



The Crux of Christmas
The Prince of Peace & the Future of Planet Earth
Pastor Mike Fabarez

Well, Merry Christmas to you. Merry Christmas. Merry, Merry Christmas.

It's such a weird word—merry. I don't find that in everyday vocabulary. Ask somebody how they're doing in March and they say, "Merry," right? "How was church today?" "What a merry service we had." "How are your boys doing?" "Well, they're just a couple of merry gentlemen, those boys." "Merry"—weird word.

You know what that word means? Cheery? Smiley, right? Happy. I mean, that's a pretty powerful word if you think about it, and maybe that's why we don't use it so much—because not many things are like that. Now I get it. I know why we say it, because we'd like the celebrations of the incarnation of Christ to be, you know, a happy, festive kind of celebration. I get that. But it's super important that we, as Christians, do not confuse our cultural Christmas greeting with an expectation regarding the Christian life. We can't do that.

Because frankly—I mean, here's the truth—the first coming of Christ was not designed to make everything in your life merry. This just wasn't the intention. Because if it was, it would be failing, right? Because that's certainly not the reality for us. That's not how it works. That wasn't God's plan.

Oh, it is his plan to make everything merry, but it's going to take a second visit to get that done. Now, if you're taking notes—it'd be good if you did today—it'd be great to jot down this reference just as we get started. I won't make you turn there right now, but Hebrews chapter nine—Hebrews chapter nine, verse 28—makes it very clear there are two comings of Christ, and each of them have very distinct purposes. And the first one was to send Christ to bear the sins of many, to bear the sins of many. That was a short visit, right? Thirty-three years or so. When Christ comes, he bears the sins of many. And then it says he will appear a second time—a second advent—he'll appear a second time with no reference to sin. He's not going to be dealing with sin or bearing sin for many, but he's going to come to bring salvation, or to save those who eagerly await him.

Now, the first one deals with the problem of sin—pays the debt of sin. The second one starts to now remedy, eternally and once for all, the problems that were caused by sin. Right now, though, between the advents, we live in this valley where you can have your sins forgiven, but there is still an entire experience and life that is laden with the consequences of sin—like death. We all have to deal with that. I mean, that's the ultimate consequence of sin—the wages of sin is death—and we



are not exempt from that. The people you love aren't exempt from that. Our world is not exempt from that, and all the other things associated with that.

So we've got to understand why Christ did not come in this first coming that we celebrate to bring us merry lives.

Now, our study is taking us through the first couple of chapters here of Luke, and we're in the middle of a narrative and it was kind of unfair to break it where we did between verses 12 and 13. So as we go back to that text to try and understand what the first coming was all about, I'd like you to get some context. We'll start in verse number 8, and start reading again a little bit of what was going on here when the angelic being shows up and speaks to the shepherds, and then the angelic choir, if you will—the host—has a whole other message. And we're going to look at this and see if we can't understand why the focus of this text is primarily on the first advent. And yet there are visions and at least some hints about what Christ is going to do in the second advent.

So grab your Bibles if you haven't already. As Lucas said, we're gonna roll up our sleeves a little bit here. Don't let the worksheet scare you. It's not as scary as the worksheet looks. It'll be a great sermon, I hope.

Verse number 8, pick up the text here. The same region, right near Bethlehem here. The shepherds were out in the field—this is Luke 2:8—keeping watch over their flock by night, and an angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them. They were filled with great fear, as you would be. Verse 10: The angel said, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you"—there's our great word; we get "evangelical" from *euangelion*, or the gospel—"I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." And because it was coming, as we noted last week, to the shepherds—the lowest class in, you know, the working folks in Bethlehem there—this is all clear without distinction at all, without exception, and we dealt with that last week and that was an important distinction to make.

Verse 11: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David"—that's Bethlehem—"a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." Savior, Christ, Lord. "This will be a sign for you: you'll find the baby wrapped in swaddling cloths"—not a blanket—"and lying not in a bassinet, but in a manger, a feeding trough."

And suddenly there was with the angel—here's where we pick up the text here today—a multitude of the heavenly host (the army—that's what "host" means), praising God—these angelic beings—



and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.”

“And on earth peace among those with...”—that didn’t read right, now, does it? Doesn’t sound right at all. We know how this is supposed to go: “Heard the bells on Christmas Day, their old familiar carols play, and wild and sweet the words repeat of peace on earth, goodwill to men.” I mean, that’s how it’s supposed to go, because that’s how it’s always been sung. And, I mean, hymn after hymn and carol after carol tell us the first coming of Christ is about peace on earth and goodwill to men, right?

So what’s wrong with our Bible? Our Bible’s all messed up here? It says, “On earth peace,” and then it qualifies it—“among those with whom he (God) is pleased.” That’s different. Really different.

Why is it so different? Well, this is the scary part of the outline, but it’s not that bad. It’ll be painless. But let’s—number one on your outlines—please jot this down: let’s make note of and know what verse 14 isn’t saying. As countercultural as it may be, let us understand why. And I hate the fact that we have to do this, but we do have to do this because this is so entrenched in our culture, because it showed up erroneously in our translations some five hundred years ago. So let’s figure this out, if we can. You got that down? We need to know what verse 14 isn’t saying.

Now, let’s look at this up here on the screen—which should reflect what you’ve got there on your worship packet. You’ve got two lines here. And what I’ve done is I’ve taken them from the Greek symbols of the characters and I’ve turned them into English characters. So we’ve got it transliterated for you; we’ll do a little translation. And over the first one here on the top line, what you’ve got is something—I’ve expanded on it a little bit here—but these are the earliest or oldest Greek manuscripts have what we have on the top line. Later, we had copies that crept into the New Testament. As we look through the history of the copying of the New Testament text, we have what we see on the bottom line.

