



Advent 2025

Session 2: Peace

THE LESSON AT A GLANCE

What is peace? Many would describe peace as the absence of conflict and would describe themselves as peacekeepers—doing what they can to maintain peace in their marriages, families, friend circles, and jobs.

But Jesus, the Prince of Peace, didn't avoid conflict. In fact, He often stepped into contentious situations to usher in God's peace. In God's kingdom, we are called not to be peace *keepers*, but peace *makers*. We take our cue from Christ, who made the way of peace possible through His death, burial, and resurrection.

The second week of Advent is focused on peace. The Incarnation of Jesus Christ brought God's peace during humanity's suffering. As we light the "Bethlehem Candle" this week, we celebrate Emmanuel, God With Us, who entered the brokenness of sin and death to make peace possible through His shed blood. We look beyond the cradle to the cross and celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace!

TODAY'S SCRIPTURES

Micah 5:1-4; Luke 2:1-7; Romans 5:1-8

THE MAIN IDEA

Peace is a deep sense of wholeness from knowing God's presence in our lives and experiencing reconciliation with Him and others.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How does Jesus's birth—in the middle of a Roman occupation, with Mary and Joseph far from home, and in humble circumstances—point you toward the kind of peace God offers?

SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

Micah 5:1-4 In the midst of Micah's warning about the coming exile, he pointed the Israelites toward a day of deliverance. Amid their suffering, he reminded them that God would send a Savior, born in Bethlehem, who would sit on David's throne forever. Even in the hardest circumstance, we can be reminded that God is ultimately in control and is working to bring about His eternal purposes.

Luke 2:1-7 At the command of Caesar in Rome, Joseph and Mary had no choice but to leave Nazareth and travel the ninety miles to Bethlehem for a census vote. What began as political posturing became the tool God used to answer the prophesy of Micah more than 700 years before Christ's birth. Even in the darkest circumstances, we can experience peace as we trust in God's sovereign plan.

Romans 5:1-8 God's peace is more than just experiencing a change in our circumstances. True peace comes when we give our hearts and lives to Christ, and experience forgiveness of sins and eternal peace with God. Even in our greatest sin, Christ makes it possible for us to experience His peace not just in eternity, but to walk in His peace throughout our lives as we trust in Him.



START HERE

The theme of the second week of Advent is peace. As you reflect on the nativity, perhaps “peaceful” is a word that comes to mind. Lest we forget, this was not a peaceful moment according to the circumstances. Mary and Joseph were temporarily relocated outside of their hometown and likely their entire support system because of an edict of a pagan ruler a thousand miles away in Rome. There was a shortage of available housing and provisions. After Jesus’s birth, a local king would attempt to assassinate the Messiah, forcing Joseph and his family to take refuge in Egypt. Yet, the angels said, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people he favors!” (Luke 2:14). Where Jesus is, peace abounds. The Prince of Peace is present in the most difficult of circumstances, and He brings a peace that surpasses the struggles we face. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:14, “For he is our peace.”

DISCUSS

How does our celebration of Christmas sometimes soften the Christmas story to make it sound more “peaceful” according to earthly standards than it was? How would you describe the kind of peace the angels proclaimed?

REVIEW AND DISCUSS THE TEXT

1. We experience peace when we look to Jesus.

Micah 5:1-4:

*Now, daughter who is under attack,
you slash yourself in grief;
a siege is set against us!
They are striking the judge of Israel
on the cheek with a rod.
Bethlehem Ephrathah,
you are small among the clans of Judah;
one will come from you
to be ruler over Israel for me.
His origin is from antiquity,
from ancient times.
Therefore, Israel will be abandoned until the time
when she who is in labor has given birth;
then the rest of the ruler’s brothers will return
to the people of Israel.
He will stand and shepherd them
in the strength of the Lord,
in the majestic name of the Lord his God.
They will live securely,*

*for then his greatness will extend
to the ends of the earth.*

Unpacking Micah 5:1-4

Ask a parent of young children to describe the weeks leading up to Christmas, and they may not describe it as peaceful. Between shopping, wrapping, baking, and attending school programs and parties, the month of December feels like a sprint to the finish line. Some might say peace is something they look forward to experiencing once Christmas is over!

