Sermon Series: The Wonder of Christmas
Sermon Title: Christmas Peace

Text: Isaiah 9:6-7 -- For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Introduction: This is our second message in the series, **The Wonder of Christmas**. Today we're looking at Christmas Peace. PEACE ON EARTH IS SOMETHING ALMOST EVERYONE WANTS BUT NOT EVERYONE GETS TO EXPERIENCE. At the beginning of 2023, as nations across the globe were reeling from one crisis to another, the **Collins English Dictionary** revealed its 2022 WORD OF THE YEAR to be "**permacrisis**." "**Permacrisis**" is a noun defined by the publisher **HarperCollins** as "***an extended period of instability and insecurity, especially one resulting from a series of catastrophic events***." A blog post on the **Collins Dictionary website** from November, 2022, noted that the term rings true because of the war in Ukraine, climate change challenges, political instability, and the surge in inflation. Just a year later, WE MIGHT ADD THE WAR BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE TERRORIST ORGANIZATION – HAMAS, THE DEATHS OF MORE THAN 600 PEOPLE IN MASS SHOOTINGS ACROSS OUR COUNTRY IN THE PAST TWELVE MONTHS, AND THE CONSTANT BREACH OF OUR BORDERS BY ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS BRINGING WHO KNOWS WHAT INTO OUR COUNTRY. The blogger goes on to say the term embodies the "d**izzying sense of lurching from one unprecedented event to another," as people wonder what new "horrors" might be around the corner**. Some people might refer to these as PEACE-BREAKER EVENTS because of the negative effect they have on so many people. THESE PERMACRISES LEAD US TO AN IMPORTANT QUESTION THIS MORNING.

Where is the peace that the heavenly host declared to the shepherds on the hills outside of Bethlehem in **Luke 2**? You remember what they said, don't you? "**Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests**." May I suggest that the reason peace SEEMS SO ELUSIVE is because we misunderstand it. **Oswald Chambers** says, "***PEACE IS NOT THE ABSENCE OF TROUBLE; IT IS THE PRESENCE OF GOD***." That's why the prophet Isaiah could say, "**There is no peace for the wicked**" (**Isaiah 48:22**). When a person is right with God and walking in fellowship with Him, PEACE is the inevitable result. The writer of **Proverbs**

confirms this saying, "**When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD *(in other words…when a man has peace with God),* he makes even his enemies live at peace with him** (**Proverbs 16:7**)." So, the secret to obtaining peace among men is to first discover peace with God. Of course, this is a very important theme for us in this season of advent.

In many ways, the teaching of the Scriptures on the "PEACE" announced by the angels is like an unfolding drama played out in several acts throughout the Old and New Testaments. Let's take the next twenty-five minutes or so and see just how it all takes place.

ACT 1: ***The PROMISE of Peace***. The Old Testament prophet Zechariah preached to the Jews during the time when they were being restored to their land following the Babylonian captivity around **520 B.C**. His prophecies talk as much about the future Messiah as any of the writings of the Jewish prophets. They include, among other things, his rejection and betrayal for thirty pieces of silver (**Zechariah 11:12-13 -- And they weighed out as my wages thirty pieces of silver. 13 Then the Lord said to me, "Throw it to the potter"— the lordly price at which I was priced by them. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord, to the potter**), his deity (**Zechariah 13:9 -- They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'They are my people'; and they will say, 'The Lord is my God'"**), and his priesthood and kingship (**Zechariah 6:13 -- It is he who shall build the temple of the Lord and shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule on his throne. And there shall be a priest on his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both**).

In **Zechariah 9** we're told that the promised Messiah will provide both Jews and Gentiles with a great reason to rejoice BECAUSE in His coming He will bring salvation and peace (**Zechariah 9:9, 10 -- behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he … and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea).** What this will look like is not fleshed out for us by Zechariah, though it will become clear in the future. For now, just recognize that in this prophecy of the Messiah. God promises that through Him there will be peace on earth for those from every nation, tribe, language and people (**Revelation 14:6**).
(**THIS IS ACT ONE…The Promise of Peace)**.