And I should say this: every ancient manuscript that we have—or any document that we have—whether we’re reading Homer’s *Iliad* or, you know, the *Odyssey*, or whether we’re reading Seneca’s orations in Rome, or whatever ancient history we’re reading—we don’t have the original copies because you cannot have these documents survive that long. They were all read and used, and they deteriorate. So the only way that we know what was written was to look at the copies that still exist. We want to go back as far as possible to find those existing copies. And the good news about the New Testament is we have more ancient copies that testify to that original writing—though we don’t have it—within, actually, decades of the actual writing, which is the smallest gap we have of any document from antiquity. And we have more that date back to the early centuries than any

document from antiquity. It is the most attested document that we have—the twenty-seven books in the New Testament. Not to mention the Old Testament—that’s a different story, but equally confident we are that what we have in our Bibles today, whether it’s the Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament or the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, does reflect what was actually written—though I can’t pull out the letter that Paul wrote to the Colossians and say, “Well, here’s the very one he wrote”—that we have copies going way, way back. And we have lots of copies.

And as we look at those copies, sometimes—because it was all done by hand and not by computer and not on a copy machine—we see little discrepancies creep in. And so we have some discrepancies often between the early manuscripts and what came later, because the further you get away from it, much like in the telephone game, sometimes you get some things that creep in. And when those mistakes creep in, they multiply down the line. So what we want to do is look at all of them, put them all on the table, and let’s figure out what exactly Luke wrote in recording what the angel said. What did they say?

And, as you see here, as with most New Testament documents, there’s very little variation, but occasionally we find them—they’re called variant readings. Here’s a variant reading in the text, okay? And if you look carefully here, you’ll see on the top line we’ve got an “s,” or in Greek a sigma, and on the bottom line we don’t have one. That’s the only difference here between these two lines. We’ve got older manuscripts—no “s.” Early manuscripts—we have the “s,” the sigma. The sigma is not gone.

Okay, what difference does that make? Well, it happens to make a lot. Let’s take a look at this text and let’s do a little translation here—translation where you’re like you’re back in school. Here we go.

Epi means “on”—it’s the preposition “on” or “upon.” *Gaisce* is the word “earth,” right? So “upon the earth”—so far so good. It’s all identical—writing it twice—sorry about that. *Irena*—okay—is the noun “peace.” “On earth peace”—so far, so good.

En—pretty broad preposition here: “among,” “with,” “toward,” “to,” “in,” okay? That’s a broad preposition. *Anthrōpōis*, right? Which is the plural dative form of the word “anthrōpos,” which we get “anthropology” from—that means “men” or “people.” This is the generic term. This is not the word *anēr* for “male”; it’s the word for people—man, mankind, anthropology. In this case, plural.

Eudokias and *eudokia*—there is our discrepancy. There is our variation. Which is it? Well, the early manuscripts have *eudokias*, and the later manuscripts have *eudokia*. Okay, now, what does this

word mean? Let's translate it "pleasure" or "pleasing," okay? It's a noun—pleasure or pleasing; something that is pleasurable or brings pleasure, or something that is pleasing. Lots of ways you can translate it: "goodwill," you can translate it "favor," but it's some good feeling, some good thing—pleasure, pleasing.

Okay, now, I know it's Sunday morning and it's early, but we've got to talk grammar just a little bit here. When you put a sigma on the end of this word in *eudokia*, it gives it its place in the grammatical construction of the sentence. If there's a sigma here, then it becomes a genitive case, which is the case in grammar—and I'm being very simple about this, oversimplifying it perhaps—of association. It's trying to qualify something or associate or connect with a noun nearby. And in this case, the noun that it is qualifying, if there is a sigma there, is the word *anthrōpois*, okay? So whatever "pleasing," "pleasure," whatever it is, it's talking about the people—the people that are described here.

If you take the sigma off and you just have an alpha at the end of this—an "a" at the end of this—then that's a nominative case. A nominative case is the subject case or the identifying case. Every phrase, every clause has got to have a nominative noun in it, okay—either implied or expressed, as it is in this case.

Okay, so here's another thing you need to note: the noun *eirēnē*—"peace"—that's also in the nominative case. Now here's the deal—look at this carefully here. Either you have a phrase with two nominative cases, which makes it two phrases, or you have a phrase with one nominative case, which makes it one phrase. Okay? That's why sometimes this is broken into two stanzas—as it is in all the hymns—or this is one stanza, right? This is one phrase in the stanza. If that's the case—well, that's because the sigma is there.

In other words, that's what the boxes are all about. If I've got two nominative cases, then I've got one phrase here and I've got another phrase here, because there's another nominative case, and I've got to translate it that way. If there's no sigma there, as opposed to having one entire phrase with one nominative case noun in that phrase.

See, this sounds so technical, but it's not. It's so simple. You're smiling—still? You see it? It's not hard at all.

Okay, now, let's translate a little bit here. Okay, "upon the earth"—we've already done this—but let's figure this out: "in" or "with" or "among the people"—the *anthrōpoi*, right—"who"—now if I'm going to translate this—"are pleasing." Who are pleasing. Now there's no object here, but we

assume: pleasing to who? Pleasing to God. So I've got, in one phrase, "upon earth peace in or among men who are pleasing"—literally pleasing to God. Or I've got two distinct phrases: "upon earth peace"—you could put a semicolon there on the next line, because this is poetical phrase in the text; that's why it's not prose, all in one paragraph—"and then I got another phrase: in or to men or people—pleasure." Okay. And the way we have translated it for four hundred years is "goodwill." Good things, good feelings.

