

“CALM AND BRIGHT”
“Peace in the Midst of Conflict”

The season of Advent begins today. This year our theme is *“Calm and Bright.”* Two Hundred years ago, the beloved carol *“Silent Night, Holy Night”* was shared for the first time. Over the next few weeks we will focus on this beautiful carol and see how the words and music can prepare our hearts for the birth of Christ Jesus. The theme for the first week is *“Peace.”* At the end of the first verse we sing, *“Sleep in Heavenly Peace.”* I think sleeping in heavenly peace gives the vision of a child safe and secure from harm, a child who trusts that they are loved and cared for. This is the vision of peace that Isaiah speaks about and Zechariah proclaims. We still long for peace. In this first week of Advent, may we experience a bit of the peace that we are promised in Christ. .---Pastor Cindy

Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon: **“Peace in the Midst of Conflict”**

Gracious God, Your vision of peace and wholeness comes to us in sweeping revelations and in tiny signs of hope. Kindle our hearts that we may be a peaceful people. Keep us from growing weary of waiting, and give us the faith to trust in your promise of peace. We pray in the name of the coming Christ. Amen.

This week’s sermon may be viewed at <http://sundaystreams.com/go/firstwichita>

Study Guide

Monday, December 3, 2018 Isaiah 2: 1-2

The Advent readings are often filled with images from the prophets. Advent invites one to remember the promise of the prophets, the birth of Jesus AND those things that have not yet come to pass. Advent focuses on the time to come when justice, peace and righteousness shall reign fully on earth. In the midst of conflict, God offers the promise of peace, the promise that the day will come when all nations together will be united in the presence of God and we will be blessed with all that is “*calm and bright.*” In the midst of conflict, how do you experience the peace of God? Today, pray a prayer of peace for yourself, your relationships and for the world.

Tuesday, December 4, 2018 Isaiah 2: 3-4

Not only will all people stream to the mountain of God, they will do so that they might know God and walk in God's ways. The promise is that God will speak and will speak of what is good, just and right. Part of the struggle is that people hear or believe they understand what God wants and how God wants things done. Those disagreements make for conflict, violence and war. The prophet is not clear about the process it takes to be united, only that the promise is that the time is coming when it will occur. People are often distracted: by work, by uncertainty, by life spinning out of control. During the Advent season we are often distracted by advertising and busy-ness yet the carol *Silent Night* reminds us of all that is calm and bright. Advent invites us to turn back to God, that “God may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” How are you finding ways to turn away from distractions and find the peace that Christ offers?

Wednesday, December 5, 2018 Luke 1: 68-70

This song of Zechariah is beautiful. It comes after Zechariah had been unable to speak during Elizabeth's pregnancy. When Elizabeth wanted to name the baby John, she was questioned. Zechariah wrote down that the baby's name was to be John and immediately he was able to speak. People pondered and talked about this for a long time. Zechariah began praising God. John was to prepare the way of the Christ and Zechariah praised God for what had occurred and would also occur. Read this passage several times. How do you see God at work in the world redeeming the world? Who is God working through to make a difference in the world to begin to shower the world with peace?

Thursday, December 6, 2018 Luke 1: 71-75

“That we might be saved....we might serve him without fear.” The purpose of John and of Jesus was that we might be saved and learn to love God and serve Him without fear. To be without fear, is to find “heavenly peace.” When we sing the first verse of *Silent Night*, we sing of all being “calm and bright.” Zechariah sings of peace when God has rescued us from our enemies, when the world will be made right because of God's reign. Peace is not just the cessation of war, but a sense of God's presence with us, no matter what. In that sense, celebrating the birth of Jesus, *Emmanuel: God-with us*, is an acknowledgement of the peace that only God can give. As we begin a year of gratitude, how do you thank God for the peace we receive in Christ?

Friday, December 7, 2018 Luke 1: 76-79

Zechariah proclaims John's role in the future of the reign of God in these verses. “You...you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins.” John did that and more. John invited people into a newness of life in order to prepare to experience the coming of Christ. John prepared the way with prayer, with preaching and with baptism. Then Zechariah promises that when people gain knowledge of their salvation, “the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness....and to guide our feet into the way of peace.” The simplest way to understand Advent and Christmas is to know that God pierces the darkness with the light of love and grace and from that love and light we walk the way of peace, live the way of peace and share the way of peace. Where do you find peace in the midst of it all? Today, plan sometime this weekend to experience the peace that Christ brings.