Fifth Sunday of Advent: Prince of Peace!

Scripture:

‘So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.’ (Luke 2:4-7)

‘For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.’ (Isaiah 9:6)

Introduction

* In recent years the arrival of a new baby has become an increasingly public event as parents share with their loved ones all the preparation, anticipation and excitement that comes with bringing new life into the world. There are baby showers (a party with food, presents for the baby and even games) and ‘gender reveals’ (which can take many creative forms but essentially reveals the baby’s sex to the expectant parents in the presence of those close to them!).
* In Jesus’ case there were no parties, no balloons, no tasty food or drinks, no baby present wish lists prepared for his birth and no family or familiar acquaintances apart from his parents.

Context

* Most regal figures are born with great pomp and ceremony. Crowds gather and the media are eager to capture the first images of the new arrival. But Jesus, the greatest miracle in the history of the world, the eternal Son of God being born as a man, enters the world in the most mundane way possible. But this was by no means less cause for celebration!
* Although Joseph was living in Nazareth, he and Mary had to go back to his ancestral home, Bethlehem, because of the Roman census (Luke 2:4-5). While political reasons determined Jesus’ place of birth, ultimately God, who controls history, guaranteed that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem in accordance with Old Testament prophecy (Micah 5:2).
* Isaiah is mentioned by name in the New Testament over 20 times as forseeing the Saviour of humanity, the promised King, from the line of David, God’s servant and anointed preacher of the gospel, victor over all evil and hope of the world … all bound up in this baby.
* In Isaiah 9:6 the prophet writes as though this child had already arrived in his time, with the expectation that he will be a Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace.
* The *ESV Commentary* writer says that ‘Jesus, the Prince of Peace was to bring about the much-anticipated rule and reign that people had been waiting for. His governance contrasts with even the best Davidic line that Judah had experienced for his nature was divine.’
* The *shalom* peace of Jesus would be one of harmony and unity with God, bringing a sense of wholeness and wellbeing. It would be a peace with no end, a peace that would reflect the holiness of God in its devotion to justice and righteousness.
* Jesus, the Prince of Peace, whom we celebrate at Christmas, chose not to come with grandeur. He didn’t come to lead an army of troops with swords and guards or to build his own kingdom of this world with barbed wire and passports. He came as the ultimate, selfless act of love, offering peace to all.

Reflection

* The world was in turmoil when Isaiah lived, and when Jesus walked this Earth, and continues to be today. It may be hard to see how Jesus, the embodiment of peace, is present in such a harsh world. But note that having peace doesn’t mean that things will be easy (John 16:33). Jesus never promised easy, but he did promise that his peace would be with us and that he would help us: ‘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’ (John 14:27).
* This Christmas time, regardless of what the world does, however unachievable people may believe peace to be, Jesus longs to reign in our hearts as the Prince of Peace. And he calls us to consider our relationship with him and sharpen our peace-making character both personally and corporately. Peace in our own lives flows from a relationship with the Prince of Peace. Our relationships with others should be marked by the peace of Christ.
* Quote:

*‘As one made in the image of God, peacemaking, reconciliation is in my DNA, part of my identity as a disciple of Jesus Christ. People will know we are God’s children because we show the family likeness. Given peace from God, we build peace.’* (Justin Welby)

Prayer

Lord, thank you because you are the ultimate Prince of Peace, humbled in the form of a tiny baby. I praise you because your reign extends above all rule and authority, power and dominion. Bring peace to my heart today, bring peace to people of all nations across this world. May they know your love poured out for them and experience the deep peace that only you can give. Amen.