Okay, now, I like the bottom one. I vote for the bottom one. I want there to be "peace on earth," don't you? I want peace on earth. And I'd like everybody to feel good. That makes for a great Old Navy commercial, right? That's what I want. I want the first coming to be about peace on earth and everyone feeling happy. That's what I want.

Okay. It's a very different sentence if you put the "s" at the end of this. Then it becomes a genitive-case noun and it reads, "upon earth peace"—but let me qualify—"in or among men or people who are pleasing to God." Now the first coming looks very selective about the beneficiaries of the coming of Christ. It doesn't make for a good Old Navy commercial, right? It doesn't really help us with selling, you know, Coke or Pepsi. This is—now it's—oof—okay, this sounds salvific. This sounds redemptive. This sounds like it's that spiritual salvation thing all over again.

Okay. Now here's the deal—and even if you know some Greek, and a lot of you, you know, you've banged around the block a few times in the Christian life; you study a little Greek, and some of you go to school, you'll learn some Greek—or you've taught yourself. That's great. Here's what you don't know, even if you studied Greek, perhaps: when you go back in the old manuscripts, it's a lot different as it looks on paper—on the papyrus—than it looks in our printed New Testaments. For us, we're thinking, how could you miss the sigma? It's huge, right? I mean, it's a big letter; it sits there right there.

Well, if you go back to the third, fourth century, these manuscripts, when you read them, the style of the day was what we call a "lunar sigma." It's a certain way to put a sigma if it's at the end of a sentence. And really, all it is is a comma—"lunar" because it looks like the moon, a little crescent moon. It's just a tiny little mark above the line—near the top of the neck of the former character—you just put a little squiggly line there. It's just a little breathing mark, a little comma. It's like an apostrophe only going the wrong direction. Okay. That's what we call the lunar sigma. It's kind of a superscript, lunar, small, tiny sigma. Right? It's easy to miss.

Okay, here's the theory that everyone—99% of people who study ancient manuscripts—we look at those, and we say, clearly that little breathing mark there went away. I mean, something happened; it was at the end of the line; it looked like a speck of dust. I don't know. But the copies, when they started to be made in certain regions of the ancient world, left that sigma off because it was such a



tiny little mark on the page. And we developed an entire body of manuscripts—later manuscripts, tenth, eleventh, twelfth century manuscripts—in the Byzantine Empire, where they were still reading and writing Greek, that left the sigma off. And when you leave the sigma off, you get a very different message from the angels: “Peace on earth, everybody! No more war! Everybody get along!” And, “I want everybody to feel good—Christ can make everybody happy.”

Okay. Not the case. I mean, you can ask anybody who studies any ancient languages, and if they know anything about the history of the—what we call—transmission of the text, and we’re all certain that sigma belongs there. It got dropped off, and the early manuscripts all have it. And when they have it, we go, “Oh, clearly it was there, and it got missed.”

So what’s the proper reading of the text? Proper reading of the text is the first one, which doesn’t feel as good, and it is very specific about who has peace. And when you look at what it means in light of the context of who gets peace with God when they’re saved—when his favor rests on them—you start realizing this is about vertical peace with God, not horizontal peace on earth among us. That’s different. In other words, the “men” are those—the “people” are those whom God saves. They get peace this way with God. It isn’t “peace on earth, goodwill to men”—two different things. Very small letter—very important for us to have that.

And most translations do. The only two translations you’re going to find in the bookstore that are going to have it—if they still carry an old 1611 King James Bible—are going to be the King James Bible and the New King James Bible, that bases its text on the Old King James, which based its text—if you really want some history on this, and stop me at any point if this gets too confusing and historical—on Erasmus’s text that preceded the King James Bible by a couple hundred years. And we have that text being made there in Cambridge by Erasmus on some very, very late Greek Byzantine manuscripts.

What’s the point? Everybody making translations from that time put all the manuscripts on the table that were available and recognized, “Oh, the sigma was missing. Sigma needs to be here, because look at most of the old manuscripts—all have the sigma there.” Therefore, every translation that you buy today is going to read something like this—here’s your ESV: “On earth peace among those with whom he’s pleased.” New American Standard: “On earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.” They all take this as a genitive noun, not a nominative noun: “On earth peace among men in whom he is well pleased.” “On earth peace among people with whom he is pleased.” “Peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.” I mean, it’s boring, right? “On earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.” All saying the same thing. However you want to translate it, it translates something like this.

Therefore, what I'm saying is, the songs are wrong. And if you bought a Christmas card that said that, I'm sorry—next year you can do better, right? Pick a different set of Christmas cards. "Peace on earth, goodwill toward men" is not biblical. It may be nice, and the world likes it. That's not what the Bible said. It's not what the angel said. Why? Because Christ came to fix the vertical relationship with God on his first coming. You want to talk about horizontally fixing everything—that's the second coming. He'll fix it all then. It starts with judgment, and unfortunately it ain't gonna be good when he comes back the second time for those who have not made peace with God vertically.

