

Weekly Encouragement

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Make This Christmas Special - Part 4

By Rev. Peter Eng

Day 23

Gloria in excelsis (Luke 2:14)

From: **Announcing Jesus** ([Luke 2:8-20](#))



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

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

Anyone remotely connected with singing Christmas carols would know the words "*Gloria in excelsis*." Those were some of the first Latin words I learnt. I didn't know what they meant, but they sounded good, so I sung them anyway. They mean "Glory in the highest." This is the song of the angels on Christmas day. I also like the "good will toward men" bit. It supplies the generous mood of Christmas and gives me a nice feeling of kindness to all, the feeling that all is well.

Of course, if all were well, God would not need to come in human flesh. If all we need is an

exhortation of "good will toward men" (women included in the original Greek "*anthropos*"—[humans]). Translators agree the better rendering is that peace on earth comes to those with whom God is pleased. But as a concept, it remains true that there will come a time when there will indeed be good will towards all—because Jesus came.

At the resurrection, Jesus will restore all things to himself. There will be a new heaven and a new earth. Jesus Christ will reign over all the earth and we will rule with him. Then, will there be good will towards all. This powerful Christian imagination has arrested the attention of the world. It holds out to Christians the truth of what will eventually happen, and to the world a hope for a better tomorrow. I am not inclined to debate the idealism of the older translation against the realism of the newer one. I suggest it may be more helpful for us to embrace both thoughts. This is because the ideal, even if not represented clearly here, is taught elsewhere in Scripture.

Tell the message others need to hear. Let them know there is peace to those whom God is pleased. So we need to get right with him. Let them know our common desire of good will towards all is not mere wishful thinking. Point them to the experience of Christmas. Imagine a world where the mood of Christmas lasts all year long. That is a poor expression of the good Christ will bring to earth. Yet in a real way, Christmas is a foretaste of good will towards all. Is this not a message worth sharing?

Day 24**Spread the word (Luke 2:17)**

From: **Announcing Jesus** ([Luke 2:8-20](#))



And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. (KJV)

When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, (NIV)

They tell what they know.

The shepherds were earthy folks. They were lowly folks. We would think that God will choose the wise and powerful to proclaim the message. We would think the most appropriate and successful way of spreading the word is to use the media, to get the attention of the people through star power, or whatever people cleverer than I would use.

Shepherds were considered doubtful witnesses among the Jews. Many of these care for sheep owned by city dwellers, and if a sheep is lost to wild beasts or accident, there is that suspicion the shepherd is responsible for the failure. When a shepherd speaks, he is ineffective in convincing people. To

convince others he is telling the truth, a shepherd must go that extra mile, and make the extra effort.

God in his infinite wisdom has chosen shepherds and shepherd-like people to tell his story. There are many ineffective proclaimers among Christians. We don't tell the Christmas story well. We don't tell the resurrection story well. God couldn't have chosen us to tell the story right?

God calls the effective communicator for the job, to be sure. But he also calls the shepherd-like people. In our human wisdom, we think we must be credible before people will respond. Being credible helps, but it is not essential. The power of the Gospel does not lie in our credibility, but in the message, and in the work of the Holy Spirit working in the lives of those who hear the message.

Christmas is the time for us to spread the word. It does not matter that some will not listen. Some will. It doesn't matter that some doubt our credibility. Christmas is not about what others think of us. It is about getting the word out, that God has sent his Son into the world to give us hope, peace, joy, and love.

Day 25**Kept and pondered (Luke 2:19)**From: *Announcing Jesus* ([Luke 2:8-20](#))

But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. (KJV)

but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. (NLT)

We have the advantage of hindsight. Mary did not. She had the wonderful privilege of participating in the coming of the Messiah, the Christ. But she did not know this child would die as a sacrifice for sin so as to redeem the world from sin and from death.

Mary was experiencing and hearing from different people why they have come to visit the child. More than any mother recalling the time when she gives birth to a child, Mary kept all these birth events in her heart and pondered them. She thought about them often. She wanted to see how all these things fit together as Jesus grew up. "What child is this?" From conception, to birth, to visitors, to messages from God, there is nothing usual about the child. Mary did not understand everything, but she

thought about these happenings often, for they were not happenstance.

