far away. We've tried to find peace in having control of our world, and we've tried to find our purpose in directing others. But in every case, God stops us before we go too far on a hopeless tangent.

At each point of the star, God gives us His own distinct peace. Left to ourselves, we would go off on a search that would never end. There will never be enough stuff or distance or control. But with Him, we find peace here and now.

That's especially true this morning. Our peace is in the Treasure in the manger. That Treasure who created all things. That Treasure who became flesh.

When we highlight the center of our Christmas star, the star becomes a picture of the manger. In the center of that manger is the diamond of His gift. You see, finding peace is not seeking a needle in a haystack. Peace is found in the diamond of the Son of God in the straw of the manger. That diamond is the very Son of God. He isn't lost in the manger. He is purposely in the manger so that He would be found. Likewise, He is purposefully in Word and Sacrament – *His Means of Grace* – so that He would be found by us.

Who else would do this but God? We treasure our important gifts and know where they are. I can't imagine a young woman who has gotten her engagement ring on Christmas Eve to only lose it. She's not taking it off for any reason. Don't ask her to wash the dishes tonight. That diamond is the center of her world, and she is keeping it safe.

God's Treasure has come to be the center of our world. What a wonder that the One true God puts the center of the universe, His only-begotten Son, into the setting of the manger. He doesn't put Him safely in the Most Holy Place in the Jerusalem Temple. Jesus isn't placed on the golden throne of a king. He doesn't have Jesus hover over us. All of those would make sense as the greatness of this Gift should be seen and protected. The Son of God coming into the world rightly comes with the brilliant light of the glory of God and the chorus of angels singing. It is right that shepherds – along with us – hear them and are stunned by the brightness and the message of the Savior born to save a sin-filled world.

But that outward glory is brought into one small, almost-hidden spot – the manger. There we find the great gift of peace, like a diamond set within the arms of the manger. We have looked often at the star as it promises different points and directions of peace, but it is not a tangent of distance and discovery that brings us peace. Peace is the diamond held within the manger. That infant Son of God, so small that He could be ignored by many, is the only hope for peace.

We are all invited to hear this true story again this morning just as we have every Christmas. This true story of how the Savior came to the world. The Savior that the fallen world did not recognize. The Savior who would die in order to save you!

Remember how we turned the star of peace into the manger? But now, the arms of the manger are briefly replaced. The arms of the manger are now your arms as you hold the Infant Savior. Look at Him and see the gift of peace that the angels declared. Here is peace to the world, not a mere wish, but the living Christ who caused His birth in this way. He came so that He could be held in the arms of the manger, the arms of His mother, the arms of the shepherds, and the arms of all people.

Holding the Son is the enduring gift of Christmas peace. We'll shake out the wrapping paper in case there is something hidden. Some of us will attempt to re-use the wrapping paper for another year. Most of the parts for the toys will be found. Eventually, the toys will be assembled and look pretty much like the pictures on the boxes. The many parts of Christmas will be put away, and the important pieces will remain.

That is especially true of the true gift of Christmas, the Savior, and the peace that He brings. In all our pursuit of peace, He is always the answer. He is the peace that passes our understanding, but He is also the Peace that perfectly understands us since He came to be one of us. His peace ends our hopeless pursuits for possessions and power.

True peace is the Lamb of God held by shepherds, the infant Son in His mother's arms, and that same Savior held by us in His Means of Grace, His Word and Sacrament. Here is the gift of God, the diamond of His relationship with us, and the treasure in the arms of the manger. Merry Christmas! Amen.

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

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +