

Names of the Messiah: Prince of Peace

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Prayer of Illumination

Gracious God, we thank you for the gift of peace personified—Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. As we hear your Word, may not only we, but may your world experience peace where there is strife, and wholeness where there is division. Amen.

Scripture: Isaiah 9:6-7 (NRSV)

For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onward and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

*The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.*

SERMON – Names of the Messiah: Prince of Peace

A cynic once defined “peace” as: “a period of cheating between two periods of fighting.”

We’ve been singing carols this season about peace:

*Hark the Herald Angels Sing—“peace on earth and mercy mild”
Silent Night—“sleep in heavenly peace”*

Yet we have trouble remembering Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s Christmas carol that ends with a sigh:

*“And in despair I bowed my head; ‘There is no peace on earth,’ I said; ‘For hate is strong,
and mocks the song of peace on earth, good will to men.’”*

Is Jesus still the Prince of Peace if all we seem to hear is bad tidings of chaos and jeer? I believe the answer is yes—especially so for such a time as this.

What helps is understanding what the Bible teaches about peace. Peace is an active and assertive response to injustice and a lack of love. The peace of God isn't some lethargic, naive, hakuna matata, unlock-the-doors kind of moment. Peace has the power to restore relationship and connection. This was established from the very beginning at the Messiah's birth announcement:

*"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"* (Luke 2:14)

Jesus delivered on these promises in his life saying,

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you." (John 14:27)

Christ's peace that "passeth all understanding" survived crucifixion and is passed on to us through his resurrection:

*"Since we have been justified by faith,
we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* (Romans 5:1)

To the Greek mind, peace was the absence of negative or stress-inducing things. Peace was the place where you could get away from it all—Shangri-La. In other words, peace was an escape, an avoidance. You could be at peace only if no turmoil was present.

But to the Jewish mind, peace is more of a positive way of being and relating in the real world. Peace helps you engage the world's chaos, rather than flee from it or pretend it doesn't exist. Peace is there to address and heal the disarray. Christ the Prince of Peace gives us shalom. Shalom is wholeness and well-being. Cohesiveness of community—harmony. Peace of mind and peace of heart—where we're freed to move from shame to honor. With Christ, there's a close tie between the peace he gives and restoration—the healing of body, mind, and soul.

The peace of Christ gives us the courage to work through the rejection and wounds we collect over our lives, so that we can mend, move forward, and forgive, rather than being held hostage by hurt or bitterness. For Jesus, another name for his peace is salvation, deliverance. When Jesus greets us, he often says *"Peace be with you."* When he says goodbye, he says *"Go in peace."*

With the Prince of Peace we can stay in one peace. God's peace can also be likened to a tea bag. Imagine that peace is like a bag of tea and our relationships are like water. Sometimes we find ourselves in hot water. Peace is that tea bag that steeps in our relationships. Peace flavors our relationships with harmony and forgiveness and grace—when things get heated or even boil over.

So when we talk about Jesus as the Prince of Peace, we're not talking about prince charming in a fairy tale. God's peace is more of a call to struggle against the inertia of the status quo. A life committed to peace pushes you out of your comfort zone and exposes you to the elements. It faces what must be faced. In the plague-ridden 14th and 16th centuries, 30-40% of Europe's population was wiped out by the bubonic plague. But the mortality rates were much higher for one group of people: clergy. A few priests left their posts and ran away from home. But most priests and religious leaders stayed faithful to their calling. They entered houses marked with the signs of the Black Death. They visited the sick and dying, gave last rites, and presided over burials. Plague doctors—at least those who hadn't run away—were forced to care for a disease they knew nothing about. So, when they made their house calls, they took extreme precautions as they risked their very lives to bring health and healing.

Here's a description of one outfit a doctor in Paris wore in the 16th century:

"a sponge strapped to his nose, garlic on his tongue, shoes with cymbals, a gaudy blouse that had been steeped in 'magical juices,' a waxed tunic of racy red leather (waterproof for fouled air), and a headdress with spectacles or inset stone eyes and a long birdlike beak/nose containing sweet 'medicines' to cleanse the air."

There are risks that come with pursuing peace and wholeness in our broken world. But the Prince of Peace is with us in our struggle. The Prince of Peace entered enemy confines to bring peace. Jesus came to remedy the plague of our sin and sickness. He touched lepers—and restored them. The peace he gives is free, but it's costly—it took his life. Isaiah talks more of the power of peace when he prophesies:

*"they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks." (Isaiah 2:4)*

Yet as violent as a sword's mission is, the job of a "plowshare" is also disruptive—it would dig a ditch to break up the earth. A plowshare would surgically enter the ground and then turn it over—bringing up the new richer topsoil from under the earth. The next crop would grow in this richer soil.

Even peace has an element of upheaval to it. Christ, the Prince of Peace, will turn your life upside down—in a good way—for growth, maturity, and spiritual fruit—like peace.

One of my favorite passages in Acts says,

"These people who have been turning the world upside down have come here also, ... saying there is another king named Jesus." (Acts 17:6-7)

Jesus the Prince of Peace is still turning lives upside down, turning and churning the ground of our being. The plowshares of peace overturn old, compacted earth, overturn old compacted ideals and expectations, overturn old barren ways into new sources of creation.

When the soil of our hearts is aerated and harrowed by Christ, we become more alive, fertile, and open to new life. It's disturbing and invigorating. That's the power of Advent Peace. Life is given new possibilities. Your life is given new possibilities.

This is the good news of great joy: Jesus—the Prince of Peace is our peace. He lives in us and he directs our feet in the way of peace. The very peace that Jesus experiences, we can experience and extend to others. "Blessed are the peacemakers," says Jesus, "for they will be called children of God."

Christ has commissioned us to be agents of peace in our homes, in our church, and in our world. Jesus is our King of Glory and he's our Prince of Peace—in all seasons of the year.

Amen.

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