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The Peace of the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 2:8-21; John 14:27)

This series of Advent has been on the theme of *God With Us*, looking at the nature of the person and work of Christ. We spent most of our time this Advent season looking at the different ways in which the apostle Paul described the person and work of Christ in his pastoral epistles. This morning I wanted to return to the gospel narratives related to Christ's birth. This morning we're going to be looking at Luke, the second chapter, and then after that reading there will be a brief reading as well from the Gospel of John, the words of Jesus to his disciples.

This morning I'm going to be looking specifically at Luke 2:8-21, but we'll be spending our time together on one verse, verse 14, as it is an announcement of the peace of the Lord Jesus Christ that is being brought to humanity through the incarnation. And it is our desire, and certainly mine, that you would be able to hear and to know the peace that is offered to you through Jesus Christ this morning, because that is the intent of the incarnation. But it is indeed, perhaps, a very different kind of peace than many would understand it to be---one that challenges us, one that deepens our understanding of what real peace is. But I believe it is also an offer of peace that does meet that which we often grasp for. We grasp for peace in various ways.

Hear now the Word of God as it tells us of the birth of Christ.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived.

And now in John's gospel, Jesus says to his disciples in the midst of teaching them about the Holy Spirit---as that which he would give as a gift to them---Jesus says to his disciples, who were caught up in the trouble and concern and anxiety of what was to come. Jesus said these words: "Peace I leave you with; my peace I give you. I do not give you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

This is the word of God. Thanks be to God. Will you pray with me. Father, all of us in this room in various ways are in need of a deeper knowledge and experience of real biblical peace. But Father, your Word tells us that that peace is not possible unless it really comes from you through Christ and through the work of your Spirit. And so now, Lord, by your Spirit through the power of your Word, help us to know and to receive the peace that you offer. Help us, we pray, and help the teacher. In Jesus' name. Amen.

From the Old Testament, Isaiah 26:3 reads this, the prophet says: "You will keep in perfect peace,

him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.” In the New Testament the apostle Paul would write of this peace as he wrote to the Philippian church. While in chains, Paul would write these words: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Then a few verses later he would say this, as that truth which he has just uttered he illustrates in his own life when he says: “I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.” That's a powerful peace that Paul writes of. It's a powerful promise that the prophet Isaiah utters to the people of Israel.

But what of a common peace, perhaps even among mortals like us, everyday folk who perhaps you--- if you are a Christian or even if you are not yet a Christian---you desire peace. I was reminded this week of just two gentlemen who experienced this promise of peace of the Lord Jesus Christ while in the midst of very real persecution. Their names were Stuart Latimer and Nicholas Ridley. You can find a plaque right in the middle of Oxford on Broad Street. And on that plaque you will read the date of their execution on that very spot in the middle of Oxford. In fact, they were among those who would be called the Oxford Martyrs because of their Christian faith. On that very spot, while just literally moments from their execution in the middle of town, Stuart Latimer was recorded to say to Nicholas Ridley, these words: “Be of good cheer and play the man, Master Ridley. We shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace in England, as I trust shall never be put out.”

Such amazing peace that would cause one man to say to another while facing execution---that their peace, their sense of hope, was so solid on the work of Christ that they realized that God would do something more powerful through their death than the Lord could have done through their life. And indeed I will tell you---and I do not speak with hyperbole---that every person who is sitting in this room this morning is doing so because of the work of just these two men, who were an integral part of the Reformation that would then spread across Europe to places like Scotland, and Switzerland, France, the rest of England, that would then come to the United States.

What kind of peace is that? Don't you want that kind of peace? I do. That in the face of real trouble, real pain, and real anguish, that one's testimony could be---whether in need, or in plenty, whether in peace or in great trouble, whether in acceptance or persecution---my peace is of the Lord.

