

Isaiah 9:2-7  
Psalm 96  
Titus 2:11-14  
LUKE 2:1-20

## “Peace On Earth’ – And Us”

God comes to us “where we are” – but doesn’t leave us there.

That is the message of this holy night, this night which for many is the most emotionally intense night of the year. Celebrated as it is at the end of the year, Christmas is a time for reflection and personal assessment. Celebrated as it is with an emphasis on family gatherings, it is a time for focusing on who is present – and on who is no longer present, on families mourning, families breaking, families healing, families whole, and families just being formed, on individuals by themselves, on who is here in this country and who may be facing danger thousands of miles away. Celebrated as it is by an inescapable emphasis on gift-giving, it is a time when some may rejoice in what they receive and some in what they give, while others are all too aware of how little they can do and are doing of either.

However we are assessing our personal state at the close of the year – *God comes to us*. Whoever we are with or not with – *God comes to us*. Whatever, if anything, we have given or received – *God comes to us*. Every Christmas – indeed every day – God offers us the gift of God’s own presence as our present, a present we can unwrap, open and experience whatever our circumstances in life.

God comes to us “where we are” – *but doesn’t leave us there*. No one can truly encounter God and remain unchanged: those who met Jesus in the flesh either bowed and served him (like Peter) or turned away (like the rich young man who became more wedded to his own wealth) or they unleashed the potential for evil that they, like all other people other than Christ, have within them (like Pontius Pilate).

God comes to us this Christmas Eve [Day] and offers us, not only his presence; God offers us *transformation and a commission*.

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favors.” That was the message the angels delivered to the shepherds who were working the third shift in the fields outside of Bethlehem.

This message was not just a “fly by” greeting – the angelic equivalent of a small plane carrying an advertising banner over a beach on a Saturday in August. This message was an invitation *to do something, and to be different*.

The first thing the shepherds did was to go to Bethlehem and kneel before the new-born king, Jesus, the Christ. But the second was equally important: as St. Luke tells us, “When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child.”

The shepherds worshipped and then shared the Good News that the Savior of the world had been born to a world which needs him so much: needs forgiveness, reconciliation, love, hope, peace.

We have a great advantage over those shepherds: we know or can learn the rest of the story of Christ's life, death and resurrection – and his ongoing spiritual guidance for our lives today, and his ultimate future presence as King of the world. We can share this Good News with others.

Jesus is the One who Isaiah foretold: the “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

The same message delivered by the angels to the shepherds is today delivered to all of us: Glory to God and peace on earth. The commission we are offered is in the “army” of his disciples who are working for peace in one or more of many different ways, building a more just world in which the blessings of safety, security, prosperity, community, health and education are more widespread, in which mutual understanding and respect flourish internationally, nationally, regionally, locally and in every home.

Accepting and fulfilling the expectations of this commission from the Lord requires faith and dedication, a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and the full use of all of the gifts of the Holy Spirit conferred at baptism, including “an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love God, and the gift of joy and wonder in all God's works”, as The Book of Common Prayer puts it.

Being one of God's peacemakers could involve working as a High School student against underage drinking: there's nothing peaceful about a DUI and a car crash. It could involve working to build understanding among people at college, at work or in the community who are very different from each other – in terms of race, faith, economic circumstances, whatever. It could involve working for justice for those who lack the power to protect themselves – some of those Jesus called “among the least of those who are members of my family”. It could involve a lot of things.

If we accept this commission, each of us simply prays and asks our Commander where he wants to “deploy” each of us and whatever our particular missions are. Your mission may be something you're already doing that suddenly you see in a whole new way as part of God's plan. It may be something you've never imagined yourself doing – just like I never imagined I'd be going to Kenya and helping to teach other clergy how their churches can be instruments of God's healing for those impacted by alcoholism, drug abuse and/or H.I.V./A.I.D.S. until I did it last summer, with the help of the people of this church.

God only knows what your life will be like if you say “yes.”

Or, we can just pack away the message of the angels with the Christmas decorations until next December and never know the lives we might have been able to touch had we all said “Yes, Lord, I want to spread peace on earth, good will toward all people. What would you like me to do first?”

God comes to us where we are, but doesn’t leave us there. We can draw closer, or run away. It’s up to us.

On come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord. Come, and be transformed and commissioned to spread peace on earth and good will to all people. Amen.

**The Rev. Francis A. Hubbard**  
St. Barnabas Episcopal Church  
Monmouth Junction, New Jersey