

A SIMPLE CHRISTMAS: ADVENT 4 (Peace)

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Luke 2:1-20

2In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

8 In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the

Messiah,* the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host,* praising God and saying,

¹⁴ 'Glory to God in the highest heaven,

and on earth peace among those whom he favours!*

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.' ¹⁶So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

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REFLECT & DISCUSS

Context

For all the lead up to Jesus's birth, the story of his actual birth is rather brief with few details. The center of the birth story pivots on the angelic announcement, which brings the gospel message into stark and direct relief. Some contrasts are helpful to keep in mind:

- **Prince of Peace:** Emperor Augustus was a "Prince of Peace" (*pax Romana*); Jesus, the Messiah, challenged that title as the new Prince of Peace
- **Throne:** Jesus was not born to a palace or pomp and circumstance. Jesus was humbly ushered into the human story in a village feeding trough, far from the center of power, surrounded by people (shepherds) considered shifty and shady
- **Rule:** The gospel message of freedom for captive people, embodied by Jesus, was born in the conditions of oppression, taxation, and exploitation from Roman occupation.
- **All People:** the Israelite hope for salvation and a new future was not only for a people, but all people.

Reflect

1. Read the scripture passage carefully and slowly. What word or image stands out to you? Why?
2. What do you love most about the Christmas story? What do you find most confusing or troubling?
3. Where are you in the Christmas story? Do you identify with the shepherds, angels, other travelers, Mary of Joseph, or some other possible character (mentioned or not)? Why?
4. God entered the human story in a remarkable way: under the conditions of occupation and exploitation, in a time of uncertainty and longing, to those valued least. What does that decision of God to enter the human story in such a way mean **for you** and mean **for the world** today?
5. There are many ways of understanding and experiencing "peace." What does true peace mean? How does the story of Jesus give us a glimpse of God's *shalom* (Biblical Hebrew word meaning: fullness, wholeness, peace)?

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