

An Invasion of Peace

Thomas Robinson, *Certain Hope, Wondrous Love 1*, December 8, 2018

Luke 2:1-14

¹ In those days a **decree went out from Caesar Augustus** that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration when **Quirinius was governor of Syria**. ³ And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴ And **Joseph** also went up from Galilee, from the town of **Nazareth**, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be registered with **Mary**, his betrothed, who was **with child**.

⁶ And while they were there, **the time came for her to give birth**. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn **son** and wrapped him in **swaddling cloths** and laid him in a **manger**, because there was **no place for them in the inn**.

⁸ And in the same region there were **shepherds out in the field**, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an **angel of the Lord** appeared to them, and the **glory of the Lord** shone around them, and they were filled with **great fear**. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them,

“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

¹² And this will be a sign for you:

you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”

¹³ And suddenly there was with the **angel** a multitude of the **heavenly host** praising God and saying,

*¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”*

Isaiah 59:7-9

 Isaiah’s indictment of the situation of Israel and humanity

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| ⁷ Their feet run to evil, and they are swift to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; desolation and destruction are in their highways. | they have made their roads crooked ; no one who treads on them knows peace . |
| ⁸ The way of peace they do not know , and there is no justice in their paths; | ⁹ Therefore justice is far from us , and righteousness does not overtake us; we hope for light , and behold, darkness , and for brightness , but we walk in gloom . |

Luke 1:76-79

 Zechariah’s prophecy about the infant John (the Baptist)

⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called the **prophet of the Most High**; for you will **go before the Lord** to **prepare his ways**, ⁷⁷ to give **knowledge of salvation** to his people in the **forgiveness of their sins**, ⁷⁸ because of the tender **mercy of our God**, whereby the **sunrise** shall **visit us** from on high ⁷⁹ to **give light to those who sit in darkness** and in the **shadow of death**, to **guide our feet into the way of peace**.”

Luke 19:37-44

 Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem

As he was drawing near – already on the way down the Mount of Olives – the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, ³⁸ saying,

*“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”*

³⁹ And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, *“Teacher, rebuke your disciples.”*

⁴⁰ He answered, *“I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.”*

⁴¹ And when he **drew near and saw the city, he wept over it**, ⁴² saying, *“Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.”* ⁴³ *For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side ⁴⁴ and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”*

Irony and Paradox of Advent

One of the most important tasks of the Gospel is to open our eyes and ears, renew our minds, to help us realize that the world on its deepest and most permanent level is far different than we are told. All the power, money, sex, and violence that fills our politics, economics, entertainment, and fantasies is short-term and gives no final satisfaction.

There is a different reality, complex, simple, beautiful, hard to believe – a God of love and majesty, who loves us in spite of our delusional rebellion and ugly brokenness, and comes for us to give us life beyond our chosen death – life, creativity, and joy now and forever.

Advent is a turning point. It means “Coming,” “Arrival.” But it is the coming of God’s reality into our deeply believed delusion. So it’s also an invasion. Light crashing Truman’s world.

The Invasion of Heaven’s Army

Luke helps us see the irony. Caesar Augustus, Quirinius! Roman armies had conquered. They imposed Peace. And control, puppet kings, legions, and taxes. Joseph & Mary are under control. Gabriel had said Mary’s son was to be king. The job is already filled. Peace!

Mary gives birth and tightly wraps the baby and lays him in a feed trough. At the very bottom of the hierarchy of power, prestige, and possibilities that structured the world. Shepherds could be lower. It is to them that God’s messenger announces the Messiah, who is deliverer and Lord (Caesar’s title, God’s title). His sign? A feed trough.

Then the heavenly army appears – Elisha’s chariots of fire – the great invasion is underway! They sing God’s Glory! They sing Peace! But no swords, no executions of Caesar, Herod. Everyone understands a top-down Roman peace. This was peace from the bottom up, from the feed trough and the cross. God’s peace breaking into the false peace we know.

The Hard Road of Peace

Real peace is hard. Isaiah saw how Israel/the world did not know ‘the way of peace.’ Trying to create it with force, violence, without justice, they hope for light but get darkness.

Zechariah’s prophecy about John echoes Isaiah: help people learn God’s mercy that breaks in with deliverance and forgiveness. Real light breaks forth. We find the way of peace.

The Angelic army’s song echoes again as Jesus rides into Jerusalem with a multitude celebrating him as king – heaven’s peace, God’s highest glory. But he’s on a borrowed donkey headed for a cross. He weeps for the city (the world) he longs to protect. They cannot see/trust the way of peace. Destruction looms ahead. Jesus takes it first.

Jesus’ Advent is God visiting his people. He knows the way of peace. He takes onto himself the rage, betrayal, injustice, corruption of human power. Out of death he creates Life.

The Gift of Peace

The invasion of peace works on every level. Jesus gave his disciple peace in a world of tribulation: “I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33). Peace that can love, forgive, treat with justice, create life. Trusting the way of peace is always a challenge for us.

Those who follow it often experience the sword pointed at themselves (Mt 10:34).

This peace comes with deep vision that looks beyond present circumstances and finds strength to act true to the way of peace, even when it leads through a cross (Phi 4:6-13).