



## Sermon “Peaceful Presence” – Brian D Lima

Fourth Sunday in Advent.

Luke 1:26–38

### I. Introduction

Just after Mary had given birth to Jesus, wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger because there was no guest room available to them, an angel of the Lord appeared to shepherds who were tending to their sheep and told them about the Saviour’s birth. Suddenly a great company of the heavenly hosts appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

*“Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth **peace** to those on whom his favour rests.”*

But what was this peace on earth that was promised? Later when Jesus grows older, he speaks to his disciples about peace, the peace he brings. He tells them, “**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.” But what does he mean? What is peace?

Jesus didn’t teach his followers to find peace by meditation. He didn’t tell them to find peace by taking a holiday in the country. Although meditation and a holiday might be helpful to find a bit of rest, this doesn’t seem to be the peace that Jesus is referring to. How do we know that? The followers of Jesus aren’t depicted as taking holidays or of emptying their minds in remote and isolated places. The followers are always depicted as throwing themselves in the midst of great chaos; either in serving the needs of the masses or suffering great persecution. Peace therefore must be different than rest.

In today’s account we will look at the life of Mary. Mary, a young woman, who is approached by an angel of God just like the shepherds. And she feels just like the them as well. She is troubled and afraid. But we will see in our special sister in faith, someone who enters God’s peace. She enters into God’s peace, unity with God, oneness with God, through an obedient trust in God’s words to her. May our sister in faith, encourage us this morning, to enter into God’s peace as we submit to His words to us.

### II. Context

We know that Mary grew up among a people that were forced to submit to the great Roman Empire. We know that many leaders in Israel were looking for God’s redemption and rescue of the nation through a leader that God would raise up as He did through King David. Many are looking for a great man to stand up and lead Israel.

But Israel already has a great leader over the nation and that leader is God Himself. And this great leader sends an angel to a young woman who will receive His word just as David did. She has a heart for God as King David did. This young woman named Mary, will enter into the peace of God and be for us an example to follow. Mary will enter into God's peace even though she is afraid and confused. We will see her enter into that peace by resting upon God's presence and Word.

### **III. Unpack**

#### **1.) Peace in God's Presence**

In Luke 1:26–28, we find Mary in Galilee being pledged in marriage to Joseph. Joseph is a descendant of David as so of some importance to the nation. God had promised to bless David's line and to establish his throne through David's offspring. Certainly, Joseph might be the one that God approaches or speaks to. But it is to Mary that an angel is sent. The angel appears to Mary and says, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you." Mary has opportunity to enter in God's peace through His presence by way of His angel.

This is a bit like God speaking to Moses in the burning bush. Moses has opportunity to enter into God's peace, oneness with God and His will, now that God had revealed Himself to Moses. The same is true here with Mary. An angel of God appears in peace and now Mary has opportunity to enter into the peace being offered by God.

God sent an angel to earth to Mary and not Joseph. Why? God was offering the world His peace as King over creation. No longer was God going to use mere human intermediaries of His Kingdom as was David. Gone were the days when God would send a prophet or angel to speak to a man like Joseph, who was from the biological family line of David. God was entering into His creation in order to establish an eternal peace not a temporary and imperfect one given by the kings of old. God speaks to Mary because He is not looking for a new human king. He is establishing His own Kingdom through His own Son. And this Kingdom wins for those who enter, eternal peace.

#### **2.) Peace through Fear**

Luke 1:29–33, God is establishing His Kingdom, His peace with the world, but Mary is afraid. God then seeks to help Mary enter into His peaceful kingdom by calming her fears. He explains to her that she will give birth to a son named Jesus who will be called the Son of God. God's own Son will reign over those who have hearts like Mary.

In Mary's account, we see God calming the fears of those that follow Him. God establishes His kingdom on earth, but He is also conscious that He will have to calm the fears of those He is calling to follow Him. What significant leader from the Old Testament wasn't filled with fear when God called them to follow Him and His kingdom?

Remember when the Israelites cried out to the Lord because of the oppression of the Midianites and how God approached Gideon to lead Israel out of oppression? The book of Judges describes...

<sup>11</sup> The angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak...where...Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. <sup>12</sup> When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior."

The angel of the Lord tells Gideon that he, Gideon the mighty warrior, will rescue Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Imagine an angel of God appearing and calling you a "mighty warrior!" It sounds intimidating! Rather than sounding like a "mighty warrior," Gideon expresses fear and doubt! He says...

*"Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."*

Gideon, like Mary, is afraid and confused how he might be considered a favoured one in establishing God's Kingdom. And like with Mary, the angel of the Lord will seek to calm his fears. The angel says...

*"I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive."*

In Gideon and in Mary, we see God establishing His peace with His children. We see God calming their fears so that they might rest in His will for them.

