

## **Messengers of Peace**

**December 25, 2015 | Anita Retzlaff**

Joy and Peace! For to you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. The angels' announcement that Jesus is born opens the floodgates of God's love for all time and makes 'peace on earth' a real option for all humanity. In the pronouncements of angels, shepherds and watchmen there is great and abiding joy. Merry Christmas to you all.

We gather this morning to give thanks to God for the creativity by which love comes into the world in a new and convincing way. A baby, once, long ago, is the means by which the world is given yet one more invitation to love and to be loved. I will be using the poetry of Ann Weems this morning in an attempt to capture that creative impulse on God's part to show us how we might live together well upon this earth. It is in poetry that we are blessed with the language of possibility, always opening new ways of seeing the things that we tend to regard as ordinary or expected.

### **In December Darkness**

The whole world waits in December darkness  
for a glimpse of the Light of God.

Even those who snarl "Humbug!"  
and chase away the carolers  
have been seen looking toward the skies.

The one who declared he never would forgive  
has forgiven,  
and those who left home  
have returned,

and even wars are halted,  
if briefly,  
as the whole world looks starward.  
In the December darkness  
we peer from our windows  
watching for an angel with rainbow wings  
to announce the Hope of the World.

The Hope of the World has come. "Peace on earth, goodwill to all people" is the ringing endorsement of the angels who announce the arrival of God-come-among-us on Christmas morning. This is good news of great joy because God has kept the promises made to Israel and to the faithful over the millenia. We have been given what we have been promised since that time as well; the presence and salvation of the Lord in new and wonderful ways! In contemporary words: Love wins!

The salvation of God comes to us - we just need to look around and grasp the good news stories that are unfolding across the face of the globe. There is more to life in 2015 than the bad news of war and fear and scarcity. There is a reason that the angel says, "Fear not!" Fear has become our default setting these days. Fear grabs the headlines and fear seems to dictate global foreign policy. This morning, however, the Good News of peace and possibility is our joy and reality. God remembers. God comes. God remembers the people. In many places refugees find new homes as countries all over the world respond to the Syrian catastrophe. There is room in our hearts for those who flee for their lives. We will make sure that there is room in the inn.

God remembers all nations on this Christmas morning. In our country Settlers and First Peoples approach a new era where truth and reconciliation forge a common path of

mutual cooperation and a shared hope for our future together. God remembers the creation and delivering on old promises breathes the Spirit of stewardship over the land and nations come together, planning ways to mitigate the disastrous effects of climate change. There are many good news stories amidst the clamour of unrest. The bright hope of peace on earth is undeterred in the face of those who say that all is lost. It is Christmas Day.

Messengers: sentries or watchmen, shepherds and angels greet us this morning through the age old testimony of scripture announcing that God is here. "All the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God." The whole world will take note: the hope of God is real and transformative. The whole world joins forces to turn things around where hope is recognized and real. As we hear from the prophet Isaiah the ruins of Jerusalem **rejoice** when Israel comes to realize that God has returned to them through hope. Such is our joy today as we celebrate renewed hope and possibility; not a passing optimism but rather a solid belief that God truly brings joy out of sorrow and shalom out of brokenness. That is why a baby in a manger makes sense. Love is born in obscurity and explodes into reality all over the places of hopelessness, pettiness, destruction and discontent.

The watchmen or sentinels, the guardians of our faith, are posted at the gates of our consciousness, at the edge of our awareness, around the perimeters of the global church and also within this congregation, reminding us that God redeems, restores and saves on this Christmas Day. "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace." Peace punctuates with light the places of darkness in our world. Peace on earth is the hope that we live into because of the salvation of our God. At the angels' announcement of the birth of Jesus, with our reconciliation at hand, the world is changed in ways that we do not even begin to imagine.

**Even Now**

*Even now we simply do not expect  
to find a deity in a stable.  
Somehow the setting is all wrong:  
the swaddling clothes too plain,  
the manger too common for the likes of a Savior,  
the straw inelegant,  
the animals, reeking and noisy,  
the whole scene too ordinary for our taste.  
And the cast of characters is no better.  
With the possible exception of the kings,  
who among them is fit for this night?  
the shepherds? Certainly too crude,  
the carpenter too rough,  
the girl too young.  
And the baby!  
Who expected a baby?  
Who expected the advent of God in a helpless child?  
Had the Messiah arrived in the blazing light of the glory  
of a legion of angels wielding golden swords,  
the whole world could have been conquered for Christ  
right then and there  
and we in the church—to say nothing of the world!—  
wouldn't have so much trouble today.  
Even now we simply do not expect  
to face the world armed with love.*

Salvation is a love relationship that we share with God and peace is what happens because of it. Do we ever really grasp what it means that we "face the world armed with love?" The Good News story for today, for 2015 and for all time is the paradox that the greatest power known to humanity came along side us knit together in the body of an infant. A further paradox is that each one of us is equipped to face the world's hatred, violence and vengeance armed, outfitted only with love. The most powerful force of all time is known and understood through us - love in action - peace on earth. So it is on Christmas Day that we embark on a journey with the birth of a baby that will take us all the way to Easter. But today we rejoice in a new beginning, the birth of a baby....

### **This Year**

I wonder if God comes to the edge of heaven each Advent  
and flings the Star into the December sky,  
and laughing with joy as it lights the darkness of the earth;  
and the angels, hearing the laughter of God,  
begin to congregate in some celestial chamber  
to practice their alleluias.

I wonder if there's some ordering of rank among the angels  
as they move into procession,  
the seraphim bumping the cherubim from top spot,  
the new inhabitants of heaven standing in the back  
until they get the knack of it.

(After all, treading air over a stable and announcing at the  
same time can't be all that easy!)

Or is everybody—that is, every “soul”—free to fly  
wherever the spirit moves?

Or do they even think about it?

Perhaps when God calls, perhaps they just come,  
this multitude of heavenly hosts.

Perhaps they come,  
winging through the winds of time

full of expectancy

full of hope

that this year

perhaps this year

(perhaps)

the earth will fall on its knees

in a whisper of “Peace.”

The call of God is compelling. The angels announce it. The shepherds answer it. When confronted with the heavenly host the shepherds move, with haste, to discover what God wants them to see and to know. Are we moved, compelled by God’s call to observe that which brings peace? Does Christmas Day give us a boost, a shot in the arm, a sense that in God's name we can go into another year as messengers of God's peace? We are such an integral part of the Good News story that the Bad News stories will not stop us from seeing the hope and the possibility in each and every difficult situation we encounter and in each and every person that we meet.

### **The Christmas Spirit**

The Christmas spirit  
is that hope  
which tenaciously clings  
to the hearts of the faithful  
and announces  
in the face  
of any Herod the world can produce  
and all the inn doors slammed in our faces  
and all the dark nights of our souls  
that with God  
all things still are possible,  
that even now  
unto us  
a child is born!

We are blessed this Christmas morning with the announcement of the angels and the enthusiasm of the shepherds. Let these words and images go with us from the manger into our homes. Let us be encouraged to be God's messengers of peace, facing the world armed with love. Let us ponder and praise, go with haste and without fear for today is Christmas Day! "Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth, PEACE."

AMEN