

**Micah 5:2-5a + Jesus Is Your Peace + Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY  
Festival of the Nativity: Christmas Day + 25 December 2017**

There's always a lot of wishing going on this time of year. Children wish for this toy or that game they've been hoping for since they saw the commercial on TV. People send Christmas greetings and well wishes in cards and through all kinds of digital media. Songs blare through store speakers wishing for white or holly jolly Christmases, wishing for an end to poverty or hunger, or simply wishing for a hippopotamus for Christmas.

There's also a lot of wishing for some abstract things—things that nearly everyone, if we're human, wants to have. There are wishes for joy and happiness, wishes for love and your heart's desire. There are wishes for freedom and justice and wishes for peace. It's amazing how much talk of peace there is this time of year, yet so little actual peace in our world.

Of course, there are wars and conflicts and rumors of wars going on all over the world where lines are drawn and sides are taken. But what about in our own communities or workplaces or schools or on social media? You have a particular view or actual opinion on anything from politics to movies to parenting to race to religion, and it doesn't take much for lines to be drawn and sides to be taken with nuclear options at full readiness.

In our own families we can even have trouble finding peace. Sinners living under the same roof is challenging enough, but then you mix in a little selfishness and lovelessness here, a little thoughtlessness and insensitivity there, and next thing you know there's gasoline poured on the flame heading towards the gunpowder. Looking inside yourself won't find you peace either. Guilt for the evil you've done or the good you've failed to do leaves you unsettled. Trying to personally silence that guilt only makes things worse. Is it any wonder, then, why there is so much yearning for peace?

Back in the prophet Micah's time, there was also very little peace. Things weren't going so well for God's people. The Lord had allowed the vicious Assyrian empire to wipe out their relatives to the north and burn their way up to the gates of Jerusalem. Judgment had come after centuries of rejection and idolatry and immorality. Eventually judgment and destruction would also come for Judah, but the Lord had intervened and rescued the Jews.

Yet they still lacked peace. God had sent Micah and other prophets to warn the people away from wickedness and hypocritical lip service to the Lord. Yet the people rejected the Lord and the peace that only he could give. However, for those who remained faithful to the Lord, God promised to bring them peace. ***“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”***

Was God trying to get them to put their hope in another earthly ruler? Hadn't earthly rulers failed them? I mean, even Israel's greatest king—King David—had fallen into adultery and deceit and murder. Yet the King whom the Lord promised wasn't just another earthly ruler coming from David's hometown of Bethlehem Ephrathah. No, the Lord promised them a King who would be like no other ruler in human history. This King would be very different because he would be God's Anointed One, the Christ, the Prince of Peace, our Savior.

Christ's ***“origins are from of old, from ancient times.”*** That means unlike any earthly king who is born, lives, and dies, this King would be without beginning and end—the eternal Son of God, as we confess in the Nicene Creed, ***“eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made.”*** Being true God, the coming King would be holy and free from sin, not bearing the curse of sin that David had inherited from those before him and passed on to those after him.

As true God, Christ has been around for all eternity, but as Paul wrote to the Galatian Christians, ***“when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.”*** (Galatians 4:4-5) You see, at just the right time, Jesus was born of a human mother in a very real earthly place, a rather insignificant place. Bethlehem Ephrathah was not far from the capital city of Jerusalem, but it might as well have been the middle of nowhere. Calling Bethlehem ***“O Little Town of Bethlehem”*** would've been generous. It wasn't a bustling metropolis. It wasn't the center of anything. Even today it's not much more than a rundown tourist trap, but the Lord in his grace made it important. King David had come from that little village and so would the Prince of Peace.

In fact, his birth would usher in a time when the holy God would restore humanity who had rebelled against him. ***“Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites.”*** The prophet Isaiah, one of Micah's contemporaries, gave a similar prophecy. ***“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth***

**to a son, and will call him Immanuel** (which means “God with us”).” (7:14) That special Child born of a virgin mother at just the right time would reconcile us with God and restore peace between God and us.

So how would Jesus bring us that peace? **“He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.”** What a beautiful picture of the peace Christ brings! We see Jesus the Good Shepherd stand and nothing can move him, because he is the almighty God. We see Jesus the Good Shepherd guide his flock—his faithful followers—with a strength found nowhere else, a strength that can withstand worry and fear and doubt and conflict, hurricanes and blizzards, terrorism and political turmoil and tragedy. With this strength, he defends you not only from the temptations of Satan and the attacks of your sinful nature, but also from the sinful world’s constant onslaught against his people. Nothing and no one can overcome your Good Shepherd, who overcomes the world and rescues you even at the cost of his own life to bring you to the safety of heaven. By that sacrifice to save you, he brings eternal majesty to his holy name.

That’s what brings us peace and security! **“And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be their peace.”** Jesus knows you by name, gives his life for you, and tenderly cares for you. Jesus promises not to give us a world that might be better, but a life in which we have nothing to fear. Jesus provides you with something the world cannot give—real peace. Not that fearsome things won’t come into your life on this side of heaven, but in Christ, you can have confidence because he defends you with his almighty power and cares for you with his undying grace.

**“His greatness will reach to the ends of the earth...and he will be their peace.”** This King comes to reconcile you with your heavenly Father and bring you peace. Jesus came to provide peace for your guilty conscience, peace in this vale of tears, and peace when you face the hour of death. Peace through Jesus gives you certainty when you’re faced with tragedy or hardship or pain. It’s no wonder the angels sang that first Christmas night, **“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests!”** (Luke 2:14) Peace truly came to earth through Jesus—the embodiment of God’s love, the Word made flesh who made his dwelling among us, the fulfillment of God’s promises, the Shepherd-King who is our Prince of Peace.

That brings us back to all those wishes at Christmas time and that wish for peace. Where and how can you possibly find peace for your heart, for your life, for your family, and for your community? Look once more into the manger and you’ll find peace for your troubled heart. You’ll find peace for your brokenness and your pain and your guilt and your grief. There in that manger bed, you’ll find peace for your conflicts within your heart, under your roof, or out in the world. That peace came to earth with the birth of our Savior Jesus that first Christmas, and Jesus is your peace. The Word made flesh, Immanuel, Christ came to bring you real peace with God, and that’s absolutely breathtaking. May Christ our Savior fill your heart and your life with his marvelous, breathtaking peace all the days of your life! **“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests!”** Amen.