

Dear Waiting and Watching Advent Christians,

CUE 16—We all have images in our minds of what the first Christmas looked like. Many of these images are imprinted on our memories from what we have seen in nativity sets, or on the cover of Christmas cards, or from television depictions, or in children’s services.

But not all of those images are historically accurate. We envision that the newborn baby in a manger has a halo, as do his parents. We visualize a little drummer boy playing his drum while the animals in the stable sway and keep the beat. We imagine that the Wise Men arrive on the night of Jesus’ birth, and that these Wise Men are royal kings. But all of these images are fiction, pious embellishments of the biblical story.

CUE 17—One other fiction associated with the Christmas story is that the angels which appeared to the shepherds were gentle, frail, chubby little cherubs dressed in pastel loungewear, who wouldn’t hurt a flea. **CUE 18**—However, in the Bible, usually when an angel appeared, it was a fearsome and awesome sight. For example, Luke tells us that the shepherds who saw the angels on Christmas night were filled with fear. The appearance of these supernatural beings brought terror to the shepherds.

CUE 19—flash—So, the first words out of the angel’s mouth were, **“Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord...Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:10,14).**

That is why Jesus came—to be our Savior, to save us from our sins. He didn’t stay “away in a manger.” He grew up to be a man, a man who lived a perfect life. You would think that this would get him far with others. But where it got him was onto a cross. A dark and fallen world couldn’t stand such holy light. As we heard in the gospel lesson, speaking of Jesus: **CUE 20—flash**—**“The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him” (John 1:9-11).**

Think of it—God coming in peace to make peace with his people. But they turn on him to kill him. You might expect that this would mean the end of peace between God and humanity. Yet it is precisely by Christ’s death that God makes peace with us. From a wooden manger to a wooden cross—that was his mission. As the Christmas carol reminds us: *“Nails, spear shall pierce him through, the cross be borne for me, for you.”*

For you the cross was borne to reconcile you to the Father. In the birth of the Prince of Peace foretold by the prophet, we have peace with God. More than that, we are adopted into God’s eternal family. **CUE 21—flash**—The Apostle John writes in tonight’s Scripture reading: **“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”** Far from being alienated from God because of your sin, through Christ you are reconciled with him, made his children and joined to his family. **CUE 22—flash**—The Apostle Paul writes: **“Therefore, since we**

have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

The message of the angel to the shepherds was, “**Fear not.**” The message to you this Advent and Christmas as well is, “**Fear not.**” Fear not your sin. Fear not God’s judgment. Fear not even death. **CUE 23—flash—**Fear not! “**A Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11).** In him there is peace, peace to God’s people on earth. Amen.

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Holy Redeemer, Prince of Peace, though you appeared once in lowliness to free us from our sins, and to establish peace and good will between us and our God, we have your promise that you will come again in great power to judge all hearts, and fill your church with eternal glory. We await your advent with eagerness and joy. Come quickly to take us to the place in our Father's house, which you have prepared for all who love you.

Help us to be prepared at all times for your coming. Keep our hearts filled with true contrition and faith; overcome our doubts; cast sin from our lives; keep us from embracing the treasures and sinful pleasures offered by the world. Fill us with humility, that we may never trust our own works to merit heaven, but rely fully on you to save us. Cause the Holy Spirit to work powerfully in us with his grace through Word and sacrament.

Enlighten the hearts of people everywhere with the gospel, calling them to saving faith. Work faith also in the hearts of the people of Israel. Convert all sinners to you, that none be left in spiritual darkness to speak against your holy name. Through faith in Jesus as the only Savior, let all people enjoy your true peace and good will. Hear us, gracious Lord, as we pray the prayer you taught us, in contemporary language,

THE LORD'S PRAYER