Let me prove this to you—turn to Luke 12 real quick, and we'll leave this little grammar lesson behind us. Luke chapter 12. And I love the way one commentator puts this (I'll quote it): he says, "Now even those who cannot read Greek but are sound in doctrine know that *eudokias* (the genitive reading) is in line with biblical doctrine, because peace with God is the portion of those—and only those—whom God has graciously placed his favor." He gets that from just reading the rest of the Bible. We know this is—now look at this. Luke 12; drop all the way down to verse 49. You read the rest of the Bible—talking about being in line with sound doctrine—you recognize we can't possibly mean the first coming of Christ is about "peace on earth, goodwill to men." Why? Look what he says, verse 49: "I came to cast fire on the earth." Oh, no one put that on their Christmas cards, right? That didn't work. It's the wrong color scheme for Christmas. "I came to cast fire on the earth," Jesus said, "and would that it were already kindled." Right? He's gonna come for judgment—judgment of unrepentant sinners and people that don't have God's favor resting on them.

Verse 50: "I have a baptism to be baptized with." That's kind of his, you know, poetic euphemism for the cross. "I'm going to have to go through this terrible, fiery baptism, if you will, of the cross." That's the first coming, as Hebrews 9 says (that I quoted to you): to take care of sin—to bear the sins of many. "And how great is my distress until it is accomplished." Remember the garden scene—sweating so much, profusely; it was like his head was bleeding. That's not the color of the drops—just the drops coming off his head from perspiration because of the grief of thinking about the cross.

"Do you think," verse 51, "that I have come to give peace on earth?" Now, listen—go out on the patio between services, and while you're getting your doughnut and the other people are coming in, ask them that question. And the answer is going to be, certainly at Christmas time as you smile at them: "Well, of course he came to bring peace on earth! Why—peace on earth, goodwill to men!" Oh, Jesus answers the question clearly, does he not? Now you can smile smugly and say, "No. Wrong. Jesus did not come to bring peace on earth." "No, I tell you, but rather division."

What are you talking about? Does he come to bring division in our vertical relationship with God? No—no—no: peace, right, to men on whom his favor rests. But when it comes to making peace with people, in terms of God and you making peace, he creates some problems with those who don't have peace with God. That's a problem. It's conflict. And you know that conflict if you're a

true Christian here today. You know what it's like to stand up for and live for Christ in a world that doesn't.

“From now on,” he says, verse 52, “in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. They will be divided—father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law.” We get it—man, there's division in the family. Jesus is saying, “Why?” Because when you are one submitted to the lordship of Jesus Christ—living for the God with whom Christ made peace for you—it's going to create some problems even with those who do not have peace with God. That's a problem. It's conflict, even in the most intimate relationships you have—even in your family. For those who do not live under the lordship of Christ, it creates problems in your workplace, in the conversations you have in the lunchroom—it's gonna create conflict.

Right—one more: Luke 21. We're in Luke 12—just invert those numbers. Luke 21. Let's go to Luke chapter 21. One more thing, just to make sure you know that everything's right on schedule here in God's big picture. He says this—look at verse 9, Luke 21:9—“When you hear of wars and tumults”—sounds like a disease, but you understand what tumults are, right? The clamoring, the posturing, the political posturing, the harsh rhetoric—when you hear all that that's related to warfare—“do not be terrified; for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once.” See the valley between the first advent and the second advent? It's going to be a broad, broad valley. And we're still waiting. It's two thousand years.

Right? This is verse 10: “Then he said to them, ‘Nation will rise against nation’”—in the valley here between the advents you're going to have a lot of nations fighting other nations—“and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake.” Conflict in our relationships—those who do not submit their lives to the lordship of Christ, those who are not saved by Christ. And in the world, conflict between nations—political posturing and tumults between nations—and bad stuff in nature: earthquakes, famines, droughts, pestilence. Wow. “I came to bring peace on earth”? Not now. Not now.

He came for thirty-three years to solve the sin problem by living in your place and dying in your place—paying the debt. And now there's a wait, as things play themselves out. Now I'm in this gap between the first coming and the second coming. I do not expect during this period of time there to be peace on earth and goodwill toward men. What I'm concerned about is—whatever that peace is he was talking about—that would be important. So look at number two on your outline as we go back to Luke chapter 2—jot this down: we need to make peace with God. That's the peace that we're talking about—not peace with each other (although that would be nice, and one day we'll have it with everybody on the planet). But right now we're talking about, when the angels

announced the first coming of Christ, you need to have peace with God. You need to make peace with him.

What does that mean? I'm glad you've asked. Colossians 1. I mean, you know the text. It says, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he's pleased." I want God to be pleased with me, and I want peace with God. I think that sounds like something I need. It is something I need. And it's something that you need.

Verse 21 introduces an important biblical word here in verse 22. But verse 21 is the context: "And you"—Colossians 1:21, are you with me on this?—"who were once alienated and hostile in mind..." There's something about my relationship with God from the beginning of my conception: I am not at peace with God. I am, according to this text, alienated—we're not at peace, we're not at one. We're strained here in our relationship—and hostile. As a fact, the things I think aren't even in keeping with that God. Why? Because God, as we learn from the beginning of the Bible, is a holy being, and I unfortunately am an unholy being. And those are polarizing personalities. And it's the ultimate odd couple, right? Klugman and Randall—that dates me, I understand that—but remember? Some of you know what I'm talking about; you're just too tired, I guess, and old to smile and affirm me in this—but the odd couple, right? (There you go. Thank you.) God is holy. I am not. That means that what I do grates against God, you know—and that's the old "odd couple" concept, right? He doesn't like the way that I do things. Why? Because he's holy and perfect, and I'm not—I'm sinful. As a matter of fact, the things that I'm doing, he says—he calls—evil.