ACT 2: ***The PRONOUNCEMENT of Peace*** (**Luke 2:8-14 -- And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone**

around them, and they were filled with fear. 10 And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth PEACE among those with whom he is pleased"). This scene takes place a little over five centuries after the prophecies of Zechariah. Immediately following the birth of Jesus, we're told that an **angel of the Lord** appeared to shepherds in the night sky just outside of Bethlehem. He informed them that the prophecies from long ago were being fulfilled! The Christ could be found lying in a manger in Bethlehem. This is what the prophet Micah spoke of in **Micah 5:2 -- But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.** The pronouncement of His birth was such a grand and glorious event that it demanded a response from heaven. A great multitude of angels began to sing His praise saying, "**Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those with whom He is well-pleased** (**Luke 2:14**)."

WHAT DID ALL THIS MEAN? ***At his first advent,*** we're told that Jesus preached a message of peace (**Ephesians 2:17 -- And he came and preached peace to you who were far off (Gentiles) and peace to those who were near (Jews)).**" But He wasn't simply talking about a sense of personal fulfillment or inner tranquility. No, Jesus was talking about peace with God made possible by His atoning sacrifice for our sins (**1 John 2:2 -- He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world**). **Jesus' purpose in coming to our world was to reconcile us to God by becoming the sacrifice for our sins thus satisfying the wrath of God toward us**. That's what the angelic hosts were so excited about when they glorified God and praised Him for the peace that comes to those WITH WHOM God is well-pleased. When we humble ourselves before God and place our faith and trust in Jesus, **we bring pleasure to God and are made to be at peace with Him**. **Romans 5:1** puts it like this: **Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ**. Now to be fair, other parts of **Zechariah's prophecy** regarding the Messiah will be fulfilled by Christ at ***his second coming*** when the weapons of warfare will no longer be needed because the whole earth will be under the rule of one king – The Lord Jesus Christ! **But God's plan to bring salvation to mankind started with Jesus' birth in the tiny village of Bethlehem**.

Imagine the impact upon the shepherds when they truly understood that real and lasting peace with God was a possibility. All their lives they had lived under the sacrificial system spelled out clearly in the Old Testament Law. They offered their sacrifices and perhaps felt a little peace for a brief time the way some today do when they participate in "**confession**." But the reality that sin had crept back into their lives, robbed them of any further peace and made it necessary to repeat the cycle over and over again without ever bringing about a different result (**Hebrews 10:11 -- And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins**). This was all about to change with the coming of the Messiah! For those who would be the recipients of God's grace, peace was available for the asking.

Everybody seems to be looking for a little peace and quiet these days. But even such a reasonable idea can go too far. The quietest place on earth, an anechoic chamber at **Orfield Laboratories in Minnesota**, is so quiet that the longest anybody has been able to bear it is 45 minutes. Inside the room, it is so quiet that the background noise is measured in negative decibels, -9.4 dBA. **Steven Orfield**, the lab's founder, said, "***We challenge people to sit in the chamber in the dark—one person stayed in there for 45 minutes. When it's quiet, ears will adapt. The quieter the room, the more things you hear. You'll hear your heart beating, sometimes you can hear your lungs, hear your stomach gurgling loudly. In the anechoic chamber, you become the sound***." But the room isn't just for torturing people. Companies test their products in it to find out just how loud they are. And NASA has sent astronauts to help them adapt to the silence of space. **For you and me, however, the room is a deeply disorienting place**. Not only do people hear their heartbeat, they have trouble orienting themselves and even standing. **Orfield** said, "***How you orient yourself is through sounds you hear when you walk. In the anechoic chamber, you don't have any cues. You take away the perceptual cues that allow you to balance and maneuver. If you're in there for half an hour, you have to be in a chair***." So what are we to learn from the anechoic chamber? It's simply this: Don't mistake the absence of sound for the peace the angels announced at the first Christmas. They're very different. PEACE IS NOT THE ABSENCE OF NOISE, BUT AS OSWALD CHAMBERS SAYS, "IT IS THE PRESENCE OF GOD." **THIS IS ACT TWO … The Pronouncement of Peace.**