There will be many things in our life we cannot understand all at once. We do not have hindsight in our own life just as Mary did not at that point. We live it and see it worked out. In faith, we follow Mary's example of keeping and pondering. There are things in our life we consider unusual. "I should not have survived that" we say, but we did. "That is totally unexpected" we say about things good and bad. While we will not rise to Mary's stature, we can keep and ponder these things in our heart. In time, everything made sense to Mary. In time, we too will understand the "Why" behind God's actions in our life.

At Christmas we can tell the wonderful message that God has the "Why" in our life. He calls us to faith in him, and in time, he will answer why this or that happens.

Do you know someone who needs to know why things happened in their life as they did? Tell them the story of Mary. The first Christmas was a day of joy, but not a day of much understanding. But we do not need to know a lot to have joy. We only need to know who is in control.

Day 26**The cut that heals (Luke 2:21)**

From: [Jesus present at the temple \(Luke 2:21-40\)](#)



And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb. (KJV)

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. (NIV)

A cut is usually an act of separation. One part is severed from another. The circumcision was a cut that separated the descendants of Abraham from others.

In the early days of the Christian Church when non-Jews became Christians, the Jewish Christians had to make a big decision. "Should we require Gentiles to be circumcised or is baptism enough?" After much debate, it was decided that circumcision would not be the cut that divides. So Christians were not circumcised from our inception.

We have the circumcision of Jesus recorded for us. Many are circumcised for various reasons, but circumcision for faith is practiced by the descendants of Abraham. This identifies him more closely with Abraham than those who are not circumcised.

Today, Muslims and Jews are at terrible odds. Yet they are descendants of Abraham marked out by circumcision. Jesus is the peace of the world. I see in the circumcision of Jesus a foreshadowing of God's plan to bring all people to himself. Both Jews and Muslims reject Jesus, but Jesus has the cut that heals, the sign that identifies him as the Son of Abraham calling all the sons of Abraham to peace in himself.

The cut of circumcision is also the foreshadowing of his broken body, the ripping apart of his body to pay the penalty for our sin, and to reconcile us to God. This Christmas remember the cut of Jesus. Reach out to the children of Abraham for they have missed an inheritance, and we, not Abraham's descendants in the flesh, have received it. Let us share it back to the sons of Abraham. Help them see the cut that binds, and the broken body that heals.

Day 27**Consolation of Israel (Luke 2:25)**

From: Jesus present at the temple
([Luke 2:21-40](#))



And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. (KJV)

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. (NIV)

It is the same word in Greek—the word for consolation and comforter. Simeon was waiting for the Consolation or Comforter of Israel. This is another term for the Messiah. Isaiah says, “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people.” It is a time when God will “speak tenderly to Jerusalem.”

There are different aspects of Messiah (Jesus). In this instance, it is Jesus as Consoler or Comforter. This word is also translated Advocate. Jesus is all of that in a special way. The devil is assigned the name “Satan.” This word means Accuser. He is the Blamer, the Accuser, the Prosecutor who accuses the saints before the Lord. He is the one who finds fault with us, and digs up our past failures.

Israel’s failure is ever before them. The Accuser would not let them go.

Imagine you are rightly accused of all your sins. There is no plea but guilty, and there is no option but face the judgment. Then comes your Advocate who comforts and consoles you because he will find a way with the judge. He will make the impossible happen. He will acknowledge your guilt but somehow set you free from the penalty of your sin. More than that, he will break the power of sin in your life.

Jesus is that Consolation of Israel, the Messiah who stands with us in our guilt, and delivers us from judgment. Simeon knows Messiah will deliver Israel. That is great news. He did not know that Messiah would redeem not only national Israel, but also spiritual Israel. He will comfort Jews and Gentiles alike.

“Israel’s hope and consolation, Hope of all the earth thou art,” the Christmas carol rightly exults. Christmas is that wonderful news for every guilty person seeking an Advocate to plead his case. Jesus is our Advocate before the Father to set us free. A message worth telling.

Day 28**Light (Luke 2:32)**

From: Jesus present at the temple
([Luke 2:21-40](#))



A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. (KJV)

He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!" (NLT)

Jesus comes to us not only in time, but also for all time. Jesus comes to us through the nation Israel, but he would be the Savior for all nations. Jesus is light to the nations.

The first thing that surprised Jesus' disciples after Jesus rose from the dead, was the meaning of the good news going to all the nations. By that, they thought the message of Jesus was going to all the Jews scattered around the world in the different nations. But God's agenda was more inclusive than that. He would have the disciples go to the Gentiles with the good news and not require them to become Jews. This was a big stumbling block to the Jews. They could not accept that the Messiah of the Jews could also be given to the Gentiles.