Verse 21: "You were alienated, hostile in mind, doing evil deeds"—not by the Channel Seven definitions, right? I'm talking about by God's definitions. He saw my actions as unacceptable, as evil. "But now," if you are a Christian, verse 22, "he has"—here's the key word—"reconciled..." You want a more biblically rich Bible word for "peace"? Here it is: reconciled—made peace between the alienated parties. "He has reconciled us"—how?—"in the body of his flesh by his death..." When he died, the payment was paid; the debt was paid off "...in order to present" me "before God holy and blameless and above reproach before him."

No matter what you say about Mike Fabarez right now, here's the deal: my life, as Paul said (I know this is poetic), is "hidden in Christ." In other words, his life now is attributed or credited to my life, and my sin was credited to him when his body on a cross died. Everything that was meant for me—take you to the next chapter, chapter two—says it way better than I can say. Colossians chapter two, look at verse 13: "And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh" (one of the themes he's talking about in that text—another time for that), "God"—when I was dead—"made me alive together with him." This is Colossians 2:13. "Having forgiven us all of our trespasses by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands..." Right? Liars should be treated this way. Thieves should be treated this way. Adulterers should be treated this way. Cheaters should be treated this way. The wages of sin is death. I mean, depending on the sin, there's a penalty for it. That's how it works. "And the Bible says that record

was cancelled in your life and mine with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.” The debt is relieved because Christ died the death you and I should have died.

You remember that whole discussion—if you remember the story at Easter (or Good Friday)—where they’re deciding what to put over Christ’s head on the cross? They didn’t know what to do. Why? Because that’s where they put the charge. If you were an insurrectionist, a robber, a murderer, a rapist—whatever—put that above your head while they crucified you so that you could teach your kids: “This is what happens to rapists; look at him—he’s being crucified in the city square—or outside the city gates, in the case of Jerusalem.” That’s how they did it in Jerusalem. So with Jesus, what are they going to put? Remember—they didn’t know what to put, so what did they do? “King of the Jews.” They put that on there. The Jewish leaders didn’t like that; Pilate said, “What I’ve written, I’ve written—just leave it.” Wrote it in several languages, but put that over his head. They didn’t have a charge against him. Why? Because he was sinless. He didn’t do anything wrong. The Bible says from God’s perspective he took everything that you did that was wrong—every evil deed that you did—and nailed it to the cross.

Now, I know this does not play well with moderns who say, “Can’t you just forgive?” I mean, that would be the nice thing to do—someone wrongs you; what does God want you to do? Forgive them—forgive! But you don’t have to pound them in the alley—or pound someone else in the back alley—to forgive someone else. But see, that’s not how it works with the legal demands of the law. That’s not how it works. When there is a debt that is racked up against the righteousness and holiness of the Creator, it would be like me running for judge—“I’m going to be a judge in Orange County, a superior court judge; vote for me. And here’s my platform—vote for me: everyone goes free.” You’ve heard me say this before. Everybody goes free. “I will pardon everybody.” Why? Because I’m a nice guy—that’s why. I’m a loving guy. And because I’m a loving guy, if someone murders and kills and rapes—doesn’t matter what they do; I don’t care if it’s a parking ticket—free; if it’s rape—free; kidnapping—free; kill a lot of people—free. Why? Because I’m loving.

That’s your pathetic view of God, some of you. You think God does that. God cannot do that, or God would not be just. And if God is not just, he’s not good. And if God is not good, he’s not God. God is good, and he’s a God of justice. And therefore he looks at the things that you do that you rationalize and justify in your own mind, and he says, “That needs payment.” How in the world is he going to love you—reconcile you, make peace with you, embrace you, bring you into his kingdom and say you’re his child—if all of that debt is against your life? He takes that debt; he nails it to a cross on a thirty-three year visit on the first advent so that Christ could bear the sins of many and say to you, “Forgiven.” That’s peace with God. I want that.

How do I get it? Glad you asked. Chapter one again—Colossians 1. I didn’t finish reading this paragraph, you might have noticed. We ended with—he said, “Alienated,” verse 21; “hostile in mind; evil deeds.” Verse 22: “Reconciled in the body by the flesh—by his death, in order to present me holy, blameless”—that’s what I want. I want to be above reproach in God’s eyes. I want

forgiveness of all my debts. How do I get that? Verse 23: “If indeed you continue in the faith...” Right? This whole transaction is something you are signing up for—committing your faith. And you’re going to continue in this: “I’m going to believe it; I’m going to trust it; I’m going to put my confidence in it—stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel”—the hope of the *euangelion*—the good news. And what’s the good news? You’ve sinned; you deserve God’s punishment; but instead you’re going to trust that that transaction on the cross paid the penalty for you. And I’m not going to be moved from that hope. I’m going to sit here today as a healthy adult; I’m going to believe that. And when I’m on my deathbed, and I’m dying, and I’m about to cross the threshold into eternity, I’m going to believe that then. I’m not going to be moved from that. My commitment is to hold steadfast and stable, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you’ve heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven.” And Paul is out there doing his part to make sure everybody hears about it.

I want you to have that peace with God. That’s why Jesus came—not to give you, right, this wonderful picture of the Norman Rockwell Christmas and “peace on earth, goodwill to men.” That’s later. Right now: peace with God. Do you have it?

Right—you can fit in down here, because you don’t want all the division and all the uproar of people, you know, wagging their finger at you as some righteous Joe and “holier-than-thou” and “Jesus freak” or whatever. You can seek peace and not have the disruption of your peace with the world. The problem is you’ll never make peace with God. You need to make peace with God by repenting of your sins and putting your trust in this Christ that said he came to die for you with the first advent.