Our celebration of Christmas has evolved significantly since the early 300s AD, when the church began to recognize Christ's birth on the church calendar. The emphasis on eating and buying has replaced fasting and prayer, and the cultural celebration of Christmas has become superimposed over the celebration of the incarnation. This full-steam-ahead approach to the holiday often leaves us feeling depleted and depressed rather than fulfilled and peaceful.

How do we experience peace during the Christmas season, and more specifically, how do we experience peace amid the ongoing stress, difficulty, and loss that is a part of the daily human experience? While we may not be able to control the last-minute email asking for yet another cookie tray for a class party or the fourth-quarter demands of a difficult job, Scripture teaches us Christ came not to resolve all our circumstances, but to allow us to experience His peace in the midst of them.

The minor prophet, Micah, understood something about looking for peace in the midst of chaos. He ministered in the Southern Kingdom during the time of Isaiah around 750-700 BC. In the first four chapters of his book, Micah warned the people that the Northern Kingdom would be carried away into exile by Assyria, and that Jerusalem would be pillaged before the Southern Kingdom would fall to Babylon years later. While most of his words were filled with ominous warnings about God's judgment on Israel's sin, the prophet took a turn in chapter five to point toward a coming day of restoration and reconciliation for God's people.

"Now, daughter who is under attack, you slash yourself in grief; a siege is set against us! They are striking the judge of Israel on the cheek with a rod" (Micah 5:1) Micah proclaimed that Israel would experience grief, judgement, and humiliation as judgment on her sin. God's judgment is always just. As Deuteronomy 32:4 says, *"The Rock—his work is perfect; all his ways are just. A faithful God, without bias, he is righteous and true."* Because God is just, Israel's sin had to be addressed. However, because God is merciful, Micah reminded the people that His judgement would not last forever, and one day they would return to the promised land.

"Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are small among the clans of Judah; one will come from you to be ruler over Israel for me. His origin is from antiquity, from ancient times" (Micah 5:2). While the prophet pronounced judgment on Israel's sin, he pointed them toward the coming Savior. Micah announced that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem Ephrathah, the small town in Judah where Ruth gave birth to Obed, and where King David was born. His prophecy was made clearer by the prophet Jeremiah fifty or more years later when he wrote, *"Look, the days are*



coming”—this is the LORD’s declaration— “when I will raise up a Righteous Branch for David. He will reign wisely as king and administer justice and righteousness in the land” (Jeremiah 23:5).

During the Israelites suffering, sin, and coming judgement, Micah pointed them to the hope of Christ’s arrival. *“Therefore, Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of the ruler’s brothers will return to the people of Israel”* (v. 3). Micah acknowledged that Israel would experience God’s judgment, but in the course of time their sufferings would seem like labor pains before the joy of a coming baby. One day, through the Messiah, the dispersed tribes of Israel would be reunited. The splitting of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms had torn apart tribes and separated many Israelites from worshiping at the temple. Even though Micah’s message proclaimed a coming judgment, his words also gave hope in the coming restoration initiated and accomplished by God.

“He will stand and shepherd them in the strength of the LORD, in the majestic name of the LORD his God. They will live securely, for then his greatness will extend to the ends of the earth” (Micah 5:4). Interestingly, Micah did not paint the picture of a coming military leader who would rescue them from the Assyrians and Babylonians. He didn’t paint the picture of an indulgent parent who would keep them from experiencing the consequences of their sin. Instead, he painted a picture of a shepherd-leader who would lead and protect them in strength and majesty. Not only that, but this shepherd-leader’s greatness would reach the ends of the earth. Their circumstances had not yet changed. In fact, things would get worse for them before they got better. However, Micah pointed them to this peace: *“He will be their peace. When Assyria invades our land, when it marches against our fortresses”* (Micah 5:5a).

