Emmanuel, God with us. The Savior Jesus is born. Welcome to all brothers and sisters here and online.The light of Christ brings hope, joy, peace, and love to the world.

A Child is coming

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Micah 5:2-5a; Luke 1:39-55 12/22/2024

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**Prayer:** Loving Father God, through the birth of Your beloved Son Jesus, we see Your glory and power. You are our song, the new melody in our hearts and lives. Oh, Son of God, Lord Christ, may You be born in us today, so that we may know Christ’s work in the world. Holy Spirit, open our eyes to embrace Your profound truth and help us walk in Your light.

In 2006, there was a film titled *Children of Men*. Imagine the world in 2027, with the story centered in London. It’s a chaotic time, with wars raging everywhere. The worst part: humanity cannot cure a pandemic of infertility. Due to the lack of births, the death of the world’s youngest person, an 18-year-old, becomes headline news. With a declining population and no hope for the future, the world is filled with fear, pain, and anarchy.

Amid this, a mystery is discovered in a remote village: a young woman is miraculously pregnant, and hope is rekindled. A group of rebels, hippies, and outcasts take on a dangerous mission—to bring this miraculous mother and her unborn child to a place of safety. The journey is treacherous, and many lose their lives.

Before reaching their destination, the young mother goes into labor. Trapped in a building under heavy gunfire, she gives birth. When the baby cries out for the first time, the world stops and listens to the sound of the child. They hear peace. Everyone is awestruck by the mysterious miracle.

This story portrays a world full of fear and uncertainty for the future. Yet, because of the pregnant young woman and the promising newborn, hope is brought to life. This closely mirrors the world described in today’s Old Testament scripture.

God’s people lived through times of captivity, hardship, and turmoil, during which they desperately needed hope for the future. The prophet Micah proclaimed the word of the Lord, speaking hope: he foretold that the Lord would raise up a ruler from the tribe of Judah, someone who would come from Bethlehem. This ruler would establish a new kingdom where God would truly be King. This new ruler, descended from the great King David, would stand on the promises of God’s covenant. Micah declared that the pains of labor would soon end, and when the child was born, joy would replace sorrow. He announced that this miraculous birth would bring forth the Child of Peace.

When the early church read this passage, they believed Jesus to be Israel’s Messiah, the descendant of David, the Shepherd of God’s flock, and the Prince of Peace.

They proclaimed Jesus as the fulfillment of God’s promise to Israel and, through Israel, to the entire world. The blessed child of Mary opened up a new reality.

Because of this child, we can declare that God rules over the world, transforming pain into joy. The ultimate conclusion is not captivity, exile, slavery, or death—it is peace. The child in Mary’s womb opened up a new world for all humanity, bringing joy and peace.

The film continues. The protagonist carries the newborn baby a short distance when a nearby building explodes. The sound of the baby crying momentarily calms the chaos, but the fighting soon resumes. Why does the war continue? Isn’t this the Child of Peace? Isn’t this what people hoped for?

The film is fictional, but it resonates deeply because it touches on the human condition. The early church experienced ongoing violence that disrupted peace, and this is also our experience. Our world is filled with weapons of mass destruction and unending wars, undermining the peace proclaimed by the angels at Jesus’ birth.

Today, we face the challenge of navigating the tension between peace and unrest in a troubled world. How can Christians understand this violence-filled world while proclaiming God’s peace? There are two typical responses:

1. Spiritualization.
We approach our predicament by emphasizing spiritual and personal peace. This perspective says that Christ’s peace is an inner calm and tranquility, rooted in the knowledge that Christ is with us. When we establish a close, personal relationship with God, we experience Christ’s peace. This inner serenity provides stability amid life’s storms, even when faced with uncontrollable circumstances.

This peace arises from the spiritual security we find in our relationship with God. It often views the great hope for peace as something that will only emerge in a distant future. By focusing on God’s deferred future action and emphasizing internal, individual calm, this approach often seems disconnected from the realities of our present struggles.

2. The "moral model" Response.

This view critiques the spiritualization of peace, arguing that it fails to fully address Christ’s mission. It holds that through active Christian engagement in society, we can help bring about the peace of God’s kingdom.

This response sees Jesus’ earthly ministry as a model to follow. We are called to work for human welfare, justice, and peace in the world. Peace will not come on its own; we must take action to create it.

While this approach ties peace to real-world concerns, it risks reducing Jesus to merely a moral example, motivating us to action without acknowledging the fullness of what God has accomplished in Him.