By the way, I thought Christmas was about joy. It is about joy. And here’s the joy—you can jot it down if you’d like; we’ll get to studying this—maybe, Lord willing, eventually in Luke 15 sometime. But in Luke chapter 15, Jesus tells three stories—three stories of things that were lost: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. Remember that great chapter in the Bible? Starting with the first one—and that’s all I have time to reference here—but they’re all about joy: the joy of having something that’s dead now be alive; something that was counted as lost now being found; something that was alienated, if you will—separated—now being reunited and reconciled.

And the first one—he gives us the picture of the sheep. And he says the shepherd, if there’s one alienated from the flock—straying, going its own way (to use the terms of Isaiah 53)—the shepherd goes after that sheep and seeks that lamb and embraces that lamb and brings him—here’s how the text puts it—puts it on his shoulders (the shepherd does). He comes back to the flock, and here’s how it’s put. And he says to his friends when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, and he says, “Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.” “Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine persons that don’t need repentance.”

What's the point? We can sit here today and say, "We've all made peace with God." But if someone today, because of the first advent of Christ, puts their trust in the life, death, and the verification—which was called the resurrection—of Christ, the Bible says you'll make peace with God today. And in heaven they'll rejoice. And if we're smart, the rest of the flock will rejoice as well, because there's nothing more important than that.

Now, you're still going to die of cancer, right? There's still going to be wars in the world. This is a very encouraging Christmas sermon, I understand, at this point. There are still going to be troubles in your relationships. You'll still have financial messes. There'll be all kinds of problems. Why? Because the second advent isn't here yet. But you'll make peace with God—and that's what matters. Because one day, as Jesus said—we put it this way last week—he said, "Don't worry about this life and all this stuff down here, because it is the Father's good pleasure to give you," little flock—I love the way he calls them a "little flock"—he says, "to give you the kingdom." Now, it's not here yet, but it's coming. And when it comes, if you're part of the flock—if you're not alienated, if you're one of us, if you're a person that puts his trust in Jesus Christ—the kingdom is going to come and you're going to be ushered into the presence of God. And the Bible says then we're going to see a lot of the merriment that we'd hoped would really characterize life with "peace on earth and goodwill to men." That's not what the angel said about the first coming. But the Bible had a lot to say about the second coming, and the second coming is where our hearts should go whenever we think about the first coming.

Now jot this down on your outline. Now, I know you're going to object if you're a good exegete here this morning—or even a good expositor, or a critic of expositors (which we seem to have a lot of)—you're going to—sorry—you're going to say (you'll get that later): "This is not what the text says." But jot it down anyway, and see if I can't show you that it's a good application of our text—number three on your outline, jot this down: confidently anticipate the second advent. Confidently anticipate the second advent—the second coming.

Now you see verses next to that on your worksheet—verses 15 through 21. That takes us back, finally, to the rest of Luke 2. Let's look at the rest of Luke 2. And as you scan through that there—Luke chapter 2, verses 15 through 21—that's our text for the morning. You're going to say, "I don't see anything in there about the second coming—nothing. This sermon is a major fail, because it ain't about that, Pastor Mike—heretic." Now listen—you need to understand this. I recognize the angels don't start talking about the second coming in this text. But you'll find a paradigm here if you just will keep your thinking cap on for just a few more minutes in this message. And if you watch what's going on in this text, you're going to see a paradigm in this text that is perfectly applicable to where we live between the advents, and you're going to see something here—by the way the shepherds respond—that shows us a great lesson in how we as Christians, living between the advents, are going to confidently anticipate the fulfillment of the second promise.

Okay—with all that said, let’s read it and look at the text carefully. We’ll read it and then go back through it. Verse 15: “When the angels went away”—they’re done with the whole thing—“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he’s pleased”—the angels go away; they go back into heaven. “And the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.’ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.” Now, they had learned two things about the child (we’ll look at that in a second), but they told them (I’m assuming here the first thing they were told; more on that in a minute). “And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.” Apparently there were other people standing around, and they’re like—everyone going, “Wow, this is amazing,” except for Mary, verse 19: “But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.” Now we’ll see why in a second. “And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus”—Yeshua, Joshua, “Savior,” “God saves,” “the Lord saves”—“the name given by the angel to Mary before he was conceived in the womb.”

Now let’s build a paradigm based on what the shepherds did that may show us exactly how we are to live between the advents. There were two things that were promised. Now we’re going to have to go to the broader context, because we split this text up, but recognize—in your Bibles, look back at verse 11. In verse 11, one of the promises regarding the baby was that he was going to be called “Savior,” “Christ,” and “Lord.” Savior, Christ, Lord—that’s the baby. There’s a baby there; he’s the Savior; he’s Christ; he’s the Lord. Then in verse 12, there’s another promise. And the promise was that they were going to find this baby in strips of cloth, lying in a feeding trough—verse 12.

Now, in verse 15 they say, “Let’s go and see the thing that has happened.” They believe; they acted on the second promise, which was, “I think we can find this baby, and the baby is going to be there just like the angel told us.” They believed the second promise, and they went to see this thing that had happened. And what had happened? A baby was born, lying in a feeding trough. Okay.

