

# Jesus Prince of Peace

Christmas Sermon by the Rev Derek Lightbourne Parish of Lower Hutt 2017

Keynote Bible passages: Isaiah 9.2,6,7, Luke 2.1 – 2017

Towards the end of this service we will sing in joyous praise: 'Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace.' The first reading announced his coming: 'For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given and his name will be called ...Prince of Peace.' This is our theme focus as this morning we share together in the celebration of Jesus' birth.

There's a number of descriptions given of Jesus in this time of his birth – Saviour, Emmanuel, King, Lord, Holy Child, Christ, and Prince of Peace.

1) The theme of Peace has a particular relevance for today, in an unsettled and somewhat dangerous world. One has only to think of insults being thrown between two leaders of nations at the same time as they build up their nuclear arsenal of weapons. Someone has described the possibility of a serious war as being as close as a temper tantrum. Thankfully some other leaders of nations are encouraging dialogue between the adversaries towards seeking a lessening of tension. Thankfully also there's an increase of nations working together to address other major issues confronting our world as we draw to the close of 2017. Issues like inequality, climate change including rising sea levels, and ethnic tensions in nations thus threatening the rule of peace.

One might well ask, are we any closer to that reign of peace prophesied, and glorified by the angels. One might at least conclude that peace between humans is the desire of God, creator of the world. Unfortunately, down through history humans have disrupted the peace by selfish desire, territorial ambition, personal power, and indeed selfishness. In many ways times haven't changed. In Jesus' day there was a fragile peace, 'Pax Romana' enforced by a formidable army. As we consider what is called the 'Holy Land' it seems to find peace very difficult to achieve. In the immediate future the prospect of peace there seems remote. The nature of this peace has especially to do with relationships between nations. The Holy Scriptures are mindful of this importance, and I'm reminded of the words of words from Psalm 122: 'Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.'

2) There's also another aspect of peace that is so very close to the heart of the 'Prince of Peace.' Curiously enough it was noted by a Roman writer of the 1<sup>st</sup> century: 'While the emperor may give peace from war on land and sea, he is unable to give peace from passion, grief and envy. He cannot give *peace of heart*, for which man yearns even more than even for outward peace. '(Epictetus) His writing gives us a clue as to the substance of Jesus' reign of peace. The weeks leading to Christmas have included a focus on the one who was looking for the coming of Jesus, John the baptiser. His father Zechariah would prophecy about John's role: 'You child will be called the prophet of the most high.... By the tender mercy of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to *guide our feet into the way of peace.*' (Luke 1.76). Pray the truth of this prophecy.

A key aspect of Jesus' ministry included the *desire for peace*, 'My peace I give you, I do not give to you as the world gives. He is describing an inner peace, especially between men and women and their God. Some years later St Paul reflected on this peace of Christ: 'Jesus came and preached peace to those who were far off and those who were near'. How to describe this inner peace is not easy, as Paul himself acknowledged in the words we know as the Blessing: The peace of God that is beyond human understanding. ....

This is something of a 'heart-peace' – recognised as we reach out to family, friends and in the congregation. There's a warmth, a friendliness, a sense of welcoming, of being in another's presence and space as one greets another. It might be also as an action of reconciliation. We recognise it is the service today as the leader pronounces 'The peace of Christ *rule in our hearts*'. Furthermore, as we extend that towards ones less well-known or not known and in need, it reaches out in practical action, in giving, and especially one might feel that sense of generosity at Christmas.

I especially love the prayer attributed to St Francis:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:

where there is hatred let me sow love;

where there is injury pardon;

where there is discord, union;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there's despair, let me sow hope;

where there is darkness, light,

where there is sadness, joy.

For your mercy and truth's sake.

Finally, as we have concerns both for peace in our world and having an inner peace, we might be mindful of the connection as the song of a few years back reminded us: 'Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.'