I will tell you that regardless of what it is you desire, there is not one heart beating in this room or across the planet that does not want the same thing. That is, we all desire peace. Every one of us. We might define peace differently, we might even pursue that peace differently, but each and every one of us as human beings, I want to posit to you this morning, were made for peace. The problem is that we fail, day after day after day, decision after decision, we fail to actually achieve the peace we so often want. And the peace which Paul was talking about, the peace that these two men experienced, the peace that Isaiah is promising, and most particularly the peace which was announced by the angels that was to come through Christ Jesus alone, is the peace that is meant for each and every one of us.

The problem is we desire peace, but we don't desire that peace. The challenge of the incarnation is yet for us to hear again the offer of peace. And I will say it over and over again, that whether you have known Christ for a year or months or decades, each and every one of us still yearns for this peace. If you are not yet a Christian, you, too, desire peace. I want to challenge you this morning to hear the offer of peace that comes through the incarnation.

Let's look together as we look at this verse 14 and then expand from there as we look at these other passages and consider the broad offer of peace, biblically speaking. We're going to look at the Promised Peace, the Power of Peace, and the Path to Peace. The Promised Peace, the Power of Peace, and the Path to Peace.

Let's look together, then, at the promised peace. In these words of verse 14 of chapter 2 of Luke we hear the angels after they had already told the shepherds: Do not be afraid. Good news is coming to you today. By the way, it was by design---I hope you noticed the reading from Luke and the reading from Jesus's words in John to his disciples and here to these shepherds---do you notice the parallel of themes? Do not be afraid. In other words, do not be deeply troubled inwardly. Though your circumstances may be screaming out at you in contradictory fashion to the idea of peace...do not be afraid and deeply troubled.

Because why? Because the angel says here in verse 14: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." What the angel declares there is meant to be two simultaneous truths that are parallel with one another. When it says: Glory to God in the highest---meaning glory to God in the highest in heaven---that in the throne room of heaven of God's palatial existence of sitting on the throne, that every angel, every person who has ever known the Lord is shouting glory to God in the highest. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. Glory be to God. Parallel to that God has designed that there also---now it comes through the announcement of the angel that "on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

So therefore, if God is deserving of all glory and honor and hallelujah to the highest in heaven, and the parallel is to be the peace on earth and what is offered to us and promised is a peace. But to understand the promise of peace, we must understand its inference---that for there to be the promise of peace, it must mean it comes in then the presence of hostility.

The promise of peace here and the imperative, 'Do not be afraid,' is the story of human history. Hostility is our storyline. Every human peace is fragile. The stories of our lives, the things that we decide to put out there on Twitter or on Facebook, or in the headlines, or in the news---just this last week's---scream of anything but peace. But the hostility that you and I experience so often times is the horizontal hostility. Am I the only one....amen? Can I agree with that? And so therefore we understand that the tale of human history is not what is on promise here. Why is that the case? It is because the promise of peace has to deal with the presence of hostility.

And the presence of hostility....what is the hostility? I believe that first and foremost, when the angels are talking about peace here, they're talking about a vertical peace, because there is a vertical hostility between us and God. That what's being promised here is a peace that first and foremost is to be offered to all those who receive the work of Christ, that a peace can be had between us and God the Father.

And that hostility is first and foremost not seen just in outward action. We think of the Ten Commandments. We see the hostility between us and between God all around us: stealing, lying, adultery, coveting, lust, anger with parents, parents' anger and brokenness with each other. We see so much of it. Our world is saturated with it. But that is not the first and foremost story of the hostility between us and God. I will argue to say that every outward example or demonstration of hostility between us and God and between us and one another is first and foremost the problem that begins with the heart.

That going all the way back to the book of Genesis we learn first and foremost that the hostility enters in, not between you and me, but between us and God. And that started with a simple pronouncement: I don't want your peace, God. I want peace by my own hands. And God said in essence, Okay, then.

And we were given over to our efforts at peace. What then was the fruit of our desire---in a hostile action, not to choose the blessing of God, but to choose to be god ourselves---what is the fruit? Murder, Cain and Abel, the brokenness of families, the brokenness of nations. We see it throughout the Old Testament, over and over again. The cyclical pattern. The brokenness between humanity and God ends up with brokenness between us as human beings. The promise of peace came to deal with the presence of hostility. But the first hostility to be dealt with is indeed between us and God.