### **3.) Peace through Confusion**

Luke 1:34–37, we see that Mary isn't only fearful. She is also confused! Gideon says "my clan is the weakest" in Israel. "How can I rescue Israel?" Mary says, "How can I have a child since I am a virgin?" Just as the angel explained to Gideon how God would establish His will through him, the angel explains to the confused mind of Mary how God will bring about His will through her. By calming Mary's fearful heart and confused mind, we see God gently leading His children by establishing His peace through calming their feelings and thoughts. We don't see God providing peace for Mary by telling her to control her feelings and thoughts by being by herself somewhere so she can get better control of herself. She is not asked to isolate herself from the world in order to focus on herself and find ways to better control her thoughts and feelings. We see instead a God who provides peace through His presence. He then helps Mary to enter into His peace, a union with Him, by calming her fears and clarifying what confuses her.

### **4.) Perfect Peace through Rest**

God has offered His peace to Mary. He has calmed her fears and explained to her what He will do. Now in Luke 1:38, we see Mary's response. She enters God's perfect peace by resting in His promises. She has been told that she is favoured by God and that she will give birth to God's own Son. Her reply is...

*"I am the Lord's servant...May your word to me be fulfilled."*

God's peace was offered to her, union with God and His Kingdom. When she expressed her fears, God sought to calm them. When she expressed her confusion, God sought to explain what was happening. Her response was to finally rest in God's words to her. She could have allowed her fears to prevent

her from resting in God's peace. She could have been someone who allowed their fears to make them unstable in all they do.

The writer of the book of James describes those who let their fears immobilize them into inaction as "like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind." There is a proverb describing those who are immobilized by their fears. They do nothing convincing themselves that something terrible will happen. They justify their inaction saying, "There's a lion outside! I'll be killed in the public square!"

Mary is not the fool. She places her confidence and hope in God and she grows in her trust of God. Going beyond her fear and confusion she finds true peace with God as she rests in His presence and will for her. She says, "I am the Lord's servant...May your word to me be fulfilled." True peace!

#### **IV. Application**

What is our application for today?

##### **1.) Peace in His Presence**

Today, God has poured out His Spirit into the World that all may come to know Him. That all would come to experience His presence. Many of us have experienced a deeper awareness of His presence in our lives.

I shared, not long ago, how my brother called me in Japan while I was teaching a class that our father had suddenly passed away. With no family or friends around I finished my day of teaching in a daze and that night I went into the chapel of the church where I was working to be with God. I opened my heart to Him in prayer and expressed my deep sorrow and confusion on why my father had passed away at such a young age.

And in the middle of my prayers, God filled me with His Spirit, His presence and I suddenly knew His peace. Tears freely flowed and I felt a deep peace knowing that God had been watching over my father every second of every day of his life. God knew my father and loved him much more than any other person or family member. I could rest knowing that our Heavenly Father was with my father even in his last painful moments.

We know real peace only through God's presence. When God, through His Spirit, comes into our lives, it is an opportunity for us to enter into a peace that only He can provide.

##### **2.) Peace Instead of Fear & Confusion**

When God's presence is made know to us, we will, because we are like children, have fears and doubts. We know as is revealed time and time again in God's word and specifically today in Mary, that He desires to calm our fears and clarify our confusion. We can enter into the peace He provides when we allow Him to minister to us through these fears and doubts.

I remember teaching an English class in Osaka to a group of Japanese housewives. Many of them came from middle-class or upper middle-class homes. There was one woman who was in her 60s and I remember teaching her class the Bible after our English lesson. The Bible lesson went really well

and I could sense that the truths of the Bible were really resonating with some of the students there. You could sense that some were really absorbing what was said.

After I finished, the Bible lesson this woman, Yuriko-san, looked at me a bit sheepishly said, "I almost believe, but I can't. I almost believe in Jesus, but I just can't." At that time, Yuriko-san allowed her fears and confusion to prevent her from entering into God's peace through His Son, Jesus. I really hope she eventually welcomed the peace of God through Jesus. The Bible says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you." Let us not be a people who allow our fears and confusion to prevent us from resting in God's peace.

### **3.) Resting in Peace**

We were created to have peace with God and His Kingdom. The account in the first chapter of the book of Genesis describes how we were all made as God's offspring. We were all called to care over God's creation with Him. We were created to enjoy His peace. Because we seek our own peace, we make up our own ways of searching for peace, we find ourselves in disagreement and discord with God. No longer are we living as we were meant to live, we try to create peace where it will never be found.

But God is a Good Father. He sees His children rebelling against His peace and His response is to send His Son. Jesus, the Son of God, comes into the world in flesh that we might all find peace with God again. Jesus comes in flesh rather than glory that our fears would be reduced. Jesus explains the will of God that our doubts and confusion would be resolved. Jesus is born that we might enter into God's peace as restored children of God, one with the Father, Son and Spirit. There is no other peace than this.