They discovered when they got there in verse 16—they found the baby lying in the manger, just exactly as the angel said. They discovered that the second promise was true. What was the second promise? You’re going to see a baby—strips of cloth—lying in a manger. They then relayed the first promise to Mary and Joseph and whoever was standing by. In verse 17, “they made known the saying…” Well, what saying? Now I don’t think it’s as consequential they’d show up and say, “Hey everybody, an angel told us we’d see the baby lying in a feeding trough just like he is. There he is in the feeding trough.” That’s obvious. I’m assuming what they did here—and clearly that’s part of what they told them—and I’d say it’s the focus of the discussion: “Hey, this baby is Savior, Christ, and Lord.” Right? They told that to the people standing by—that’s what the angel told us.

Okay. Then they returned to work praising God for two things. Look at this now in verse number—what is this—verse number 20: for the things that they had heard and the things that they had seen. Now, what is it that they saw? All they could see with their eyes is a little crying baby in a feeding trough with strips of cloth around it. That’s what they saw. What had they heard that they couldn’t see? They heard that this baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a feeding trough was Savior of Israel, the Christ of Israel, the Messiah, and the Lord—the Lord of all. That is what they believed, and they relayed that.

Now, they went back to work, rejoicing in what they had seen and what they had heard. They rejoiced in the promise that was verified (promise number two), and they also rejoiced in promise number one, which was not verified yet. How could I possibly know that this baby is Savior, Christ, and Lord? There’s no signs of it. A lot of babies are born in Bethlehem. I realize that’s the city that the Messiah was going to come from, but I have no signs that he’s the Messiah. He did no miracles for me lying in that manger. I don’t know for sure, with any verifiable evidence, that he is Savior, Christ, and Lord. All I can tell you is: I see that God delivered on the first promise, which in this case (chronologically) was the second promise—that I’d find him in strips of cloth lying in a feeding trough. God kept the first promise; I trust that he is going to deliver on the second promise.

Okay, you see the paradigm now? Here’s what we’re doing: As we sit between the advents, you and I have the amazing opportunity to read the Old Testament text about all the promises about the coming of Christ. We read about the coming of Christ, and it happened exactly as the hundreds of prophecies about the Messiah—they all came true exactly as the Bible said they would. And when we look back at that historically, we have concrete, verifiable, rational, reasonable reasons to put my confidence that God kept the first promise about the first advent. Right? Now I sit between the advents and I say, “Well, wait a minute—where’s this kingdom? Where’s the peace on earth? Where’s the no crying, no mourning, no death, no pain, no disease? Where’s all that?” Well—not here yet. That’s coming with the second advent. I’m between the advents, waiting with anticipation for the fulfillment of so much so that I can rejoice and glorify God in something that hasn’t happened yet. That’s the paradigm of the shepherds, and it’s one for us to sit back and say, “Great, I want to be like the shepherds—looking at something credible in the past to give me confidence about a promise yet fulfilled in the future.”

Now, I said I can tell you why Mary treasured this up while everyone else was scratching their head. Look back in chapter one—Luke chapter one. Gabriel, you remember, had reiterated to Mary the same things that the angel had said to the shepherds. What were the shepherds told? “Savior, Christ, and Lord.” Mary put this together, too, in her heart, because that’s what she had been told. Verse 31—Luke 1:31: “And behold, you will conceive in your womb”—this is the angel now to Mary—“and bear a son, and you shall call his name Yeshua”—Joshua, “Savior.” “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High”—there’s the idea of “the Lord”—“and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David”—there’s the Messiah aspect, right? He’s reigning—that’s lordship—“and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever.” And he’s not just going to reign over this ethnic group of Israelis and have his kingdom—how far is it going to spread? “Of his kingdom there will be no end.” Universal lordship over everything.

Now Mary sees the shepherds come—the working-class, minimum-wage workers—who say, “The angel appeared to us and gave us a promise that we’d find the baby in the feeding trough wrapped in swaddling clothes.” Now, when they get there, they say, “And here’s what they told us—the angel told us that he would be Savior, Christ, and Lord.” Everybody standing around goes, “What? This baby—Savior, Christ, and Lord?” Mary goes back nine months and says, “It’s exactly what he told me.” Right? He would be called Yeshua—the Savior. He would fulfill the promises that were given in the Old Testament regarding the son of David—the Christ, the Messiah, the anointed one. And he would rule—how far would his rule go and extend?—over the entire world. That’s looking to the second advent.

Three words: “Savior,” “Christ,” and “Lord.” All of those are important. The first one: “Savior”—that’s what he did in the first advent—provided salvation and vertical peace. “Christ”—he fulfilled the promises; that’s the verification that he was who he said he was. “Lord”—I know he’s Lord in your heart, but he’s not Lord of the world yet because the kingdoms of the world have yet to be given to him and made “the kingdom of our Lord” (the Father) “and of his Christ,” his anointed one, Jesus. And he’s not reigning yet forever and ever. He hasn’t—as the Book of Revelation says—taken his great power and begun to reign. He’s going to, though. That’s the last phase.

One passage—let me, in a very Christmassy passage, go to Isaiah chapter 9. Let me show you all this together. Because a lot of you were really disappointed—you wanted your offering back when the sermon started—because you thought, “Listen, man, I want peace on earth.” Great. I do too. Here’s the deal, though: I know the second coming has to usher that in. Right now I’m going to shoot for peace, work for peace, vote for peace—all of that. Right? But here’s the deal: I understand that the coming of Christ came in two installments. And oftentimes those two installments were seen sandwiched together. And when the prophets talked about peace, they talked about it vertically and horizontally.