Therefore, that means that the peace that is being talked about here is not just dealing with the presence of hostility, it's a particular kind of peace. It is a particular kind of peace. Here I want to quote from a writer David Powlison, who writes on the nature of the kind of peace that we often think of, and that many have misinterpreted the words and proclamations of the angels is that somehow the peace that's on offer there is like this. Powlison says this: We think of peace sort of like being able to have a...being philosophical about life, being indifferent to its troubles. It's about having an easy-going personality, or having low expectations so that we're easy to please. A peace that means being able to retreat from troubles of life or the commotion of other people. It's a peace that we think of as a retirement to a life of ease and wealth and quiet and having nothing to do or no worries. It is, if you will, like having a pleasant fatigue at the follow of a hard day's work or a hard workout. We desire to quiet the inner noise, and if you and I were to be honest about what we define as peace, how many of us would not begin with some image in our head of maybe like getting up before the rest of the house does and enjoying a cup of tea or a cup of coffee and there's like, no noise. Or being able to get through all the things you need to get done without any distraction. Or maybe it's just you and your loved one or your family members being able to go off together on a great vacation. Maybe it's just a really great bike ride in December with seventy degree weather. Yeah! Maybe it is that house with a white picket fence where all the kids are above average and we're all resplendently beautiful.

We define peace just in those ways, but that is not the peace that is on offer here. That has caused....this has been a stumbling point for so many, because they want to say, well, Jesus is offering peace. We hear 'Peace on earth, goodwill towards men' as how it's been interpreted, and so therefore, where's the peace, Jesus? Where is it? Why is there still war? Why are people still losing their lives because of violence? And we want to so quickly put God in the dock. We want to put him on trial. But I want to tell you, oftentimes we want to put God on trial because we've misinterpreted his Word. The particular peace that is being offered here is not a general malaise or an easy feeling. It is particularly the peace that can only be offered by dealing with the source of hostility between us and God, and that is particularly the problem of sin.

You see, Jesus was born into the world with this promise, but he didn't enjoy a nice, quiet neighborhood. He was born under the threat of execution under Herod, who was greatly, deeply troubled, afraid that this upstart child that he's hearing about is going to overtake the throne. So what does he do? He just goes about his Herodian ways of dealing with trouble. He tries to create his own peace, but it's through violence. Just take the youngest child, and cries upon cries were heard throughout Jesus's neighborhood when he was being born.

So we know that the peace that is being offered here is not that other kind of peace. It is far deeper, that required God himself to be born of flesh, to come and to live in our mess, in our flesh, to face our temptations, to face our troubles, yet was without sin. And took on our sin, took on our mess, took on our hostility---and took it on himself. And so that is the kind of peace that Jesus came to bring.

But notice it isn't just a particular kind of peace. It also comes to particular people. It isn't just to everybody who hears it. Which is why when we hear it: "On earth peace towards men." Well, the passage is a lot more specific than that when they say: "On earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." So it wasn't a promise of a particular peace that just is generally spread over everybody's bread like a nice equal layer of peanut butter. No, it says: "On whom his favor rests."

Well, who is that? It's on those who've come to the end of themselves and have said I'm tired of the hostility. I'm broken. I'm tired. I'm hungry for something more. And you are ready to receive the love of Christ, to receive the mercy and forgiveness of Christ. Those are the ones on whom his favor rests. It isn't a special subgroup of people that are just really righteous. No, it's laid on those who are ready to receive. And that offer is to every one of us this morning.

Are we ready to receive the promise of peace that begins in the inmost place, that begins with our hostility between us and God. Because if we are, then what will begin to happen, what will be ignited, is the power of peace. The power of peace. This power of peace that is being offered here---that if indeed the peace comes to those on whom his favor rests, who have received his love, who are ready to receive his grace and his mercy, to trust that what God has said about who we are and who he is and our need for forgiveness---then we are ready for that power to move in.

