

## ***“CHRISTMAS PEACE”***

**Scripture: Luke 2:21-35**

One of our favorite Christmas greetings is “**PEACE**.” The Hebrew word is Shalom. The angels sang it to the shepherds, “Glory to God in the Highest and shalom on earth. Praise and peace go together, and they are often as ironic together today as they were then. **The angels sang of peace and Simeon said he could die in peace**, but a cynic might well have recalled that they were only words to a poor couple looking without success for a bedroom where they could have their baby. I doubt Joseph was feeling much peace. They are only words in a country controlled by a foreign army. They are only words in a time shortly before Herod would kill every child under 2 in Bethlehem. **Are they only words for us today?** (Afghanistan, poverty, war, nationalism, tribalism)

Yet peace or shalom was the joyous greeting in the chaotic world into which Jesus, God’s Son came. Luke tells us Jesus’ parents followed the law precisely in regards to their son. He was circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day. He was then presented at the temple since the law required that every firstborn male be consecrated to the Lord, along with an offering for his mother’s purification on the 40<sup>th</sup> day. We assume they were somewhat typical. This father was in his 30s, a very poor peasant from the town of Nazareth, along with his teenaged wife. They were too poor to offer a lamb, so they bought a pair of pigeons to offer instead.

In following the law they consecrated God incarnate to God. Then **an old man enters the scene**. In some room in some dark corner of Jerusalem he had spent his time studying God’s Word, constantly praying for the fulfillment of God’s promises for a Messiah to come. **He was a man who was constantly staying in touch with God**. And in response to his devotion God had promised him that he would not die until he saw the fulfillment of those promises, until he saw the Lord’s Christ. On this day perhaps he awoke like every other day, prepared to wait again. But this was different. He was led to the temple by the Holy Spirit to witness the fulfillment of thousands of years of promises. What he saw was on the surface not that unusual. Another poor young

couple from the back country making the trip to Jerusalem with their first born son. Was it just another faithful couple following the rules, but too poor to do it with much celebration? What the old man saw was a 6 week old baby who was the Messiah, the promised Son of God.

The old man approached, focused on the child and his young mother. After all that had happened Mary and Joseph must have been ready for just about anything, but what they heard here amazed them. It most likely frightened them. He took the child from her arms and held him with a joy built in so many years of waiting. Holding this child he praise God and concluded that he could now die in peace. Again, praise and peace together. The old man understood the task this child came to do – here is the salvation of God for the world, Jews and Gentiles alike.

**In amazement they listened**, then the old man, still holding the child saw clearly that his own people would not accept him, and that Mary would suffer greatly because of their rejection. We see the old man in careful awe hand the child back to his mother. *“I’ve seen him . God kept his promise. I can die in peace.”* **PEACE** – shalom -- that word that seem to conflict with everything he had just said. But does it?

**Peace is an too light a translation for SHALOM.** We usually think of peace as the absence of war, a time without conflict. But this is not an empty word, but rather a full one. **SHALOM speaks of God’s presence** that surpasses all circumstances around us. **Shalom** is God bringing comfort, salvation, a sense of well-being in knowing his love and that our salvation is secure. **This is shalom from God** – the **shalom** that Jesus brought on Christmas – a peace that fills us inside, a peace that says we can relax and take a deep breath and praise God with all of who we are. **Shalom** is the reality of our being reconciled to God through Jesus. We understand **Shalom** when we take in the truth that when we are united with Christ we are adopted as the children of God and heirs of eternal life with God. This is **shalom** that comes when we recognize the child in the manger in Bethlehem as the love of God reaching out to you and me.

The angels sang it. Simeon recognized it even as he saw the pain that would be created in Jesus’ suffering and death. This was **shalom** he could feel free to die with. **Shalom** – may God’s peace be yours this Christmas because you have seen the baby of Bethlehem, and because you know who he is and why he came. My prayer for each

one of you is that **shalom** may be yours.