



**Saint John United Methodist Church**  
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**Message for November 27, 2022**  
**“The Themes of Christmas: Peace”**  
**Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb**  
**Scripture: Isaiah 9:2-7**

## **The Themes of Christmas**

It comes around all too quickly, sometimes very quickly. It is hard to believe that the Advent and Christmas season is upon us.

Advent is the grand season that anticipates the coming of our Lord, and it begins today. During Advent we aspire to the highest of virtues. We are more generous. We consider the needs of others. We try to be more loving. We place our focus on family. Our lives are directed toward God. The themes of peace, hope, love, and joy are the themes that form this season, and they inspire to no end.

As we know, this season of the year is not without its challenges. The busyness alone has a way of exhausting us. The commercialism is nothing short of dizzying, yet we persevere, longing to be struck again by the profound truth that God, in his love, sent Jesus into the life of the world.

A lot would be placed on his shoulders, notwithstanding the cross. Jesus though was up to it. Jesus proclaimed a message that wasn't always understood or well-received, *“yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”* (John 1:12)

We turn our attention today to the peace Jesus came to bring. He was, after all, the Prince of Peace. We read about that in a wonderful prophesy delivered by the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah saw well-beyond his own circumstance to see what God's intentions were all-along. We read today, Isaiah 9:2-7. This passage puts our sights on God's long-term plan of sending his son into the life of the world. Let's hear this then from God's word.

### **Isaiah 9:2-7**

*The people walking in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
on those living in the land of deep darkness  
a light has dawned.  
You have enlarged the nation  
and increased their joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as people rejoice at the harvest,  
as warriors rejoice  
when dividing the plunder.  
For as in the day of Midian's defeat,  
you have shattered  
the yoke that burdens them,*

*the bar across their shoulders,  
the rod of their oppressor.  
Every warrior's boot used in battle  
and every garment rolled in blood  
will be destined for burning,  
will be fuel for the fire.  
For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given,  
and the government will be on his shoulders.  
And he will be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
Of the greatness of his government and peace  
there will be no end.  
He will reign on David's throne  
and over his kingdom,  
establishing and upholding it  
with justice and righteousness  
from that time on and forever.  
The zeal of the LORD Almighty  
will accomplish this.*

### **Light in the Darkness**

The war in the Ukraine rages on. We wonder if it will ever end. It is said that to wage a war you need two things—the will and the means to do so. It does seem that both are waning for Russia. We can only pray that peace will prevail.

Just this past week two bombs were detonated in Jerusalem bringing with them at least one casualty. We are left to wonder if peace will ever prevail in that area of the world.

The prophet Isaiah writes in Isaiah 9:2 that those *“walking in darkness will see a great light, and those living in a land of deep darkness a light has dawned.”* Sometimes I think we don't realize just how dark things have become. It is hard to face such things.

Thank God, he provides the light.

Visitors to Mammoth Cave know that at a certain point in every tour the guide turns off the lights and allow the darkness to settle in. The story is told of a small child on one of those tours crying out with fear when the lights were off. His older brother was quick to encourage him, *“Don't be afraid, there's a man who knows how to turn them on.”*

God turns the light on in Jesus. For those with faith, we know that God offers light in the darkness and sends his son to provide it.

### **Peace Would Prevail**

Today's passage was intended to bring hope to a people who had been weighed down for far too long with the prospect of war. The Assyrians had battered the Southern Kingdom of Judah for what seemed like an eternity. That was about to turn.

God was going to break the yoke of the Assyrians that had beleaguered his people for years. Implements of war would be turned into instruments of peace. The old song, "*We ain't gonna study war no more*" would have fit right in. Peace would prevail and of all things would rest on the birth of a child upon whose shoulders would fall the government.

The child would go by many names.

- Wonderful Counselor. His wisdom would be without equal.
- Mighty God. His would display divine power.
- Everlasting Father. He would provide and protect.
- And, of course, Prince of Peace. He would bring wholeness and well-being not only to individuals, but to the world as well.

Let's admit it, all of us put a premium on peace. We long for it individually and corporately.

Dwight David Eisenhower the great World War II general and later president was quoted as saying during his presidency, "*I think people want peace so much that one of these days government had better get out of the way and let them have it.*"

That would be nice, wouldn't it? In thinking about it though we are, at least in this country, a reflection of the government we put in place. We desire peace, but fail to attain it.

### ***Shalom***

We long for peace individually and know that peace escapes us. The Hebrew word for peace is *shalom*. It points to an inward wholeness and completeness that makes for peace.

In a *Peanuts* cartoon, Lucy strikes out on a tangent saying, "*I hate the whole wide world.*"

Charlie Brown tries to intervene by saying, "*Lucy, I thought you had inner peace.*"

To which Lucy retorts, "*I do have inner peace, but I still have outer obnoxiousness.*"

That pretty well sums it up when it comes to us as well. We want peace. We long for peace. Yet peace, true peace, is not ours.

We'd do well to remember that the *shalom* that so often eludes us is the very thing Jesus came to bring. At his birth the angels proclaimed, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those upon whom his favor rests.*" (Luke 2:14)

Later Jesus would say, "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*" (John 14:27)

Jesus calls us not only to have peace, but to work for peace. He stands to help us in that. From the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, "*Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God.*" (Matthew 5:9)

Paul puts it well in Romans 12:18, "*So far as it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*"

A lot depends on the disposition of our hearts when it comes to peace. Even still we are to *"live at peace with everyone."* That's a challenge indeed save for the Prince of Peace molding and shaping our lives to do just that.

So, the question comes to each of us as we begin this holy season: Are you allowing Christ to take over the government of your life?

Only then will you know and experience the benefits of Emmanuel, God with you.

### **In Christ Peace Is Always Possible**

In Christ, peace is always possible.

One of my favorite books I turn to this time of year is *Silent Night* by Stanley Weintraub. It's the story of an impromptu truce that took place during World War I one Christmas Eve.

The Germans started by lighting candles on small Christmas trees. The British, French, and Belgian forces chimed in with Christmas carols. Both sides broke bread together, exchanged letters, and even played a game of soccer.

Such are the possibilities when we let the good news about the Prince of Peace take hold.

We mentioned earlier that for the Jews centuries ago, the hope was that peace would prevail and that the yoke of their oppressors would be broken.

We know that that was once and for all accomplished as Jesus, the Prince of Peace, took on the yoke of the cross, not only making peace possible between ourselves and God, but between ourselves and one another.

That's why during this meal we offer our confessions to Almighty God seeking his forgiveness.

That's why we pass the peace each to the other, longing to be reconciled with one another.

In this meal we recognize the Prince of Peace and the fact that *"of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end."*

What Jesus did on the cross was stamped as true when after the third day he rose from the dead paving the way for peace to prevail.