But the power of peace is not going to be a nice smooth road like Howard County likes to spend our tax dollars [on], paving over really nice roads that were already pretty nice according to Jersey terms. I'm new...I'm new to Howard County and it's something I've noticed---there are even roads that were perfectly fine, but that's beside the point. But think about it. We like to think of growing in the power of God's peace like a nice smooth road in summertime, but it's not that.

Coming to Christ and receiving the promise of his peace, I will tell you in the name of Christ, is going to bring about a lot of trouble. Because the power of peace will take us on an eyes-wide-open journey of self-suspicion. To receive the promise of peace is to begin to ask the power of Christ's peace to work within us, which means he is going to lead us on an eyes-wide-open adventure of self-suspicion, a willingness to doubt ourselves. And that is this: That means we must that the power of peace, which is this---to deconstruct our pride, our pride that says 'I've got this.'

Think about it this way. Professionally, physically, relationally, our pride gets stoked in numerous ways. I've just recounted three: professionally, physically, relationally. Think about it professionally. When in doubt...when in doubt of how well we're doing success-wise with regard to our jobs, or when we believe we are in threat of losing our job, or when we haven't reached that status point that we so desire, what is so easily stirred up within us is a desire to just go and work harder. Find a better place. Go do a better thing. Try to acquire more power. Position ourselves in the office or in the organization so that we can get the status just so we can get there. And where is there? Peace. We desire peace in our work lives, particularly our region that is getting ready to face deeper and deeper cuts because of sequestration.

I imagine many of you are already riding the waves of professional uncertainty. How is your pride being stoked to try to just work harder? Can you just get there? One more contract, one more network. I'm not saying any of those things are wrong, but when we begin to turn to those as the means for reaching our peace, the problem is there's always a morning after. Always. Once we've reached it, we're never really secure. One more budget gets passed, but yet our contract might not get passed. Our job might not get renewed. We might not pass on into the next year because we're being laid off. Or if we do get it, we then become those who need to tell other people that they're not making it. There's always a morning after to the thing that we're trying to achieve professionally because we will come to the end of ourselves.

What about physically? I'm now 43 years old. I note that some of you may say that that's young. Well, I will tell you maybe so, but I'm not feeling it. Just in the last three months I have a mystery pain in my knee. I have no idea where it's from. I get down on my knees and then I walk and I start limping. And so I begin to devise a workout plan. I think about coming up with a new training schedule. I think about new goals that I want to do physically with athletics, and so forth. But my body is telling me

something that is unavoidable: I'm going to get you sometime. The truth is so oftentimes we want to work out more, we want to train more. But the problem is there's always going to be that gnawing pain or that fear of that next physical or that MRI. How does our physical weakness stroke our pride and how does it stir it up?

Finally relationally. Think about it this way. Because of our hostility between us and God so oftentimes brings hostility between us as human beings and there is so much relational brokenness. I imagine just by the sheer numbers there's plenty of it here in this room. But how do we respond when we are relationally deeply troubled? We try to work hard. We try to fix it. I've worked with countless couples, and I know my own heart---I often respond to relational trouble with more words. Some of you are with me on that. The way you deal with a problem is just talk more. And if you throw enough words at it, you'll fix it. I worked with a dear couple for nearly ten years. Her issue was I need to fix him and the way to fix him is with my words. And those words would very subtly go from encouragement to guilt to manipulation. He, on the other side, was not a man of many words. But his way of trying to fix it was trying to work hard enough to do the things she wanted him to do. And he would work really hard. And we would go for space of three months, six months, a year, and things would be quiet. You'd see them at church. There were happy. They were smiling---some of the most gregarious people I knew. But then that Saturday morning would call, that phone call would come on a Saturday morning. And three different times over ten years, I would go to their home and have to help them pick up all the broken glass, all the broken stuff that would be thrown out into the yard because finally her words weren't getting the job done, and he couldn't take it anymore. Because she was trying to fix it with her words; he was trying to fix it by trying to fulfill her words. But all the while the trouble was just down below, waiting for the right spark.

