

The Prince of Peace

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Scripture: *“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.” (Isaiah 9:6)*

Reader: For centuries the children of the promise looked forward to the coming of the Prince of Peace! Surely, He would stop the persecution, free them from fear and cruelty, and yes—finally bring them peace.

Scripture: *“And it came to pass in those days that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed...And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.”*

Reader: As they watched and waited for the Chosen One, the time drew nigh. Yet they weren't prepared. Like the children of Israel, we are searching for a Savior who will bring us peace. Are we prepared?

Scripture: *“And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem...To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.”*

Reader: And on a silent night, as most of His people slept, the promised Deliverer came. There was no crown, no sword, and no apparent beauty...for He came, as a baby.

Scripture: *“And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.” (Luke 2:1, 3-7)*

IT CAME UPON THE MIDNIGHT CLEAR (Congregation)

Reader: The Son of God was born, and the world was forever changed. Hebrew law requires that truth be established by two or three witnesses. Who would the great God of Heaven choose to bear witness of His Only Begotten Son? An esteemed high priest serving in the temple? A Roman tetrarch sitting on his throne? Or perhaps a wealthy nobleman living in a mansion? Who would be honored by God?

Scripture: *“And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, Keeping watch over their flock by night. And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.” (Luke 2:8-9)*

Reader: It was to lowly shepherds that the angelic announcement came. They were humble. They were devoted. And they were believing—qualities loved by God. Perhaps we should look to the shepherds and become more like them—humble, devoted and believing. For are we not all shepherds, tending our own beloved sheep, searching for peace?

Scripture: *“And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” (Luke 2:10-14)*

Reader: Why were angels sent to earth? Certainly, they brought glorious songs of joy, announcing the birth of Jesus Christ, the Lord of all creation. But they also brought a message from God. *Peace on earth, good will toward men.* Could this be a commandment for us? Or, was it a heavenly gift sent earthward from the Father? Perhaps...it was a fervent plea. *Peace on earth, good will toward men!*

FAR, FAR AWAY ON JUDEA'S PLAINS (Congregation)

Scripture: *“And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. (Luke 2:10-12)*

Reader: The shepherds were witnesses of Jesus Christ...as are we. And they possessed another important quality—an eagerness to be obedient, for as soon as they heard the news, they put their fears aside, and hurried to find Him.

Scripture: *“And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with **haste**, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.” (Luke 2:16)*

SILENT NIGHT (Choir and Congregation)

Scripture: *“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.” (Matt 2:1-2)*

Reader: Who were these magi, traveling from distant lands? Perhaps they also represent us in our own personal quest for the Savior. We, too, study the words of the prophets, finding precious eternal truths. We, too, know of His birth. And with that knowledge, we, too, leave worldly things behind, and journey toward Him.

Like the wise men, once we know who He is and what He can do for us, nothing becomes more important than finding Him. And so, we are each here, in this congregation, come to worship Him, come to seek Him with faith, willing to walk the path that leads to Him, and to His peace.

Scripture: *“Learn of me, and listen to my words; walk in the meekness of my Spirit, and you shall have peace in me.” (D&C 19:20)*

WITH WONDERING AWE (Congregation)

Reader: The first gift of Christmas was given by God the Father, as He sent His son into the world.

Scripture: *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)*

Reader: The second gift of Christmas came from the wise men, who brought precious treasures—gold, frankincense and myrrh. But what gift can we give to the Savior? Where is the gold in our lives fit for a King? All things were first created by Him, and then given to us. How can we honor Him?

As He gave His life for us, we can offer ours to Him, laying upon the altar the only gift that is ours to give; and the only gift He truly wants—our heart, our soul, and our will. Only then will we find the peace that He promises.

IN THE BLEAK MIDWINTER (Choir)

Reader: When life is going well, peace is easy to find. But how do we find peace when we are hurting, or surrounded by pain and suffering?

Scripture: *“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matt 11:28)*

Story: In 1861, our country was engulfed in a terrible civil war. The land saw a near constant stream of carnage and horror as canons roared, guns blasted and men fell. Peace seemed an unattainable, far distant hope. Few families were left untouched. The family of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the great American poet, was no exception. In that same year, a tragic accident took the life of his beloved sweetheart and wife, Fannie. One summer morning, a few drops of molten wax and a morning breeze caught her dress on fire. Longfellow tried to extinguish the flames by wrapping his

arms around her, but he could not save her and she lived only 'til morning. He, too, was severely injured, both in body and in soul.

The light went out of his life, and darkness settled into his heart. That first Christmas, he wrote in his journal, "*How inexpressibly sad are all holidays.*"

A year passed, but the deep sorrow remained. Another December entry reads, "*I can make no record of these days. Better leave them wrapped in silence. Perhaps someday God will give me peace.*"

Yes, peace. A deep yearning for peace. But where was it? In a world filled with chaos and calamity, where was the promised peace of which the angels sang? Even today war fills the earth. Conflict and contention seem to surround us; in our towns, our homes and our very lives. Like Longfellow, we may also wonder, where is peace? In his journal entry of December 25, 1862, he wrote, "*A merry Christmas' say the children, but that is no more for me.*"

In 1863, Longfellow's oldest son left the family home, without his father's blessing, to join the war, explaining in a letter, "*I feel it to be my first duty to do what I can for my country...I would willingly lay down my life for it, if it would be of any good.*" His life would not be required, but shortly before Christmas, word came that he had been severely wounded in battle, crippling his young body.

There is no journal entry for Christmas of that year.

But Longfellow's plea for peace was not to remain unanswered by a generous God. In 1864, even though the Civil War still raged, hope gradually returned—to the country and to his heart. God heard and answered the questions of his soul. His search for peace was successful. On December 25, 1864, he wrote the words which would become the immortal Christmas carol, "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day."

In his poem, Longfellow's bells ring out with sweet, familiar carols which are soon overshadowed by his foreboding thoughts of death and hate. But the bells answer back, ringing in the eternal truths that God is not dead; that good will triumph and that peace will prevail.

Scripture: "*These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*" (John 16:33)

Reader: Yes, the peace of Christ is possible amid strife; (introduction begins) for peace is not so much a state of being, as it is a condition of the heart.

I HEARD THE BELLS (Choir)

Scripture: "*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*" (John 14:27)

Reader: There lies the answer. Peace is possible, if we find it in Jesus Christ. As He calmed the great storm on the Sea of Galilee with the words "*Peace, be still,*" so He can also calm our hearts. It is this inner peace that allows us to be still, even when trouble rages. It is an abiding faith in the goodness of God.

With that faith, we come to His throne with our gifts, loving Him with heart and soul, loving our neighbors as ourselves; and yes, even loving our enemies. Then we will truly have peace on earth, for the power of love will replace the love of power, and the light of heaven will fill our hearts. It will guide us to Him and He will change us, for He is the Master Changer. He changes fear into hope. He changes hate into love. He changes war into peace. And he can change a life that is broken, into one that is clean and whole; prepared to meet God.

Scripture: "*...he who doeth the works of righteousness shall receive his reward, even peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come.*" (D&C 59:23)

Reader: The birth of Jesus Christ opened the gates of heaven, unlocking the dungeons of death and despair with the promise of eternal life to every person. No wonder multitudes of angels broke forth into songs of joy and rejoicing! Join with the angels to sing His praise and proclaim your love for Him! Christ the King, the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace has come!

JOY TO THE WORLD (Congregation)