The issue with this idea is that it neglects the peace already initiated by God in Jesus’ coming. It fails to recognize or experience the transformative reality that God has already begun to change the world, individuals, and communities.

Micah speaks of the one who is to come as the one of peace. It is Emmanuel, God with us, through Mary, the realization of *shalom*, peace.

This peace is all-encompassing. It represents peace between humans and God, and peace among people. It is not confined to the spiritual or material realms. Nor is it restricted to a distant future or the present moment. It concerns individual well-being as well as the collective welfare and prosperity of all.

When God came in Jesus, the *shalom* brought by the baby Jesus was both vertical and horizontal; it was cross-shaped. Whether in the present or in the world to come, it restores the relationships between humanity and God and among people. This cross-shaped *shalom* enters our broken world, proclaiming peace.

Jesus is both God and man. When all evil, death, and hell sought to overwhelm the way and the truth, Jesus lived out peace in chaotic times. God transformed the cross, a tool of violence and execution, into something new. Through the Prince of Peace, in the glory of Easter, the cross was elevated to become a unique symbol of hope and peace.

So, when we feel there is no way out, when we are trapped between the peace we believe in and proclaim and the realities of the world before us; when everything around us, from the storms of interpersonal relationships to wars between nations, causes visible and invisible walls to rise ever higher between people and countries, can we truly say that this peace came with Jesus?

Is Kana content with a purely spiritual and internalized peace, placing *shalom* in a distant future? Or do we believe peace only comes through our struggles for social welfare?

At Christmas, baby Jesus is the answer to the problem, the answer lies in the work accomplished by God through the child in Mary’s womb. We call this “Already enthroned and yet-to-come kingdom.”

The birth of the Messiah has already initiated a new kingdom—a new order of the world, a new reality. It is one that replaces chaos, fear, and conflict; oppression and bondage; violence and war; hunger and poverty; lack and despair; suffering and brokenness; loss and pain; sickness and death.

This foundation has already been laid; the journey is irreversible (the train has already left the station). God, through Jesus, has been born and is now transforming history and the world. The inauguration of God’s kingdom has genuinely begun to change everything, and this new reality will ultimately be fulfilled, even though we do not yet see complete peace.

Through Jesus’ birth, life, death, and resurrection, history has been altered, shifting toward God’s kingdom of peace. Followers of Jesus are invited to live into this life, allowing the truth of God’s kingdom to guide and direct our days on earth until His kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven.

This differs from a purely spiritualized answer. The already enthroned and yet-to-come kingdom proclaims that Christ’s peace is not confined to individual feelings or experiences. The peace Christ brings is both personal and societal; it is spiritual and material. It is the cessation of conflict between God and us, as well as between people. It is both present and future. Today, we are called to embody and live out God’s peace, striving in various ways to bring abundance to our lives and the world around us.

Unlike responses focused solely on moral practice, the already enthroned and yet-to-come kingdom proclaims a reality that transcends our material circumstances, something far greater than what we can achieve through collective efforts for justice. In baby Jesus, God breaks the chains of sin, fear, and death, setting us free in a new, awe-inspiring, and dynamic way. This manifests God’s peace in our relationships with Him and with others. As we labor, we trust that God has already been at work and continues to work in ways beyond what we can see.

In a world of violence, we must be cautious yet fully embrace the reality of the "already inaugurated and yet-to-come kingdom," because this faith calls us:

It calls us to follow Jesus into darkness and death and, there, to witness the light and life of God already present.

It calls us to share God’s peace—a peace we cannot yet fully see and sometimes can barely perceive.

It calls us to follow Jesus into relationships and into forms of life marked by material poverty, living out and proclaiming the abundant kingdom of God there.

It calls us to oppose the false powers and authorities of this world that seek control through oppression, deception, violence, and war. In our contexts and positions,

It calls and demands that we embody love, truth, and peace.

It calls us to live as though God is already in control of our lives and everything, for, in reality, He already is.

This baby has already come, and everything has changed. Because of this, we can freely pursue God’s peace in a world filled with fear, lack, violence, and war. Within this world, God is with us, and His kingdom has already begun. On the final day of the Lord, it will be fully realized.

God became a little child and entered this world, and He will come again. As we participate in this already-inaugurated kingdom of peace, may God’s kingdom come, and may His will be done in you until His kingdom is fully established across the earth. Amen.