And in this great text you’ll see it begins with horizontal peace in verse 5—Isaiah 9:5—“For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult”—ah, there’s our line—“and every garment rolled in blood”—someone’s died; they’ve rolled it up; someone’s injured in war—“will be burned as fuel for the fire.” What does that mean? No more of that. No more warriors; no more boots for warfare; no more dead, wounded soldiers—no more. Why? “For to us a child is born.” Okay—this is Advent One. “For to us a son is given” (that’s verse 6), “and the government shall be upon his shoulder”—which is not quite yet, right? We’re between the advents—“and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor” (which he may provide some of now for us), “Mighty God” (he certainly is that), “Everlasting Father”—this is the incarnation; this is not just, you know, God’s best prophet—this is God incarnate—“Prince of Peace” (both vertically and horizontally). “Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end”—do you think Mary, who went to Sabbath school, knew exactly what the angel Gabriel was saying? “The increase of his government—there will be no end”—it will extend forever—“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.” God’s going to do that. He’s going to bring this about at the second coming: in the first installment to take care of your sin problem—vertical peace with God; in the second coming, to establish real peace—lasting peace—on earth when he takes the throne. And unfortunately (I didn’t mention much of this today, though I did mention it and we referenced it in Luke chapter 12), it begins with judgment for those who didn’t make peace with God.

So I urge you—I exhort you—to make peace with God, because our time is running out. Now, you’re sitting here on—what is this—December 23rd, which means you survived the Mayan apocalypse, did you not? I’m so glad to see you; you look well—and you made it. Praise God for that. And last year you survived Harold Camping’s, you know, apocalyptic musings. And twelve years ago we all survived Y2K. The world was supposed to end then, I’m sure, as we were told. And some of you can remember this—from 1997—the Hale-Bopp comet (remember that? Barely, right? Because it was nothing). And then I remember a book back in 1988 I was forced to read—it was called *88 Reasons for the End of the World in 1988*. Complete waste of my time. Yet people were giving it to me—sure, the world...

Here’s the deal about all these people making these predictions: Number one, their batting average is really bad. They don’t do well in making predictions—they should come up with something else to do. But when I tell you here, as a messenger and a preacher of the Bible, that God has promised to bring this world to an end, okay, I’m speaking for one whose batting average is perfect. He’s established his batting average by the first advent, and he promises the second advent. The good news is when he left, the Bible says when he left, the angel said, “As you saw him leave, you’re going to see him return.” He’s coming back. The bad news for the curious among us is: he said, “The time”—not going to tell you the times and seasons—the *kairos* and *chronos*; *chronos*, the amount of time, and the particular specifics about it—those have been set by the Father in his own authority. Not going to give you those.

But as for you—you remember, I’m quoting now from Acts chapter one—as for you, there’s something you’ve got to do. You get right with God; you get the Spirit of God—the Spirit is going to come upon you. You’re going to be my witnesses. Now, I’ve got something to do in the valley between the advents here, and it is that you’ll be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. You’ve got a job to do—to get as many people as possible to take advantage of the peace that is available to us as God’s favor is poured out and lavished upon us, as the Bible says, for those who respond in repentance and faith to the gospel. That’s our job. While the world continues with famines and pestilence and wars and tumults and rumors of wars and all the rest, we’re going to focus on our job, and that is to see people reconciled to Christ.

And if you’re not, we urge you here today—the majority of us, which I hope do have peace with God—to get right with God today. We don’t know when it’s going to be done, but there’s going to be a trumpet blast, and the Bible says it’s going to be done—there’ll be no more time to get right with God. And for those of us that have made peace with God, we’re going to be ushered into the



kingdom. That's a good day for us. I hope you're ready for it. If not, today's the day for you. There's no aisles to walk, no hands to raise, no forms to fill out. This is something you and God do business. I don't want to manipulate—there's nothing you could do. We're not gonna sing "Just As I Am." There's nothing like that that takes place. It's you knowing that you are not at peace with your Maker. It's you knowing that a lot of years have gone by with you justifying your sin, thinking that it's okay for you to go your own way. "I'm not evil"—but the Bible says all of us like sheep have gone astray. The problem is our own will—our own way. We want to do it our way. The Bible says God is the God of the universe; we do things his way. And that's the only place that we can find what God has intended for us, and that's peace. That's the kind of internal unity—reconciliation with our Maker.

I urge you today, on behalf of everybody who knows what it is to be at peace with Christ, to get reconciled to God.

Let's pray.

God, even now, in a moment of prayer, I know it can be a sacred moment for people to pray to you in a way they never have before—without their fists clenched, or without something being tucked away behind their back—coming to you with everything on the table, saying, "Here I am. This is my life. I recognize that what the preacher says is true—that you and I are not at peace. We're not unified. You've been good to me—that's clear. No one in this room can say that God hasn't been gracious and good to us. But that connection, that surrender the Bible talks about—that recognizing that you have to be God and we are not. You're not gonna be our co-pilot; you have to be the pilot."

God, I pray that for those people today might be a day of recognizing that and being able to say to you, with real, genuine, biblical faith, "I repent. I want to follow you. I put my trust in you and recognize my need for the cross. I realize this is about what you've accomplished for me through the work of your Son."

And then, God, that's the joy that we celebrate as we commemorate the first coming of Christ. That's what the first coming was all about. And I pray there might be some today that experience the real things that the angel spoke of that day—that you would provide for us something that would make us right with you.

And then, God, may we take our job seriously. As Acts 1 said, you're coming back; but in the meantime, we've got to be your witnesses. We've got to testify; we've got to go out; and we've got



to persuade and convince and plead with people—out of love for them—that they be reconciled to you as well.

So God, empower us and encourage us as we celebrate and think back about the profundity of what it meant that Christ came to this world to save sinners like us.

In Jesus' name I pray, amen.