And then we would talk together. There would be a lot of tears. And slowly but surely the pride that had been stoked because of the brokenness of their relationship was coming right out, and the power of God's peace was the one trying to awaken them. God wasn't the cause of their sin, no more than God is the cause of sin in the world. But God uses our professional trouble, our physical trouble, our relational trouble, like a bullhorn to say your pride, your self-dependence, your efforts at trying to control it and keep it all nice and wrapped up with a bow on it and put it under the tree, isn't working.

But that is the mystery of God's peace. That when the power of Christ and his forgiveness and his work comes in, and we receive it, and the power of God's peace begins to work out, it's going to bring up a lot of trouble. But when it does, it brings the opportunity for real gospel healing. It may not remove all the relational troubles, it may not remove all the physical ailments, and it may not save your job, but it will take us and put us on a rock wherein we can find an inner quiet and a real peace that transcends all understanding.

And when it does, we will slowly but surely, and at times when we confess, imperceptibly, but we will for sure as the power of peace works its way in us, it will work its way out of us. And we, then, will become the hands and feet of Christ's peace as we encounter others who are relationally, professionally, physically broken.

This was screaming at me this last week as a family came back into the news, which was just in the news, just a couple of weeks ago. And I share this with you because it is such a picture of what it means in this person's life when the power of Christ's peace works its way in and works its way out. Her name is Anita Smith. Her husband Ronnie lost his life while they were serving, he as a teacher, she as his support in a part of his teaching team in Benghazi, Libya. Attackers took his life recently. She then started a website and then she wrote an open letter. And it's called, "An open letter from the widow of Ronnie Smith to the Libyan people." I share just a brief snippet with you this morning. She says: Ronnie loved you all so much, especially his students. He loved to joke with you, tell stories about you, help you with your lives, challenge you to be all that you could be. He did his best to live

out his faith humbly and respectfully within a community of people with a different faith. To his attackers: I love you and I forgive you. How could I not, for Jesus taught us to love our enemies, not to kill them or to seek revenge. Jesus sacrificed his life out of love for the very people who killed him as well as for us today. His death and resurrection opened the door for us to walk on the straight path to God in peace and forgiveness. Because of what Jesus did, Ronnie is with Jesus in Paradise now. Jesus did not come only to take us to Paradise when we die, but also to bring peace and healing on this earth. Ronnie loved you because God loves you. Ronnie loved you because God loved him, not because Ronnie was so great, but because God is so great. I hear people speaking with hate and anger and blame over Ronnie's death, but that's not what Ronnie would want. Ronnie would want his death to be an opportunity for us to show one another love and forgiveness, because that's what God has shown us.

There is no other explanation for how a widow could write such a letter except that the power of God's peace through the work of Christ has so burrowed and marinated in her soul to expose, I'm sure, her very definite human feeling---desire for revenge---and exposing it. But also bringing healing and an antidote for our hatred that then worked its way out of her through this letter. I will tell you that that is not an overnight deal. That is a lifetime. That is being steeped in what the promise of peace and the power of peace can do. But that is what he means to do in you and in me and through you and through me.

So therefore, then, what is the path to peace? The path to peace is two things. And I realize I'm running short on time, so I will summarize this in the best way I can. The path to peace I believe, is, if you will, the continuing message of the peace which is offered to us when Jesus says to his disciples in the verses that were read earlier: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

The way that the world gives, and, when we're honest, the way we often give, is by way of reward. Have you earned it? Have you worked hard enough for it? Try a little harder. Run a little faster. Be a little stronger. Get over it. But this is not the way that the Lord Jesus gives. In fact, we recognize that the most pronounced thing that he says is this, he says to them my peace...you earn it? My peace...you try to figure it out? My peace...work harder for it? No, he says. Peace I leave you. My peace I give you.

The path to peace begins with a recognition of what the power of peace reveals. I can't do it. I can't believe hard enough. I can't obey enough. I can't pray enough. I can't do anything. It is a gift to be received, just as surely in a couple of days we're going to share gifts with each other. How do you receive that gift? You receive it, because what? It's the fruition of a personal relationship. You see, this isn't for Jesus something he's giving us as an abstract philosophy. No, when Jesus says my peace I give you, he's talking about himself. He's talking about his Holy Spirit, his person, his gift to us. It's for us to receive.

