

**+ John 1:1-14 + Peace Came to Earth for Us! + Christmas Day + 25 December 2008 +**

Christmas is breathtaking, isn't it? I mean, so much about Christmas either takes your breath away or simply leaves you out of breath.

We all know how Christmas can leave us out of breath. Actually it's more all that goes on in the weeks leading up to Christmas. You have all the frantic running and gift buying and end-of-the-year activities. You have all the baking and card writing and parties. You have all the hustle and bustle. By the time Christmas finally rolls around you're left stressed and tired, all compounded by a year's worth of frustration and worry and difficulty. You're looking forward to Christmas dinner, time to play with your toys and a long winter's nap that might even take you into the New Year. It's no surprise, then, that all the build-up to Christmas leaves the actual celebration of the festival the last thing on the lists of most people, even most Christians.

We get distracted about the reason for the season, but Christmas is truly breathtaking. You see, what really makes Christmas breathtaking is what John has to say in the first verses of his Gospel, which inspired Lutheran poet Jaroslav Vajda to pen the following words, ***"Peace came to earth at last that chosen night when angels clove the sky with song and light and God embodied love and sheathed his might—Who could but gasp: Immanuel! Who could but sing: Immanuel!"*** There in that manger-bed we see how **PEACE CAME TO EARTH FOR US!**

There was a time when we had peace with the holy God. It was there at the beginning. That peace was there through the Word, as John described Christ, the second person of the triune God. ***"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men."*** Adam and Eve had a perfect relationship with God. We're told they even walked with God, spending personal time with him. He was their perfect Creator and they were his perfect creation. He gave them everything they needed and wanted, but gave one command: Don't eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil!

That's where the story of our peace with God takes a terribly sad turn. Only three chapters into the Bible we hear how everything went horribly wrong. Satan put doubts into the minds of our first parents about their perfect peace with God by tempting them to think God was holding back blessing from them, but it wasn't Satan who lost our perfect peace with God. It was our first parents, who then passed their guilt and deserved condemnation to every generation down to us, as Paul wrote to the Romans, ***"...Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned..."*** In that instant of self-gratification, mankind lost perfect peace and became God's mortal enemies. Warfare with God has continued, then, with the conception of every child, and it's an impossible war to win, because we all deserve hell.

In spite of our sins, the Lord promised a Savior who would be the Prince of Peace, who would restore the perfect peace between God and humanity. This Savior would come to crush the serpent's head. He would be a blessing to all nations. His rule of peace would never end and he would transform the world, though he would come in humility as the son of a lowly virgin. Still countless people, including many who regarded themselves believers, rejected what the Lord had promised, even when the promised Messiah came into the world. John wrote, ***"The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness had not understood it....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."*** Sinful mankind did not deserve this Savior. We don't deserve this Savior either, we who are so often so out of breath for Christmas that we have little energy to receive Christ anew.

Still the Prince of Peace comes bringing peace to earth, to us from God. In the Christ Child, then, sinful mankind could actually behold the face of the holy God and rejoice, as Vajda describes it, ***"You show the Father none has ever seen..."*** The very thought takes your breath away, as it echoes

John's words. ***"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."***

That is one of the most remarkable aspects of the incarnation of Christ, of the Word made flesh. For the first time since the fall into sin, mankind could behold the face of God without fear and terror. When Joseph delivered the Christ Child and handed him to his mother Mary, there was no terror on his face or in her eyes. Oh, yes, there were tears, but tears of joy streaming down their cheeks. A son was born to them—a baby boy whose name would be Yeshua, Jesus, "Savior". Unlike so many other Jewish baby boys who shared the same name, however, this baby boy was their Savior-God, their Messiah, their "Jesus". With hearts full of joy, they beheld the face of God. No fearful hiding. No terror of his holy condemnation. Just hearts and minds and eyes filled with joy and peace that had come for us.

Peace came for us that Christmas night with the birth of the Savior. That baby was more than a cute, cuddly baby. He took on a lowly form, so we could behold the Light that shatters sin's darkness, the Creator of all things, the Savior of the world. There he was—God born in a barn. Such love! Christ put himself into our place from conception to death to bring us peace with God. Who could be the same after having held that infant in their arms and counting his fingers and toes like every loving mother and father do when their child is born, yet knowing that those hands and feet would one day be pierced for the sins of all? It takes your breath away to think like that.

Peace came for us that Christmas night as Jesus began life as our Substitute in every aspect of life, ***"tempted in every way—just as we are, yet was without sin"*** as we hear in Hebrews. He needed to live a life under God's holy Law as true man, perfectly as true God. In that way, he could offer his holy life as a Substitute for us and our sin-ridden lives.

Peace came for us that Christmas night to suffer and die for our sins as Vajda wrote, ***"In flesh and blood you bore our griefs and pain"***. The Word became flesh so he could be ***"pierced for our transgressions"*** and ***"crushed for iniquities"*** as Isaiah once wrote. In that way, ***"the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."*** Breathtaking, isn't it? Those chubby little infant hands eventually became adult hands pierced to forgive even you and me!

Peace came for us that Christmas night not only to live, not only to suffer and to die, but to rise again. That humble child would one day be exalted in glory as the Conqueror of death, the King of kings who would terrorize Satan for terrorizing God's beloved humanity, the living Root of Jesse who would save us from the depths of hell and bring us victory o'er the grave.

Peace now comes to us in Word and sacrament. As the manger and Mary's arms held him whom heaven cannot contain, so we too recognize and receive him who came in flesh and blood to dwell in us through Word and sacrament. There in the Word he changes our lives with the good news of his peace. There in baptismal waters he gave us his peace as a free gift, and now in bread and wine he visits us again and again with his forgiving peace.

Peace will also come again in glory. On that day, we will behold the Prince of Peace with our own eyes in our own flesh and we will not be terrified, for that will be the loveliest sight of all, a sight that will take our breath away.

Christmas is truly breathtaking, isn't it? The Word made flesh takes our breath away. Real peace with God takes our breath away. Immanuel—God with us—takes our breath away. Marvel in holy awe at the Word made flesh, the incarnate Christ, the Peace of God. May Christ our Savior fill you with his peace when you're out of breath this Christmas, but may that marvelous peace take your breath away as you celebrate this Christmas season! Amen.