

Christmas Story, 2015

Lk. 2:1 Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. 2This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. 4Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, 5in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. 6While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. 7And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

8In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. 9And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. 10But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; 11for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12" "This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." 13And suddenly there appeared 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 men with whom He is pleased."

15When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us." 16So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. 17When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. 18And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. 19But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. 20The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as

had been told them.

Doesn't it seem that about the time you get used to writing 2015, it turns to 2016 and you start over reminding yourself; It really is 2016. Where did the time go. Where have the years gone. Me and Pam are having conversations about the necessity of preparing a meaningful last will and testament, which we will get done. We aren't young any more.

2016 is an election year for us. With news stations that have to somehow keep rhetoric moving constantly 24/7, we're continually reminded of the challenges and problems that face our world.

Global warming. Stories in leading newspapers of what zero growth or negative growth would look like. Democracy is based on index numbers that must continually spiral upwards. Yet people are telling us our planet can't sustain that. Something has to give. Zero or negative growth can't co-exist with democracy and freedom.

Last week there were stories not only about negative growth for the planet's sake, but also stories about 1 child families. Enforced somehow.

That always means infanticide. Murdering babies made in the image of God, for the sake of a new god, the temperature of the planet.

So there's *that*. But as bad as that is, it's vying for which problem needs the most attention. Will the planet murder us, or will evil men do it first.

The planet apparently has big problems, but the evil men on the planet are upstaging it. It seems like the world is spinning out of control as far as war. Senseless murders close to home. Heartbreaking genocide in the old roman empire. Once christian. Now Islamic.

I couldn't help but think of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem of 150 years ago. It was ringing in my head, so I downloaded the words.

Christmas Bells

I HEARD the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
 And wild and sweet
 The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
 Had rolled along
 The unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Till ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to day,
 A voice, a chime,
 A chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Then from each black, accursed mouth
The cannon thundered in the South,
 And with the sound
 The carols drowned
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent,
 And made forlorn
 The households born
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I said;
 "For hate is strong,
 And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:

"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The Wrong shall fail,
The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men."

His wife had perished in a fire in their home. His son had signed up for the Union Army against his bidding, and had sustained a life threatening injury.

Sometimes it seems like a cloud of evil is enveloping. How, like Longfellow did in his hour of deep despair, do you get to that final verse that he wrote? Where does that come from?

I fear for much of Christendom, the answer to that question has been lost in the intervening 150 years. How do we say, with old Job, *Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him!* Job 13:15

The answer is so simple, a child can understand. Indeed, perhaps children can get there easier than grown ups. The answer is that God is a sovereign King who, no matter what things look like to us, has all of this in His control.

Dr. R. C. Sproul likes to say there are no renegade molecules in the universe. God owns every one. And He is in control. Of everything. Eternity past, to eternity future. Even the mess in the news. He owns it all.

And that brings us back to our story we read at the beginning and Longfellow's poem and I want to take a look at some of the key passages, briefly, and ask some questions. Or maybe try to answer some questions, biblically, that we hear over and over in the news.

It seems like the news programs can't extricate themselves from Longfellow's second to the last stanza. That's as far as they get.

And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I said;

"For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

So, let's look again at the angelic announcement; *8In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. 9And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. 10But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; 11for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12" "This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." 13And suddenly there appeared 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 men with whom He is pleased."*

That doesn't sound like the Christmas card version, does it.

Longfellow's poem was written 250 years after the Authorized version of the Bible was translated in 1611. And I'll make Carl unhappy, but I have to say, I don't think the translators got it quite right. The King James says;

King James Bible

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

And that's the version we here most often and it's in our Christmas cards and at first glance, it seems to be a blanket statement. Peace on earth and good will to men.

So I took the time to copy down 6 or 7 other versions to begin to get a feel for what the modern translators are seeing in the original language.

New International Version

"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on

whom his favor rests."

New Living Translation

"Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."

English Standard Version

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

Berean Study Bible

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men on whom His favor rests!"

New American Standard Bible

"Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."

Holman Christian Standard Bible

Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people He favors!

IN all of those versions it seems that peace is for a selective group of people. It isn't a blanket statement. And thus Longfellow's confusion and indeed we see the same confusion to this day. Although Longfellow ultimately gets it right, most today, do not understand what the angel was announcing.

14 are slaughtered in cold blood in San Bernardino and the New York Daily News says, **God isn't fixing this**. There is no peace. Therefore, there is no God, and the idiots who offer up their prayers are wasting everyone's time. A bunch of misguided hypocrites who want to do nothing but have the appearance of caring.

Where is the peace it talks about in Luke 2. Enough of the Christmas cards. We're over it.

I am not a language expert. Not even my own, let alone greek, but I can

read. So I made it my purpose to try to get a feel for what the original language is saying in vs. 14.

It is an outburst of praise by angels. Because of the birth of a Saviour who will own everything. And the angels are declaring 2 things. One in heaven where God dwells, and one on earth where men live.

Doxia Glory to God in the highest. Up above the earth, in the highest reaches and expanses of space, GLORY to God.

In contrast to that place, another place. And on earth. Right here, where we live. Now remember, the antecedent of all of this pronouncement is the birth of a Saviour, who is Messiah and Lord. What does earth get?

Peace, peace. But there is a qualifier in the text. This isn't a blanket peace. All of the ideas in the announcement are included in who gets the peace. Peace for Anthropos, men, but not all men, the qualifier is eudokias. And the meaning of that greek word is positive opinion. Good opinion. Good will. Good pleasure. Men that God is happy with. Those men.

All of the newer translations are trying to get those ideas in order.