That when we have received the promise of this peace, the power of peace is working. We hear that Jesus gives us the path to peace and that is by receiving his Holy Spirit. That is what he was telling his disciples. His disciples were distraught. They couldn't imagine that Jesus was about to give himself over to execution. They were troubled, deeply troubled. They were troubled relationally, they were troubled with the Lord. They weren't getting it. And what does he say to them? He says something to them that can't be measured scientifically. I can't put it up on a screen. I can only declare it, and the mystery of God has to be at work. He says to them: "Peace I leave you, my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." Why? Because he just said: "All this I have spoken while I am still with you, but the counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all the things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." Jesus offers not a philosophy, not a formula---he offers

the person of the Spirit.

And the person of the Holy Spirit is the one that so unites us to the promise. He is the source of the power of Christ's peace that is at work within us that exposes our pride, our trying to control life. And he does what? He means to bring our hearts, he means to bring our minds, he means to bring our souls---and all of that trouble, all of that brokenness, all of the mess that is our lives---to bring it, not in a wrapped package, but in all of its mess, and just bring it to the Lord, ushering us into prayer into the throne room and to cry out before God.

If you doubt what I'm saying, have you read the Psalms? The Psalms are at one point incredibly comforting, but at other times piercingly difficult because they talk about trouble, difficulty, trial, messes, brokenness. And it doesn't always....the Psalms don't always end in nice, neat little packages. And one of the things I've been learning to do, and this is the second point---it's not just learning how to receive the peace, but it's also to make psalms, to cry out for the Lord. I've learned it by allowing the Psalms to marinate in my soul, and I invite you to do that.

And one of the Psalms that grips me, but also troubles me---and I'll just read two verses from it--- Psalm 88. And in this Psalm the psalmist writes these words: "For my soul is full of trouble, and my life draws near the grave. I am counted among those who go down to the pit; I am like a man without strength. I am set apart with the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom you remember no more, who are cut off from your care." Do you hear that? And the Psalm doesn't end with a nice, neat little end to the story. But the reason why I'm so thankful that it's there, is because it's teaching me what the Holy Spirit ushers us to do---to bring all that stuff to the Lord. Because he's teaching us there's no other way to do deal with it, except to bring it to him. And when we do so, we are making psalms, we are crying out to the Lord.

Cry out to him. Ask for his promise in the power of his peace to dawn on whatever trouble you bring to him. And do you hear the promise? My peace I give you. My peace I leave with you. I do not give you as the world gives. This is what he invites us to do.

And I close with this. One of these psalm-makers actually turned her prayers into a hymn. That hymn is called, "Be Still My Soul." Katrina von Schlegel. And I won't read the whole hymn, but I will read of one of its verses. This is a recurring promise in the hymn. She's speaking to herself as she's speaking to the Lord. She says:

Be still, my soul when dearest friends depart and all is darkened in the vale of tears.

Then shalt thou better know His love, His heart, Who comes to soothe thy sorrow and thy fears.

Be still, my soul: thy Jesus can repay from His own fullness all he takes away.

She is making a psalm. Not divinely inspired Scripture---that is not what I mean. But she turned her troubles into prayers and that prayer into a psalm.

I can't sing a lick, I can't write a note of music, but I can cry out, and so can you. The path to peace is to receive it, and by the Spirit to cry it out to the Lord. And just as surely as I stand here in the name of Christ, Jesus's promise is to you today: Peace I leave you, my peace I give you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Let's pray. Lord, we try so hard to make our own peace. But you, oh Lord, in your grace and in your mercy, through Christ and the power of your Spirit, you expose how much failure comes to us when we do so. Lord, by your Spirit and by your Word, may you enable us to have such a deep suspicion of our own abilities to provide our own peace and direct us to the only peace which lasts, which transcends troubles, which can absorb all of our troubles because you invite us to yourself. Please enable us to do this, oh Lord. This Christmas, give us the peace of the Lord Jesus Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.