

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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The Prince of Peace

This Christmas season, as we sing “Peace on the earth, good will to men, From heaven’s all gracious King,” from the magnificent Christmas carol, “It Came Upon a Midnight Clear,” we echo the words of the angels in Luke 2:14 at the birth of Jesus. The “peace” that the angels proclaimed and about which we sing reflects a deep longing of the human heart: Our lives are often in turmoil and wracked by personal hardships. And we often despair when we hear of the countless wars, natural catastrophes, widespread disaster and suffering that permeate our world. Consequently, we ache for the stability, the solidness, and the tranquility associated with that quality of life called peace. Perhaps there is real wisdom in the words of the 17th century English pastor, Matthew Henry: “The world’s peace begins in ignorance, consists of sins and ends in turmoil.” The Christmas season offers a refresher course on the authentic source of genuine peace, for it causes us to connect peace with Jesus Christ. Indeed, the Old Testament prophet, Isaiah, spoke of a coming Prince of Peace (9:6) and that is certainly what the angels had in mind when they sang of the Child on Christmas morning.

What is the peace that this Child, the Lord Jesus, offers to us? Why is He called the Prince of Peace? He declared shortly before His crucifixion: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Let not your heart be troubled. And do not be afraid” (John 14:27). The Hebrew word for peace is *shalom* (*irene* in Greek), which conveys not so much the absence of conflict as the notion of positive blessing, of a healthy relationship with God. It also suggests the fullness of well-being, a freedom from anxiety, and goodwill and harmony in human relationships. The New Testament teaches that Jesus provides peace with God through His cross, which then produces the peace of God as a quality of life. It also teaches that His return will bring true global peace, which humanity has sought for over five millennia. In fact, Isaiah 2:4 prophesies that at that time, the nations “will hammer their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they learn war.” Through His cross, Jesus removed the cause of war—sin—with the result that through Him people can live in peace with God and with one another. The Christian message at Christmas, then, is that peace has come because a Child was born, and that peace will come in all its fullness when He returns. For that reason the early church declared “Come, Lord Jesus.” The last verse of “It Came Upon a Midnight Clear” (not often sung) captures the essence of the Christian message at Christmas:

For lo, the days are hast'ning on,
By prophets seen of old,
When with the ever circling years
Shall come the time foretold;
When the new heaven and earth shall own
The prince of peace their King,
And the whole world sends back the song
Which now the angels sing.

His peace is the center of the Christmas message, which brings a renewed sense of comfort, stability and hope in a troubled world. This year, may you find the peace of Christmas.