Like the Israelites, we cannot always change our circumstances. As John Piper wrote, *“Peace is not primarily about circumstances. It is first and foremost peace with God through Jesus Christ. And in Him, we find the peace that surpasses understanding—even when the shopping lines are long, the family tensions are high, and the to-do lists are endless.”* The challenges of life, health, work, family, finances, and friendships can leave us exhausted and depleted. It might be tempting in our struggles to lose hope that better days are ahead. However, if we want to experience peace this Christmas season, we must look to Jesus. When we lift our eyes from our present circumstances and look to Jesus as the source of everything we need, we experience His peace. As the prophet Isaiah wrote, *“You will keep the mind that is dependent on you in perfect peace, for it is trusting in you”* (Isaiah 26:3).

DISCUSS

- *What about the Christmas season makes it difficult for you to experience peace?*
- *Can you think of a time when you sensed God’s peace even though difficult circumstances had not yet changed?*
- *What needs to change to make space to look to Jesus and experience His peace this advent season?*



2. We experience peace because of the incarnation.

Luke 2:1-7: *In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole empire should be registered. This first registration took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So everyone went to be registered, each to his own town.*

Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family line of David, to be registered along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was pregnant. While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. Then she gave birth to her firstborn son, and she wrapped him tightly in cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Unpacking Luke 2:1-7

Several years ago, there was a movement to “Keep Christ in Christmas.” The saying was printed on buttons and bumper stickers and shared proudly on social media. In fact, there were some who made it a personal mission to replace “Happy Holidays” with “Merry Christmas” wherever they were greeted—the grocery store line, a department store, or a teacher at their child’s school. While the heart of the movement was sincere, the desire to change a culture’s use of language around Christmas falls short of the intention. Keeping Christ in Christmas isn’t something done with Facebook campaigns or small tweaks of intentional language. Christ is inherently in Christmas. He is the reason for our joy and peace. We keep Him, not in the center of other people’s lives and vocabulary, but in our own, when we purposefully reflect on the incarnation and what His birth means for us and our eternity.

In the previous passage, Micah 5:1-4, the prophet warned the people they would experience trials and difficulties. *“Now, daughter who is under attack, you slash yourself in grief; a siege is set against us!”* (Micah 5:1). Just as the Israelites were suffering in the days of Micah, the Jews suffered under Roman occupation in the days when Christ was born. However, as Micah prophesied, *“Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are small among the clans of Judah; one will come from you to be ruler over Israel for me”* (Micah 5:2).

Joseph and Mary could have related to Micah’s message from more than 700 years before. They too lived in a time of oppression and occupation from a ruler who did not know or follow God. With the stroke of a pen, Caesar Augustus issued a decree that every Roman citizen should be counted in a census. While we might think of a census today as an annoying but largely innocuous requirement, in the ancient world, it posed a different level of expectation. Notice the language in verse 3—*everyone went*. In the ancient world, people did what Caesar required, immediately and completely, or they suffered the consequences. So, Joseph, with a pregnant wife, traveled ninety miles to his ancestral home to be counted among his people.

“So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child” (Luke 2:4-5). These short sentences carry significant meaning and importance in fulfilling God’s Old Testament



promises. First, these verses demonstrate God's faithfulness to keep His covenant to David from 2 Samuel 7:12-13: *"When your time comes and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up after you your descendant, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."* More than a thousand years before Christ was born, God took a shepherd boy made king from Bethlehem and promised that, through his bloodline, God would send a Savior to shepherd His people forever.

Luke also reminds us of the words of Isaiah 7:14: *"Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: See, the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel."* In Luke 1:34-35 we read that Mary was a virgin when she conceived Jesus, and in Luke 2, Mary was referred to as Joseph's betrothed. Luke reminded the reader of the delicate nature of their relationship, and yet, even among the difficulties, Joseph and Mary obeyed.

