

“Lord, grant us peace!” Luke 2:1-20

“In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town.

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.

And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Welcome to the most celebrated birthday party! How many times have you celebrated it? How many times have you heard the story of Jesus’ birth? How in just a few scarce sentences we can hear the story of the most significant birth ever.

Why do we remember this birthday? Why do we celebrate it? Why do people all around the world for already two millennia come together and listen to this well-known story of Jesus’ birth? Why? There is not much grandeur in that story.

Except, perhaps the angels and heavenly host terrifying the life out of poor shepherds. Otherwise, neither time, nor place, nor people involved. As ordinary as it gets. But then – why are you here?

Let me suggest that it is because of what this birth means for us. What it means for you. What it promises to us, what it brings to us, whoever we are, whatever your worries or hopes or dreams are. This birth changes everything.

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!” Yes, yes, Lord, grant us peace! Grant us peace! But – what do we mean by this? How do you understand what this peace is about?

It may mean different things for different people. Perhaps, for you, peace may mean that everything in your life would be under your control. No chaos. No loose ends. That you have settled in so well, that you have found your comfortable place, and everything is going according to your plans and hopes.

Perhaps, it is about your physical safety. Indeed, we are blessed to live in this place when we don't suffer from warfare or tribal violence. Most of us live in quite safe conditions, Adelaide and Australia in general are quite enjoyable. But millions and millions of people just like us on this very day don't have the same luxury.

But perhaps, it is about your relationships; about having good and satisfying relationships, without conflicts and arguments, without envy, jealousy and betrayal, where we can flourish surrounded by people who are dear to our hearts.

Surely, we can continue and make this list even longer, we all may have our unique hopes and expectations, our own kind of peace that we are looking for. And now, just listen! we have this wonderful declaration:

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!” Isn't that great?! God has promised that there will be peace on earth for His people, for us. For you! Isn't that so hopeful, so encouraging?!

Our God will grant us peace. He will grant us that peace that we long for, that we hope for, that we dream about. But ... wait? Is this really true? Those may be things that we are hoping for, but is this what He promises?

Just reflect on what we know about Jesus' birth. Was there peace in relationships? What about Joseph and Mary? When the bridegroom learns that his bride is pregnant. How?! Who?! When something has happened that no one can wrap their minds around? And what about peace and control over their lives?

During the last weeks of Mary's pregnancy, they are compelled by the decree of the ruthless Roman government to travel across the country just for the sake of census. To struggle staying in an overcrowded house while giving birth to their firstborn. And soon after being forced as refugees to flee to another country.

What about peace in that situation? Not to forget about being on the “Wanted” poster for the cruel tyrant Herod, being chased by battle hardened soldiers who are looking for you with one mission – to terminate your life. To destroy you!

“... and on earth peace among those with whom God the Father is pleased!” Neither Jesus, nor His family had much of that peace that we hope for. But it was Jesus of whom the Father had said: **“With Him I am well pleased!”**

What about your lives? Does being a Christian bring you this sort of peace, where you are spared from all the troubles and trials? Are Christians free from financial troubles? Do we have guaranteed jobs? No problems in business? Everything well in our churches; no false teachers, no divisions?

Does the future always look clear and everything is under our control? Are we spared from uncertainties and sudden kicks of this life? Are we spared from encounters with people who take pleasure in hurting us one way or another?

What about our relationships? Are all our longings fulfilled? Are we always surrounded by people who love and cherish and appreciate us? What about our safety? Even living in such a safe country, how much violence happens behind closed doors, when we may suffer from those closest to us...

What do you say? Where the heck is that peace? We can't see it in Jesus' life and we often can't see it in our lives either. Has our God made a false promise? Has He forgotten about us? Maybe He doesn't care about us?

But... what if He meant... a different peace? What about this understanding of peace? Peace – as our state of complete trust, where you know with your whole heart, that you are loved more than you can comprehend by the most beautiful, by the most magnificent and faithful person ever, by Jesus Christ.

Where He daily looks at you with immense affection and delight: “You, you are my beloved, you are my precious, you are so good for me, I promise that nothing will separate us, and I will be with you no matter what happens!”

What about such a definition? As the Holy Spirit put it in Paul's letter to Christians in Philippi: “**God's peace that surpasses all our understanding.**” Peace as heartfelt assurance that you are in the hands of your loving Father.

Peace as your restful state, when you fully trust with your entire being, that this Jesus, the Son of God, who is your Lord, who calls you His friend, His brother, His sister, that He will never ever abandon you. How could we be sure?

Because of what He did for you. He became so vulnerable for your sake. Born as a little baby. In a hostile world. Chased by His cruel enemies since His first breath. Hated, despised, rejected by those whom He came to rescue and bless.

Sacrificing His life for apathetic, indifferent and even spiteful people, just like us. Why did He do this? So that He could bring you God's peace. So that He can become your peace. Peace, that surpasses our understanding...

You know it quite well, that it doesn't matter so much what our situation in life is like, what the externals are, what happens around us. There is something else that matters so much more. And that is – who is with you. And who is with you?

You know the answer. The Holy Spirit reveals it to you and convinces you. Whatever challenges you may be facing, whatever dark the world may seem from your perspective, whatever little external peace there is in your life... Jesus Christ is with you.

Your Immanuel. Your God with us. To surround you, to fill you with His peace, to gently whisper in your ear: “I am with you. I am always with you. Trust me, throw all your worries and burdens at me. One day this all will be over. For I am coming again soon. Let me be your peace!”

I pray this Christmas evening that you hear this voice in your heart, and not only today, but every day. May our Lord Jesus Christ grant you His peace. May you know and experience that He is with you. Always. Amen.

Christian greetings to you!

Underdale-Glandore congregation wishes you blessed Christmas and hope-filled and joyful 2023!

May the Holy Spirit dwell in you, and the Son of God Jesus Christ walk with you, so that every day you feel loved, appreciated and safe in the hands of your Father, who is in Heaven! May His abundant blessings make your life adventurous and colourful, and your heart content and grateful!

FYI:

We celebrate the Divine Service every Sunday 8:30am at Calvary Lutheran Glandore, and 10:30am at St Mark's Underdale. You are most welcome to join!

On our website <https://pastorsblog.com.au/> you will find our sermons, news and some useful articles.

Our Academy of Christian Wisdom you will find here: <https://wiseberg.com.au/>

Enjoy!

Furthermore,

if you have any questions about this wonderful God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, who has brought us peace – and we pray that you have many – and would like to learn more about Him, to tap into His wisdom or to have more joy and hope and wisdom in your daily lives, please, do not hesitate to contact pastor Guntars on 0407 281 333 or Guntars.Baikovs@gmail.com.

It will be my great joy and pleasure to share the beauty and wisdom and grace of our Triune God with you so that you too can taste the grandeur of what is to come for all God's beloved people.

“Go in peace praising God for all that you have heard!”