

## He Shall Be This Peace

4<sup>th</sup> Sun. in Advent – 12/22/24 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Micah 5:2-5a Pastor Keith Besel

vv. 4-5a, [Micah prophetically describes the Christ child's role/characteristics,] **"...He will stand and will shepherd with the strength of Yahweh and with the majesty of the name of Yahweh, His God. And they will dwell in safety, for then He will be great as far as the ends of the earth. And He will be this peace."**

### **Introduction**

- ⌘ Even if we had lived 700 years before the birth of Christ, rather than the 2000 years after His birth that we do, we still could have known from where it is that the promised Christ would be born.
  - ➔ It's a beautiful; a timeless prophecy that God sent us through Micah. It is the Biblical text that inspired the carol, "*O Little Town of Bethlehem*." Yet more important than knowing the place of our Savior's birth is knowing the reason for His coming. Micah tells us that too: "And He will be this peace" (v 5).
- ⌘ The wording is so obvious that the main point is easily missed. God is telling us all that "peace" is not a thing. It is a man – a very special man indeed!
  - ➔ And the peace He's referring to is peace between Yahweh Himself and all of mankind. It's peace restored ... after our sin destroyed it; drove a wedge and opened a chasm between us and our Creator; basically setting us at war with God.
  - ➔ It's a war in which every single person was sure to be killed ... eternally. Yet this is God's answer: The baby born in Bethlehem shall be our peace; shall bring us back together with God so that He is once again our loving Father and we are His dear children with all of His earthly and eternal blessings.
- ⌘ We all want peace. But as we prepare our hearts now to celebrate the birth of Christ, it's good for us to ponder the story leading up to His coming. We know the Christ will come from Bethlehem, but more important is for us to know from where true peace will come.

### **I. Peace from the seats of ancient power?**

- ⌘ So, where is it that we can find peace?
  - ➔ Isaiah 7:14 tells us that Jesus would be born of an unknown, culturally insignificant "virgin," much like the town of Bethlehem was. Yet He would still be "Immanuel", which means "God with us".
- ⌘ Seriously? Can true, substantial and lasting peace come through someone and from somewhere so insignificant?
  - ➔ Indeed, our human criteria – especially for those in the world at that time, expected the Savior of the world to be born at the center of worldly civilization - in Rome.
  - ➔ But remember, in the Old Testament, God chose not to use the powerful kingdoms like Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon when He picked the place for His saving promise and presence to come first to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
- ⌘ So, what about some remote, unknown corner of the Roman Empire, can God's promise in Genesis to send the woman's seed to reverse Adam and Eve's rebellion (Gen 3:15) really come from a little hick town like Bethlehem?

→ Well, if you know your history, you know that the Roman Empire was the bed of constant conflict where politics and power wrestled to define life.

→ The best example came when Jesus was barely out of Mary's womb, as Herod "the Great's" jealousy and paranoia to retain his power reached all the way to Bethlehem. He ordered all the male children in Bethlehem and the surrounding region that were two-years-old and younger to be murdered (Mt 2:16).

✘ Can peace develop in a culture like that? No, we won't find peace coming from any of the seats of ancient power.

## **II. Peace in our modern world?**

✘ If not from the ancient world, then can we hope to find peace here in our modern world?

→ It doesn't take any kind of in-depth research to see that our context today is characterized by the same kind of horrible violence as they had in the ancient Roman Empire.

→ In the United States alone, 20.5 million babies were murdered through legal abortion in the last 20 years (<https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2024/03/19/1238293143/abortion-data-how-many-us-2023>). Compare that to around 600,000 Americans killed in the Civil War, 400,000 Americans killed in World II, and 58,000 Americans killed in Vietnam.

→ And how can we say we're at peace when our country is so utterly divided over the definition of marriage, and whether biological males should be allowed to compete in woman's athletics or what should happen with someone who enters our country illegally, and how – if at all, our government should be able to limit our freedom of speech and our religious freedom. Are we even allowed to safely speak about and raise these questions about what God's Word says is right or wrong? Half our country says, "Absolutely yes," while the other half says, "Absolutely not."

✘ I remember when I was on my vicarage, almost 30 years ago, I resolved that as long as the United States military was deploying our soldiers into combat zones somewhere in the world, that I would include them in our prayers every Sunday. To this day, I have not had a Sunday where I have not done so.

→ So, can we count on finding true peace here in our modern world? Not any peace of deep or lasting substance – that is clear.

## **III. Peace from within our own hearts?**

✘ Well, if we can't find peace from either the ancient or the modern world around us, where can we hope to find peace?

