

I.N.I.

Fourth Sunday in Advent
Dec. 21, 2014
Romans 1:1-7

In Christ Jesus, Who by God's grace was sent into this world to bring **PEACE** between our Holy Father and us sinners, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Grace and peace to you. Do we all know how important those two terms are? Without God's grace we would have no peace and without peace we would have no future but eternal death in hell and eternal separation from God. But thanks be to God that every sermon can begin with this greeting and blessing: **Grace and peace be unto you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.**

No greeting or blessing could be more appropriate as we begin a sermon study on God's Word. The purpose of every Christ-centered sermon is to proclaim and to bestow upon the hearers, the blessings of God's grace and peace through Christ. Therefore what more suitable words could be chosen than the readings for this morning—from Isaiah 7; from Matthew 1 and these words from Romans 1 to help prepare our hearts to receive with thanksgiving the gift of God's Son, the baby Jesus, lying in Bethlehem's manger.

In the Christmas story—after the angel told the shepherds the **GOOD NEWS** that the Savior, Christ the Lord, was born in the city of David and that they would find the babe lying in a manger we are told that suddenly the entire sky was filled with angels who were praising God and saying: "**GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON EARTH PEACE, GOODWILL TOWARD MEN!**"---**ON EARTH PEACE!**

One may wonder about that proclamation. On earth peace! Where? Certainly not in Iraq or Afghanistan. Certainly not in Syria. Certainly not in the many areas of the world where there is sectarian violence—the many feuding and warring nations of Africa and South East Asia. The Islamist Jihadists certainly haven't stopped their terrorist attacks. Al Qaeda and Isis haven't signed a Peace Treaty.

But there is **PEACE** in Iraq and Afghanistan and Africa and Southeast Asia if the Good News of God's Grace in Christ is proclaimed there.

This morning we are going to see from Paul's opening words of his letter to the Romans that there is **PEACE** on earth—God's **PEACE** in Christ. We have entitled our theme:

PEACE ON EARTH—BY THE GRACE OF GOD!

1) We see that God's Grace sent the world a Savior

Paul states in these first verses that he was called to be an Apostle, separated—set apart—to the Gospel of God **WHICH HE PROMISED BEFORE THROUGH HIS PROPHETS IN THE HOLY SCRIPTURES, CONCERNING HIS SON JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD.**

Paul is assuring the Christians in Rome that he was not proclaiming a new or different Gospel. What he proclaimed was the same Gospel that all of the Old Testament prophets proclaimed. These prophets recorded the Gospel promises before hand as we heard in our first Scripture reading from Isaiah who wrote some 750 years before Christ's time. Someone has counted 333 prophecies of the Messiah in the Old Testament. Over 300 promises concerning the Christ and the Good News of man's salvation given before His coming---prophecies that clearly pointed to and promised a Savior who would come to take man's place, be placed under God's Law and suffer the punishment for our sins, rise again and ascend into heaven. Its all there in prophetic words—God's grace promising to send a Savior.

Secondly Paul says God's grace sent the world a Savior who was **DESCENDED FROM KING DAVID.** We read the rest of Paul's greeting: **WHO WAS BORN OF THE SEED OF DAVID ACCORDING TO THE FLESH.**

Yes, Jesus was true man, truly human just like you and me. Wednesday night we are going to celebrate a real birth; for Jesus was really born over 2,000 years ago just like you and I were born, only in more desperately poor circumstances. He was physically descended from David,

for Mary was of David's line. His birth was the fulfillment of the first Gospel promise given in the Garden of Eden. Jesus is that Seed of the woman who came to crush the serpents—Satan's—head—his authority over mankind. From Scripture we can trace the human descent of Jesus from Adam and Eve through King David all the way to Mary. Jesus is true man in every sense of the word, except He had no sin.

But as we know Jesus is not only true man He is also true God. Paul tells us in our text: **AND DECLARED TO BE THE SON OF GOD WITH POWER ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT OF HOLINESS, BY THE RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD.** Jesus proved His Godhead by His miracles throughout His life, but the ultimate proof He gave of His divinity was His resurrection from the dead. Christ had said, **DESTROY THIS TEMPLE AND IN THREE DAYS I WILL RAISE IT UP AGAIN**—and He did! He proved Himself to be God the Son by His resurrection back to life thereby assuring all who believe in Him of their resurrection. Scripture says: **JESUS CHRIST...HAS ABOLISHED DEATH AND BROUGHT LIFE AND IMMORTALITY TO LIGHT THROUGH THE GOSPEL.**

Yes, God's grace sent the world a Savior who was promised throughout the Old Testament; who was a real human being descended from King David but who also was true God proved to be that by His resurrection from the dead.