As a descendent of David (Matthew 1:16), Joseph returned from his home in Nazareth to his ancestral home of Bethlehem to fulfill a requirement of Caesar, but even more so to fulfill the promises of God. Bethlehem (which means "house of bread"), became the birthplace of the Bread of Life (John 6:35). While Joseph and Mary may have felt as if they were being ordered around at the whim of a distant ruler, God was very near and present in their situation. He used the census to bring about the circumstances for the incarnation. Knowing Jesus was born amid chaos can give us a sense of peace. As Ann Voskamp wrote in her book *The Greatest Gift*, *"Sometimes we forget the Prince of Peace came into a world that was noisy, crowded, and full of unmet expectations. Peace didn't come in the absence of chaos, but right in the middle of it."*

"While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them" (Luke 2:6-7). In the verses that follow, Luke will share the amazing proclamation of the angels and the joyous discovery of the shepherds, but in verses 6-7, we get a glimpse of a baby born in less-than-ideal circumstances. Unlike a Roman king who could order people around at will, Jesus arrived as a lowly King, without fanfare and with little material comfort. God answered centuries-old promises not in a palace, but in a stable, and it changed the world.

Like Joseph and Mary, there are times when life feels like we are being pushed and pulled by the desires and demands of others. Whether it's a parent, boss, or government, there are times that other people's expectations can make life feel out of control. However, when things seemed most chaotic for Joseph and Mary—traveling ninety miles near the end of her pregnancy—God was orchestrating it to bring out the fulfillment of His promises. Their situation was not lost on God. He was present and moving in their lives, even if they could not see it at the time. In the same way, we may go through times when it is hard to see God's hand at work. It might appear like other people are calling the shots, and we are just along for the ride. However, real peace comes when we understand that God is always at work to bring about His good purposes. Proverbs 16:9 says, *"A person's heart plans his way, but the LORD determines his steps."* We can have peace that God is always working in our lives. The fulfilled promise of Immanuel, God

with us, means we do not have to experience life alone. Christ's peace comes as we experience walking through the various challenges of life with Him.

DISCUSS

- *Have you ever had a boss who was hard to follow? How did it negatively impact your job?*
- *How does Joseph and Mary's obedience both to Caesar Augustus and to God encourage you?*
- *Jesus was born in less-than-ideal circumstances. How does the story of His humble birth give you peace in your current moments of trouble?*

3. We experience peace when we anticipate eternity with Jesus.

Romans 5:1-8: *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have also obtained access through him by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we boast in the hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope. This hope will not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*

For while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. For rarely will someone die for a just person—though for a good person perhaps someone might even dare to die. But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Unpacking Romans 5:1-8

Have you ever noticed that arts and crafts stores are always thinking a holiday or two ahead? Before the Fourth of July is over, they're putting out back-to-school and Halloween decorations, and they can barely move the Christmas stuff off the shelves before restocking with bunny rabbits and Easter baskets. It's as if each holiday needs to be barreled through to make room for the next thing. Stores create this false sense of urgency to compel shoppers to believe they're behind already and jump on next season's holiday décor.

Even though the celebration of Christmas was not celebrated in December until the third century AD, there is something special about the way it falls on our calendars. Just as the bleakness of winter is interrupted by the celebration of Christ's birth, the joy of springtime is ushered in as we celebrate His resurrection. Even the seasons point us to Christ.

It is impossible to adequately celebrate Jesus's birth without looking forward to His death and resurrection. Without Christ's death on the cross, He would be just another interesting thought-leader, and His teachings would be relegated to antiquity. Without the resurrection, Jesus would be just another prophet, devoid of any power to save. However, when we look at the beginning

of Jesus's life on earth in light of the end of His life, we more adequately see God's power and purpose in the incarnation—God has come to dwell with and save His people.