ACT 3: ***The PRINCE of Peace***. This brings us to our text for this morning from **Isaiah 9:6-7 -- For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over**

his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. Wherever Jesus went PEACE ACCOMPANIED HIM. ***This is not to say that He brought peace to everyone He encountered, however***. He didn't, nor did He ever promise to do so. In fact, He said this in **Matthew 10:34-36 -- Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. 36 And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.** But for those who willingly submitted to His reign, He had a ready supply of peace available the moment they put their trust in Him. Here are a few examples of this kind of peace: **(1)** When Joseph and Mary presented Christ as an infant to **Simeon**, he found peace. He prayed, "**Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people** (**Luke 2:29-31**)." **(2)** To a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, he said, "**Daughter, your faith has healed (saved) you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering** (**Mark 5:34**)." **(3)** To another who humbled herself to the point of washing Jesus' feet with her tears and wiping them with her hair, He said, "**Your faith has saved you; go in peace** (**Luke 7:50**)." **(4)** There is another occurrence in the Gospels where Jesus promised peace. It was just before His arrest and suffering when our Lord said to His disciples, "**You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace** (**John 16:32-33**)." If you have read the gospel accounts, you know that the twelve didn't have peace when Christ was arrested, tortured, crucified, and buried. In fact, they were filled with fear and hid from the authorities (**See John 20:19**)! It wasn't until Jesus came to them following the resurrection and spoke the words, "**Peace be with you**," that their fears were erased and joy flooded their souls. Having seen the risen Christ, they truly believed in the Prince of Peace. We would be wise to remember that ***there is no peace without the prince***. **THIS IS ACT THREE…The Prince of Peace**.

ACT 4: ***The PRESENCE of Peace***. This is the act that began in the book of Acts and is still being played out today. It is the offer of peace with God that extends to everyone. Perhaps you remember that in **Acts 10:34-36 Peter spoke to a Roman Centurion named Cornelius and those with him because he was instructed to by God. Here's what he said. "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, 35 but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. 36 As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace**

through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all). This was God's way of showing Peter that the offer of peace is available to anyone who believes in Jesus.

So there you have it … a four-act drama that informs us how we can have peace with God this Christmas beginning with **THE PROMISE OF PEACE, FOLLOWED BY THE PRONOUNCEMENT OF PEACE, THE PRINCE OF PEACE, AND FINALLY THE PRESENCE OF PEACE**.

As we conclude this message, ***I want to address anyone here who lacks peace with God***. The good news is that true peace is available if you will but put your trust in Christ and receive Him as Savior and Lord (**Colossians 1:20 -- … and through Jesus God reconciled to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross**).

Conclusion: On **March 10, 1974**, the last WWII Japanese soldier, **Lt. Hiroo Onad**a, finally surrendered. Onada had been left on the island of "**Lubang**" in the **Philippines** on December 25, 1944, with the command to "**carry on the mission even if Japan surrenders**." Four other Japanese soldiers were left on the island as the Japanese army evacuated the island. One soldier surrendered in **1950**. Another was killed in a skirmish with local police in **1954**. A third was killed in **1972**. Onada continued his war alone. All efforts to convince him to surrender or to capture him failed. He ignored messages from loudspeakers announcing the end of the war and that Japan was now an ally of the United States. Leaflets were dropped over the jungle begging him to surrender so that he could return to Japan, but all to no effect. Over the years he lived off the land and raided the fields and gardens of local citizens. He was responsible for killing at least **30 nationals during his 29-year personal war**. Almost a half million dollars was spent trying to locate and convince him to give up. Thirteen thousand men were used to try to find him. Finally on **March 10, 1974,** more than twenty-nine years after WWII ended, Onada surrendered his rusty sword when his former superior officer read to him the terms of the cease-fire order. Onada handed his sword to **President Marcos**, who immediately pardoned him. The war was over. Onada was 22 years old when left on the island. He returned to his homeland a prematurely aged man of 52. When asked about his experience, he said, "***Nothing pleasant happened in the 29 years in the jungle***." Unfortunately, just like **Lt. Hiroo Onada**, many people are fighting a prolonged battle against the God who offers reconciliation and peace in His son. The time has come for them to surrender too. Today, you can have peace with God if you want it through faith in His Son – Jesus Christ.