And what is the result of God's grace sent to this world in the person of Jesus—**PEACE**—a oneness with God! No more is their hostility, warfare, discord, separation between God and His special creature—man.

Because of our sins there was no peace with God. Adam and Eve found that out in Eden after they sinned and their guilt caused them to hide from God. They were now afraid of God and ashamed of themselves. They no longer had a oneness and perfect harmony with their Creator. They were now Satan's children, slaves to iniquity, spiritually dead in their sins and even enemies of their God.

And that is exactly how we all were conceived and born—spiritually blind to God, spiritual enemies of God and spiritually dead in our sins. No peace, no harmony, no oneness. But now:

II: God's Peace comes through that Savior

Paul tells us in our text that he was called to proclaim this **PEACE**. As a willing slave to Christ, as an apostle, as one set apart from others he was given this call to proclaim this great news of peace and harmony between the holy God and sinful human beings.

But Paul's calling was not to proclaim this to the Jews, but to the Gentiles. Paul received a special gift of God's grace when he was called by Christ. It was Jesus Himself who called Paul and by the Holy Spirit's work on his heart Paul was turned from the persecutor of Christians into the Apostle and peace-proclaimer of Christ. It was pure grace!

Who would have been less worthy of such a call than Saul, the egotistical, self-righteous Pharisee who hunted down Christians to be arrested and put to death? But God's grace was sufficient to wash away all of Paul's sins even as His grace in Christ is sufficient to cleanse us from all of our sins as well.

Paul's apostleship was much like John the Baptist's ministry. It was not intended to glorify him but to show forth God's grace, to make Jesus' name known and glorified throughout the world. But Paul's calling was to the Gentiles, to call them to the obedience of faith. This means bringing them through the Gospel to a faith in Christ that produces in them a willingness and desire to serve and obey their Savior.

And that brings us to the last point of Paul's introductory words. You and I are among those Paul's Gospel has called to peace through faith. We have been called to be **SAINTS!** That word means—those set apart—set apart from the mass of sinful humanity as God's special people. When we are called by the Gospel to faith in Jesus we are saints; not because of any saintly conduct on our part, not because of any merit or worthiness in us; but because of what Christ has done for us: He has redeemed us, He has cleansed us and the Holy Spirit has set us apart from the rest of the unbelieving world. That is a saint!

We have this peace with God and are saints in God's eye because He took all of our sins and placed them upon His Son. All of His wrath and damnation we deserved He poured out on Jesus so that now in Christ we stand before God in this new relationship as sons and daughters of

God—at peace with our loving Heavenly Father. We can never say these words too often! That's not only what Christmas is all about, it is what Christianity is all about.

So there is **PEACE** in Iraq in the hearts of those Christian's living there who have been led to repent of their sins and believe in Jesus as their Savior. **PEACE** will reign in their hearts this Christmas even though there may be warfare in their land. They have a **PEACE** which no bullet, no mortar, no terrorist can take away from them.

Today there is **PEACE** around the world wherever the Gospel message of forgiveness and life is proclaimed in Jesus' name and people are brought by that proclamation to repent and believe in Jesus.

That is the wonderful **PEACE** that the angels spoke of to the shepherds;
the **PEACE** that Paul was called to proclaim throughout his life;
the **PEACE** that now rules and lives in our hearts and lives;
the **PEACE** that is bestowed upon us by the Holy Spirit when we read and hear His Word and partake of the Sacraments.

Paul doesn't say this here in our text, but we really don't need to be told. When we have been given such great news, when we have been told that we have **PEACE** with God, we cannot keep it to ourselves. We will need to; we will want to tell others.

We can do that today. We can invite and encourage our friends, neighbors, relatives and other loved ones to come to God's house Wednesday night to hear this message of **PEACE--PEACE ON EARTH—BY THE GRACE OF GOD!** And then follow up that invitation with more encouragements and more invitations to come and hear this Gospel, to read this saving message that alone can bring real **PEACE** to troubled souls and guilt ridden consciences.

Christ is the **PEACE-MAKER!** The only **PEACEMAKER** between God and man. Paul was called to proclaim that **PEACE** through Christ to the Gentiles of his day. And God has also called you and me to be **PEACE-PROCLAIMERS** by telling others of the birth, life, death and resurrection of the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ.

In His Sermon on the Mount Jesus said: **BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS, FOR THEY SHALL BE CALLED SONS OF GOD.** Only His children really know what this **PEACE** is all about.

Amen.