✘ Many people and institutions – both secular and religious based, tell us that the answer is to look inside here (our heart), from within us; by digging deep into our inner self and unlocking our inner potential.

→ Jesus unlocks the truth about our "inner potential" as human beings ever since we first fell into sin in the Garden of Eden. In Matthew 15:19-20, He says this about our human "heart", "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person."

→ And St. Paul teaches the same truth from Jesus to the Christians in Ephesus in this way: "Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart" (Eph. 4:17–18).

→ Likewise, Hebrews 3:12 identifies the source of true evil and conflict with God, saying, “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.”

✘ Wow! That means that any effort to blame others or our circumstances for evil and conflict is simply false and futile. The claim that we men and women can somehow achieve peace, justice, and righteousness within our hearts, by ourselves, has proven false in generation after generation.

→ Anthony Esolen, a distinguished Professor of Humanities at Thales College wrote this: “Here is our situation, as I see it. We are called to bring the love of God to what has largely ceased to be a human culture. We preach not to the old idolaters who were seeking God but got Him wrong. We preach to people who have sunk beneath idolatry; who have strangled liberty with liberty, acknowledging no laws but those they make themselves, ... who have, as Solzhenitsyn’s peasant said, ‘forgotten God,’ and as a consequence, we have forgotten man” (Anthony Esolen, “*Fighting for Love*,” *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity* 34, no. 1 [2021]: 2–3).

✘ So, both the Scriptural and the secular evidence agree: We won’t find peace coming from within our own hearts. Peace cannot come from an inherently sin-filled and conflicted source, just as safe water cannot come from a contaminated well.

#### **IV. Peace only from Bethlehem!**

✘ Yet, this conflict we have with God because of sin can’t stop hoping for an answer. Even with all of our corrupt and contaminated issues, we are still those who were first created, male and female, in the “image of God” (Gen. 1:27). And though we cannot find or attain peace with God on our own, we crave it deep down. We hope for it with all of our souls.

→ Our only hope then is to look to the one pure and perfect source of peace – to the one who first created us without sin, in a relationship of perfect peace and harmony. That of course is the only true God and His perfect Word. He tells us that peace with Him comes only from the little, unknown town of Bethlehem. “But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for Me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. ... And He shall be this peace” (vv. 2, 5).

✘ That is such an incredible expression of God’s love to us all – to this entire world! God promises to send His very own Son, the second person in the Holy Trinity, who Themselves have had the only perfect, untainted relationship with the Holy Spirit for eternity. He sends Jesus here to this conflicted, contaminated, corrupt and crooked world – not only to bring us peace, but even more, to be God’s peace in human flesh – to be our peace!

→ And how is Jesus going to bring peace between the only true God and us poor miserable sinners? He’s going take on our sin and endure the ultimate violence that sin deserves – crucifixion at the hands of us warmongering creatures in order to buy us back from the gates of hell where Satan seeks to keep us locked up forever.

✘ And in His saving work that started in Bethlehem, Jesus assures us that the peace He brings to us can, and will last because He creates within us a brand new, purified heart.

→ That’s the work Jesus does in our baptism, drowning the old, human heart with all of its evils and sins and restoring it as He first intended at Creation. Titus 3:5 says, “He saved us ... by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.” This, dear Christian, is the free gift and the only source of God’s profound peace that we now enjoy.

→ As Luther properly taught us all to say in his explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or

come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.”

✘ You see, it’s the Holy Spirit who leads us here to Bethlehem and God’s precious gift of Jesus. It’s all gift – 100% God’s doing!

➔ Not only does He gift us with profound peace with God in our baptism, where He unites us with Jesus’ death and resurrection work (Rom. 6:4-5), He also promises us this result in Romans 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

➔ And, can you believe it friends? He blesses us even more by feeding us weekly with His Holy Supper of Christ’s body and blood from the cross to keep us firmly in that peace-filled relationship with God. 1 Corinthians 10:16, says, “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?”

## **Conclusion**

✘ The name “Bethlehem” literally means “house of bread.” Now we see, perhaps the connection God wanted us to make with Him here through His Son. Jesus would later say in John 6:51, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.” He, who was born in Bethlehem, has now literally become God’s house of bread; feeding us with salvation itself through His gift of faith.

➔ And in that gift, we now see that He is not only the source of our peace-filled relationship with God, He – Jesus, is Himself “this peace!” Lying there in the Bethlehem manger; hanging there on the cross of Calvary; and now risen and reigning as our King and Savior, with the Father and the Holy Spirit – arms open wide for you ... forever! Amen.