Eventually, the church learnt that God wanted Jesus for the Gentiles also.

Today, the Gentile church is immeasurably larger than the Jewish church. But I wonder if we, like the disciples, stop short when God wants us to go further. The light of the Gospel has gone to almost all nations of the world. We have indeed spread out, but we are not very deep. Our level of penetration into nations is shallow. At this point, Jesus as light for the nations is like the light that does not penetrate the ocean very deeply. Look deep into any society, and you will not find many that are deeply penetrated by the light of the Gospel. Should we be contented with a Gospel that is not influencing society deeply?

This Christmas, let us recast our vision of Jesus as light of the nations. Let us look to the light of Jesus to light every country deeply so every nation will have a vibrant church, and have national policies conditioned by the Gospel.

Jesus will eventually rule all nations. His light has gone out to the whole world. Next, his light will shine into the depths of the nations. This Christmas, let us be bearers of this light. Let us bring this light deep into the recesses of our heart, and deep into our world.

Day 29**Good with pain (Luke 2:35)**

From: [Jesus present at the temple \(Luke 2:21-40\)](#)



(Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. (KJV)

As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul." (NLT)

Mary knows Jesus will be the Messiah. She knows he will be different from the Messiah everyone is expecting. After all, God has chosen her, a teenager of lowly status. That is not what she expected. She conceived through the Holy Spirit. That was unexpected. What she knows is that Jesus will be the Messiah, and he will save his people from sin, and go beyond the boundaries of Israel. She knows he will cause many to fall and many to rise ([Luke 2:34](#)) as she herself had so prophesied ([Luke 1:52](#)). But Simeon warns her, "A sword will pierce your very soul." And together with this, "the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed." Pain shows us things that pleasure cannot. Pain helps us to grow in a way that nothing else is able to do. A painless life is shallow and two dimensional. We don't need to seek

pain, it will seek us out. Mary's heart will be pierced. She will have the severest of pain a mother can feel. She will watch her son maligned, tortured, shamed and crucified. This will reveal the deepest thoughts of many, and it will pierce her soul.

When Jesus died, his disciples responded in different ways. His death revealed the true content of their heart that no amount of talking could. When we are confronted in our faith, we respond differently, and that reveals our heart.

The birth of Jesus will create situations when our hearts are revealed. Whether we live in the joy of obedience, or in the sorrow of regret, or in the self-made hell of vacillation, Jesus makes the difference. Once redeemed, we will never look at life the same way again. The choices we make and the actions we do reveal our deepest thoughts when our faith hits the road of life.

Jesus is the greatest good that can come to our life. Pain will come, but our pain will take on a new dimension. It shows our heart and points us Godward to the true good. Pain can come, but it is always for the good of those who love God.

Day 30**Jerusalem Rescued (Luke 2:38)**

From: Jesus present at the temple
([Luke 2:21-40](#))



And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. (KJV)

She came along just as Simeon was talking with Mary and Joseph, and she began praising God. She talked about the child to everyone who had been waiting expectantly for God to rescue Jerusalem. (NLT)

Is Jerusalem the embarrassment of non-fulfillment in the ministry of Jesus? He has not rescued Jerusalem. Jesus himself wept over Jerusalem and spoke of its impending destruction, which happened exactly as he said. That is not redemption. To this day, Jerusalem is the problem that will not go away. Well-meaning Christians say it is because Jerusalem rejected Jesus. There may be truth in that understanding. But more importantly, we need to understand that Jesus will rescue Jerusalem. That is how the disciples of Jesus understood it.

John the youngest disciple of Jesus ties it up for us when, in his old age, he had a vision. *“And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.” ([Rev 21:10](#))*. We do

not know exactly how he will do it. But we are told this city has the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles represented. The Jews, now distinct from Christians, will become one people in the new Jerusalem.

Christmas is a continuing story. It starts at Bethlehem and it will end in Jerusalem. The place of the crucifixion of Jesus, outside the city wall of Jerusalem is not the end of the story. Jesus will return in power to rescue Jerusalem. It will be the holy city of God from where Christ will rule. It will be from heaven, not a creation of man.

Our redemption will be in the space-time-matter world, not in the disembodied spirit world. The redemption of Jerusalem will be in the space-time-matter world. Jesus resurrected from the dead. He is the first fruit of the redemption that awaits us. The first coming of Jesus is the perfectly right place to think about his second coming.

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