In the first few chapters of Romans, Paul laid out the case for the severity of our sin before a holy God. Peace is not, as some might think, merely the absence of difficulty or conflict. Rather, peace is deep sense of wholeness from knowing God's presence in our lives and experiencing reconciliation with Him through Christ. Without the incarnation, we can experience temporary, situational peace based on life's circumstances. However, because Jesus came to earth to die for our sins, we can have peace on earth, trusting in God's sovereign care. Those who trust in Christ will also experience eternal peace as they spend eternity with God.

Paul beautifully expressed these benefits of following Jesus in Romans 5:1-2, which say, *"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have also obtained access through him by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we boast in the hope of the glory of God."* Believers have peace with God through Jesus. This is not just the peace of knowing God is working in our circumstances. This is the abiding peace of knowing we are in right relationship with God. Our sins are forgiven, and our eternity is secure. This is not our doing. We are justified by faith in Jesus, not from anything we have done on our own (Ephesians 2:8).

Not only does Paul say we have peace with God through Christ, but he also says in verse two that we have access to God through Him. Real peace comes when we experience new life in Christ, and when we continue to walk out new life in Him. Jesus said in John 14:27, *"Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Don't let your heart be troubled or fearful."* For believers, the Holy Spirit dwells not in a manger, but in our hearts so we are never separated from God. Deep abiding peace comes when we know we belong to God, and He cares for us as His children.

Paul went on to say: *"And not only that, but we also boast in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope. This hope will not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us"* (vv. 3-5). We can experience God's peace in our difficulties. Just as Joseph and Mary experienced the peace of Christ's birth in the middle of challenging circumstances, Scripture says we can experience peace in our hardest times. Trusting that God is with us in our struggles produces long-suffering, strong moral-character, and hope. The seeds of being at peace with God sprout fruit throughout our lives.

God sent Jesus at just the right time in history. The Roman empire united people through a shared culture, government, and language. The infrastructure was in place through the literal "Roman Roads" to facilitate the rapid spread of the gospel. The political climate in the days of Caesar Augustus made people hungry for a godly leader. Galatians 4:4 says, *"When the time came to completion, God sent his son."* However, just as God sent Jesus at just the right time in human history, Romans 5:6-8 says God sent Jesus at just the right time in *our* history: *"For while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. For rarely will someone*



die for a just person—though for a good person someone might even dare to die. But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

God did not wait for us to clean up our acts before sending Jesus. He loved us when we were the most unlovable and welcomed us into His family through faith. Jesus is the only way. The Incarnation reminds us of God’s love that made a way for sinful people to be reconciled to God. Because we have experienced His forgiveness, we have the joy of experiencing His peace.

DISCUSS

- *Why must the birth of Christ be viewed in light of the death and resurrection of Christ?*
- *How would you describe your sense of peace before knowing Jesus and after?*
- *What is an area in life where you need to experience Christ’s peace today?*

GOSPEL FOCUS

The Bible says we are all sinners in need of forgiveness and reconciliation with God. Thankfully, that is not something we achieve on our own, rather something that Christ accomplished for us on the cross and in His resurrection. We cannot truly have Christmas without the cross. If you have celebrated Jesus’s birth, but never received Him as your Savior, perhaps it’s time to ask someone to help you take the next steps of faith.

REFLECT ON THE TEXT

DISCUSS

- *Why is it significant that God worked through a wicked ruler to get Joseph, Mary, and Jesus to Bethlehem to fulfill Old Testament prophecy? What does that tell us is possible for our lives?*
- *How do the humble surroundings of Jesus’s birth demonstrate God’s love?*
- *Consider Christmas through the lens of Easter. How can reflecting on the cross give us peace this Christmas?*

RESPOND TO THE TEXT

Where is an area you are trying, like Caesar Augustus, to move all the pieces to get a desired outcome? How could submitting that situation before God allow you to experience His peace?



APPLY

How might you share the gospel by telling someone else about the peace available in Christ?
Ask God to give you an opportunity to share Jesus with someone this Christmas.

REFERENCES

John Piper, *Good News of Great Joy: Daily Readings for Advent*, 2013.

Ann Voskamp, *The Greatest Gift*, Tyndale, 2013.