

Christmass, 2007 [A]: St. Frances, South Fork

In the name of Creator, Savior, and Sanctifier:

“Do not be afraid. For lo, I bring you tidings of great joy for unto you is born this night in the city of David a Savior, who is the Christ, the Lord.”

Luke 2:10

Thus began the events of that first Christmass night so many years ago. Thus begins **tonight** our celebrations once more, as we remember and celebrate the birth of Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ: God who humbled himself to join us in human form, to take and share our human condition.

In my thoughts and prayers during this Advent Season, I have found that perhaps the meanings and the messages of Christmas are even more important and poignant to us this year. As we look around us at are

World, we might honestly ask “Where is the peace that has been promised by the birth of the Savior?”

When the Angels announced the Birth of Our Lord to the shepherds “keeping watch over their flock by night,” they ended their message with “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, *peace* among men with whom he is well pleased.” As we look down through history since that quiet night in Bethlehem, it appears that this peace has been illusive. We seek the peace which “passes all understanding,” but it always seems to be just beyond our grasp.

What does this mean? Has God abandoned us? Has He given us false hope? Can we trust Him?

It seems that this year in my Advent thoughts, prayers and meditations, I keep coming back to the theme of “hope.” Upon looking back at my sermon on the First

Sunday of Advent, I believe that the underlying theme is one of hope. In my Second Sunday of Advent sermon, which was presented in *absentia*, so eloquently, I am told, by Frank, the theme once again is one of hope.

So it is to this concept of hope and perhaps the ultimate meaning of this night that I wish to address my thoughts.

I think that the first thing that we must realize is that the conditions of that very first Christmas are not all that happy. This story is full of losses and confusion for those involved in it. Mary becomes pregnant while she is unmarried and consequently loses her reputation. Joseph decides to marry her anyway and thus loses his respectable name. The little family, at the time of the birth, have lost the roof over their heads, at least temporarily, and end up in a stable in a strange town without the support of their

families and friends. They live in a country that has lost its political, social, and religious freedom. And the shepherds, who visit in the night, have already lost their social standing and religious reputations by merely being shepherds.

The world then was no different from now, maybe even worse and God chose that time and place for His Son to be born. So how does this relate to our confusion and perhaps even despair?

I think that the problem lies not with God -- but with us. Let me share with you one take on what I am trying to say. In one of my Advent readings *A Gift Worth Waiting For!* by Oswald C. J. Hoffmann: This author shared these thoughts and I quote: ‘What has God done for us in the past? *He has always kept his promise.* Even though they did not deserve his kindness, God delivered his chosen

people through out all of history. This is the story of the Bible. Time and time again, He visited his people and led them to safety. Time and time again, his people strayed from His Laws and broke their promises. Even though they earned his displeasure, God protected his people like a shepherd. In spite of all their waywardness and disobedience, God never stopped loving his children. He never withheld his forgiveness from them. And finally, God sent his people a Savior in Jesus Christ, the Lord. Though they did not recognize him as the Anointed one of the Most High when He came, the Son of God laid down his life for the sins of the world that there might be forgiveness for all.'

“In a world where promises are made to be broken, people have a great problem accepting the fact that God makes promises. They have a problem with God, and they

also have a problem with his promises. Just as there can be no community life, no friendship, no relationships, and no commitment of any kind unless promises are made and kept, there can be no relationship with God when people refuse to recognize not only his existence but also his faithfulness in keeping his promises.”

‘The faithfulness of God is the message of the whole Bible. His steadfast love endures forever. This is the story of the Old Testament and this same story runs through the New Testament as it tells the story of Jesus. In Jesus, we see the faithfulness of God. He will stop at nothing to carry out his promises. He will save the world, even if it means the death of his own Son. He will forgive his people out of grace and goodness, not because we are so wonderful but because He keeps his promises. He will give life to his people, even as He has promised. Things may not always

go well, but we can always depend upon the promises of a faithful God.’ [This is the basis of our hope.]

‘The secret and promise of God is in the baby born in Bethlehem, in that boy in the temple, in that man walking the dusty roads of Judea. God’s well beloved and obedient Son did for us what we cannot do for ourselves. He died for us. Raised from the dead by the glory of his Father, that well beloved Son *lives* for us. He is the Lord. In him the secret and the promise is revealed. God is our savior.’

‘If it is true that God is a Savior, there is reason to rejoice. [and hope] The secret of God in Christ has to be kept, but not kept secret. God shares his secret with the World and therefore it is our task as God’s people to share this same secret and promise. It is a secret that makes people joyful in the midst of sorrow, and helps them to smile through their tears. A secret that gives hope in a

world tossed with war and conflict. It is a real secret, the secret of life, coming from God himself and from no one else. In Christ, God says to you, “Your sins are forgiven. It is as if you have never sinned at all. I hold you blameless. There is not a single charge against you. Come into the family and enjoy yourself in Christ.’ This is the beginning of “the peace that passes all understanding.”

This peace begins on a quiet night in Bethlehem in a stable, a Peace that is indeed “beyond understanding.” It is peace *from* God and peace *with* God. This peace is no spiritual aspirin, no easy comfort amid the terrifying tensions of life. For we find that peace is loaded with power, demanding that we follow Him in a single-minded mission. We are sent forth with the peace of God in our hearts on a mission of love with a message of reconciliation. Without anxiety for the future, we rejoice in

the present, and we know that “the peace of God which passes all understanding, keeps our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

“For lo! The days are hastening on, by prophets seen of old,

When with the ever-circling years shall come the time foretold,

When peace shall over all the earth its ancient splendors fling,

And all the world gives back the song which now the angels sing.”

May the peace of God, the peace of Christmas, the hope of the peace that is beyond our understanding be yours on this day, in this season, and through out the year, be yours now and forever more.

Amen

[Single apostrophe refers to paraphrasing and/or quotes
from Advent Messages of Oswald C. J. Hoffmann: *A Gift
Worth Waiting For!* 1994, St. Louis, MO: Creative
Communications for the Parish]