A Saviour is born. Christ, the messiah, who is Lord of all men. And because of that event, Glory is raised up to God in the highest places, in the heavens. And on earth, peace is possible for men on whom God's pleasure rests.

OK, so the next question is obvious, isn't it. Who are those men? Who is God pleased with.

Let's look at the same word. Eudokia. Good opinion, good pleasure, delight in. Someone in whom there is delight. Fast forward 30 years.

We're in Matthew, chapter 3, here, and we're going to see this word used again. See if it helps us understand the other passage.

Mt. 3:16 *After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the*

water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, 17and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

God delights in His Son. His perfect son. OK. That's a lofty standard. Who else? Who are the men who He delights in and offers peace?

Isaiah 57:20 - 21 are pretty clear. 20 *But the wicked are like the tossing sea, For it cannot be quiet, And its waters toss up refuse and mud. 21 "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked.*

Isaiah 48:22 says the same thing. *There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked*

Psalms 34:16 is scary; 16*The face of the LORD is against evildoers, To cut off the memory of them from the earth.*

Romans 3:23 is helpful to define this category. *for **all** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*

Likewise Romans 6:23 follows, but offers hope. 23*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in IN Christ Jesus our Lord.*

God is pleased with His perfect son, and that same pleasure is towards anyone who hides from God's wrath, IN His Son.

The only safe place, is IN Jesus. Forgiveness of sin and therefore, the good pleasure of God, is in Jesus.

So, let's look again at the angelic announcement; 8*In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. 9And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. 10But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; 11for today in the city of David there has been born for*

you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12“This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” 13And suddenly there appeared 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 men with whom He is pleased.”*

Back to our headlines. There's a wide gap between what we see in our world, and any hope of peace. Has the Word of God failed? Should we get in line behind the New York Daily News guys who shout, God isn't fixing this. Stop praying to your stupid god. Get real.

Hate is strong, and mocks the song, of peace on earth, good will to men.

First of all, there is peace. On earth. Right now. For men.

Look with me, or listen to John chapter 14. Jesus says this just hours before the soldiers come and take Him to mock trial before men who belong to Satan will murder Him.

Wherever this peace comes from, that's the peace we're after, because the situation surrounding the ones who have peace is spectacularly evil. Imminent death. But peace from within. How does that work? Does it still work that way?

Jn. 14:25 - 31 “These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. 26“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. 27“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful. 28““You heard that I said to you, ‘I go away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced because I go to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. 29“Now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe. 30““I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me; 31 but so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded

Me. Get up, let us go from here.

The Holy Spirit brings to men a peace that is not of this world. A peace, inner peace is available for men on whom God is pleased, by His grace, that is disconnected from this world. Otherworldly peace. It isn't dependent on the situation that surrounds it.

Jesus bequeathed that to His disciples, and anyone who followed in their path that would also possess the indwelling Holy Spirit of God. God's peace, in Satan's world.

Maybe some day we'll study the discourse that begins in John 13 and ends at the end of John 16. The final words in that long discourse that defines our life, apart from this world, citizens of another world, is in John 16:33.

33“These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”

We don't have much tribulation, do we. We all have nice cars. Money to buy gas. We go where we want. We don't live in constant assault.

Does that same verse work for real believers in Syria? What about them?

In Christ there is peace. We haven't faced it, but other christians have. A peace that mocks the violence of this world and says, all you can do is kill me. I'm a citizen of another place. That was the peace the angels announced. For men that God favors.

But, you say, the angels promised that it would be for All People. How does that work.

Again, I consulted the original language trying to get a sense. The word all simply means, all. All by individuals. All of the components that form a group that you're talking about.

And the word people here is a common one used hundreds of times. It isn't the word ethnos that we would understand as tribes. It's the word for a crowd. A grouping. Every group of people of any type. The folks in this room are a people. The folks who live in Tonopah are a people. It simply means any group of people made up of the individuals in the word all.

Just to be clear, if you happen to be a Jew and think the angels are only referencing other Jews, no, that isn't the case. All people.

Peter was stunned when God sent him to Joppa in Acts 10 to preach to a group of gentiles. Stunned. It took a big old dream that Peter had and an angel appearing in a vision to Cornelius to bring it about.

In vs. 34 *Opening his mouth, Peter said:*

"I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, 35but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.

God is no respecter of persons. God shows no partiality. God sent His Son for All People.

behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; 11for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

You say, there's still a disconnect. The good news came. It happened. But I'm not seeing great joy for all people. The world is a mess. Joy is a rare commodity these days.

You have to read the end of the book folks. Joy is coming. Peace is coming. The ruler of this world, the one Jesus mentions in John 14:30 that we referenced earlier, Satan himself, will be deposed, and the Son of David will sit on a throne and rule this world.

When that day comes, evil will be vanquished. Joy will reign. Peace will reign. And ALL the people who have made it to that day, will rejoice. This prophecy given by angels that surrounds the babe laying in

a manger, will be finally true.

Some of us think it's soon.

So, then, we return to the angelic announcement and would want to qualify that word All. All peoples.

It isn't a blanket all, no matter who, no matter what. It lives side by side with the other all's we mentioned earlier. It doesn't cancel out God's words in the old testament.

The face of the LORD is against (all) evildoers, To cut off the memory of them from the earth. Ps. 34:16

or the new testament;

*for **all** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, Ro. 3:23*

The ALL People in the angelic announcement is an opportunity, not a blanket blessing for evil and good alike.

The angels announce that this babe in a manger would be a Saviour. He alone has the power to save us from our sins.

Every one will stand trial before the Almighty. Those who are safe IN Christ Jesus, this babe in the manger, will receive peace, and joy, in this life, and in the life to come. Merry Chrstmas to you all.