



IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, ONE GOD. AMEN.

My Beloved Priests, Deacons, Servants, Members of Church Committees, and all the Congregation, my sincerest congratulations to you all for this Glorious Feast of the Nativity. As we celebrate this night, let us truly sing and praise with the angels as they say:

“Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, and goodwill toward men!”

That was the praise uttered by the heavenly hosts on the very first Christmas night many years ago, and that is the same praise we repeat throughout our hymnology and our prayers tonight.

The first part of the phrase is easy to understand – **“Glory to God in the highest.”** All of creation is called to glorify God today, tomorrow and forever – both in heaven and on earth, which is why we always sing **“heaven AND earth are full of Your holy glory.”**

The third part is also easily understood – **“goodwill toward men.”** The Incarnation of the Logos is the ultimate sign of God’s goodness and His love for mankind, as He sent His Only Begotten Son - **“who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see” (1 Timothy 6:16)** – into the world for the salvation of every man, woman and child who has ever walked the face of the earth, regardless of race or ethnicity or language or tribe.

So **“Glory to God”** makes sense and **“goodwill toward men”** makes sense, but how about the middle phrase: **“peace on earth”**?

Is there actually peace on earth? If so, where is it?
Did the birth of Christ end all wars and conflicts?
Did it end all hatred and violence?
Could anyone look at the world today and say it is filled with peace?

If tonight is supposed to be a night of “peace on earth”, then why is there so much conflict in our world? In our homes? In our families?
Why are so many people filled with stress and anxiety and confusion?
Why is there so much fighting and hatred and unrest?



In other words, WHERE IS THE PEACE ON EARTH? We all want peace and pray for it, but the question for tonight is where is it?
Where do we find the peace Jesus promised to His followers when He said:

“PEACE I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you.” (John 14:27)

The word “peace” comes from the Hebrew word “*shalom*”. In the Old Testament, *shalom* refers to something much more than the absence of war or conflict; it points to the presence of something much greater.

It means “completeness” or “wholeness” – like a stone with no cracks or a wall with no gaps. To be in a state of *shalom* means to lack nothing. *Shalom* can also be used as a verb. To “*bring shalom*” means to make complete or restore.

In the Old Testament Law, if your animal were to accidentally damage your neighbor’s property, you would *shalom* them by making a complete repayment for their loss as mentioned in Exodus 22:4. In other words, it means to take what’s missing and restore it to wholeness.

The same applies to human relationships. To *shalom* means more than just to resolve a conflict; it means to reconcile or heal that which was broken. When rival nations would make *shalom*, they wouldn’t just stop fighting; they would become allies and begin working together for each other’s benefit.

With that understanding of *shalom*, the prophet Isaiah looked at the coming of Christ and said:

**For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of His government and peace
There will be no end.
(Isaiah 9:6-7)**

Tonight we celebrate the Child Jesus that was born into the world to be our *shalom*. He came to be our peace. He came not to condemn us but rather to complete us. Through His incarnation, that which was previously broken was



restored and made whole again. The enmity which had separated mankind from God was abolished and put to death. And we, His beloved creation, were united once more with our Heavenly Father.

As St. Paul writes,

“For He Himself is our PEACE (shalom), who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making PEACE, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.” Ephesians 2:14-18

The world may never stop fighting. The conflicts may never disappear. The greed and selfishness and hatred will always exist. But despite all of that, we can still find “peace on earth” by looking towards the manger and seeing the One who has come to restore us and to fix that which was broken.

He restores us by giving us the right to become children of God – to be **“born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God”** (John 1:13) through the waters of Baptism.

He heals our brokenness by offering forgiveness for whatever sins burden us and drag us into a pit of guilt and despair. We find this freedom in the sacrament of Confession where we hear the words of our Lord saying, **“Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.”** (John 8:11).

And finally, He makes us whole again by giving us LIFE – the abundant life – through His Holy Body and His Precious Blood on the altar.

As St. John Chrysostom said,

“We receive within us the same body of our Lord Christ that was born in the manger of Bethlehem, the same body that walked on the sea of Galilee, the same body that was crucified on Calvary, the same body that was resurrected from the tomb, the same body that ascended into



heaven and now sits on the right hand of the Father. There is no power in life greater than this.”

So regardless of how you entered tonight – whether stressed or confused or burdened... whether in turmoil at work, turmoil at home or turmoil in your relationships... whether you feel close to God, or maybe a little distant, or even afar off... you can still find peace tonight. You can find it because God sent His Son Jesus not just to bring peace on earth, but more specifically, to bring peace to YOU.

I will conclude this letter the same way we conclude every Liturgical service, where the priest dismisses the congregation by saying “Go in PEACE and may the PEACE of God be with you all.”

Through the intercessions of the Mother of Light, St. Mary, and through the prayers of the blessed elder, St. Joseph the carpenter, and through the prayers of our holy Father and Shepherd, His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, Merry Christmas to you all.

BISHOP PETER

Bishop, Diocese of North, South Carolina & Kentucky
And Papal Vicar of the Churches of Virginia