

Christmas Eve 2017 Luke 2:14 final
Glory to God in the highest and Peace to God's people on earth!

We all long for a bit of peace.

There was a mother of two rambunctious 4 year old twin boys.

When one was sleeping, the other was climbing out of bed.
When one was playing quietly, the other was demanding a snack.

While one looked at books, the other was jumping on the sofa.

Never a dull moment. Never a quiet time to think.
Always, busy, busy rambunctious boys.

Christmas was coming. Mom had a lot to do.

To keep them busy so that she could vacuum the house, Mom sat the two down in the kitchen, with paper and glue and scissors and cotton and paint and everything they could possibly need to make their own Christmas cards for the family.

She was surprised when there were no interruptions while she finished her holiday cleaning and pleased when she found that they had made a whole pile of Christmas cards... and there, on the table, were also two paper lunch bags, all decorated with Christmas stars and glitter.

"Those are your presents Mom." they explained proudly.
"We made them all by ourselves."

Touched by their thoughtfulness, mom picked them up, carefully, and put them under the tree.

Soon it was Christmas Eve and the family gathered to unwrap their gifts.

"Open ours, open ours first," squealed the twins and of course Mom agreed.

She chose the first little bag and carefully opened it. ..looked inside and pulled out two cotton balls.

"They're for your ears, Mom." *"Oooh, well thank you."*

Then she reached for the second bag which was strangely soggy and left a little puddle of water on the floor.

"What could this be?"

"Open it, open it" Again she opened the bag carefully, reached in tentatively and pulled out... a dripping ...wet...box of defrosted frozen peas.

Completely stumped, she thought *"Now this is going to need some explanation?!?"* but instead she said *"Wow what a surprise!"*

Then, proudly the boys explained, *"We knew you would like it 'cause you always say 'just give me some peas & quiet.'"*

We all long for peace

That's why we have trudged through Wisconsin's snow and cold and gathered together to be warmed and comforted by the story of Christmas Peace born in a manger.

I want to thank all of you, who sent me your images of peace. I've been moved by how so many of you responded and hope that I haven't missed any sent in. If I did inadvertently miss one, please forgive me.

Other photos are from creative commons.

When I think of the whole sweep of the Bible, it is the story of God's people searching for peace:
Peace with God and with one another.

The Prophet Isaiah was living in a tumultuous time. There was rebellion, faction and rumor of wars. Isaiah looked to the future and promised a *Savior, a Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace*. Unfortunately, things only got worse and eventually Israel became captives of Babylon...and there was no Peace.

As Christians we understand the **birth of Jesus as a fulfillment of Isaiah's promise**. The angels proclaimed *Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors*. We think of a quiet barn bathed in moonlight and the baby Jesus sweetly sleeping in a manger.

However, if we peek beneath the Christmas card image, we recognize that **any birth so far from home, without family or midwife would be anything but peaceful**. Furthermore Bethlehem and Jerusalem were under Roman rule and the threat of King Herod pushed Mary and Joseph and Jesus to flee to Egypt, where they stayed as refugees for a number of years. For the Holy Family there was no Peace.

And today? Where is peace today?

What a year it has been.
Floods and hurricanes and wildfires.
Shootings and bombings, conspiracies and threats, wars and riots and uprisings. Peace is what we want and need and for what we pray and hope.
And yet peace is the very thing that seems to be missing.

We all long for Peace.

So what is the answer?
I've been kind of struggling with that question all week, because what I've been thinking about is world peace or inner peace or even being able to get along with everyone.

And the truth is, we live in a fallen world, and the world being what the world is, perfect peace, as in absence of war or pain or struggle or suffering is just not going to happen, at least not until the kingdom of God.

So what I am left with is the Christmas story, the one we all know: A baby born in a feeding trough, to lowly parents, shepherds, angels and maybe a few cows.
And we know that this is the story that tells us that God has decided to get personally involved, to become one of us and to be with us in a concrete way.

In the manger, he comes to us without power or honor or strength.
Later in his crucifixion he dies without power or honor or strength.

This is God's gift to us.
Perhaps, like the cotton and peas, a gift that needs some explaining, at least to the outsider.

However for people of faith **this is a story of God's love** given to us in a new way and this love will give us a new sense of peace.
The peace which surpasses all understanding.

It's not the kind of peace that beats our foes into submission, or to magically removes our struggles.

Christmas peace enables us to not only endure but even thrive in the midst of the world's challenges.

Nothing is beyond the reach of God's love.

I know a woman who walked with a loved one through a terrible crisis. There were no clear answers.

There were days and days of struggle...trying to control an uncontrollable situation.

Then one day she told me "*I'm finally at peace.*

I realize now that this is out of my hands.

God's got this one."...and God did.

This is what resting in God's love looks like.

This is what Christmas Peace looks like.

So if you arrived here tonight longing for peace

or if you have some uncontrollable issue in your life, maybe something that is overshadowing your Christmas, then I invite you to look to the manger and know that there lies God's promise to you and to a world in tumult:

Hear God's promise that **God is with us.**

Hear God's promise: *I've got this one!*

Hear the **good news of the Christmas gospel.**

Amen