# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“Peace on Earth”**

**Luke 2:1-20**

 **Christmas Eve, 2020**

At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. **2**(This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) **3**All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. **4**And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David’s ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. **5**He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child.

**6**And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. **7**She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them. **8**That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. **9**Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord’s glory surrounded them. They were terrified, **10**but the angel reassured them. “Don’t be afraid!” he said. “I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. **11**The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! **12**And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.” Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

**14**“Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.”

**15**When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, “Let’s go to Bethlehem! Let’s see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

**16**They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. **17**After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. **18**All who heard the shepherds’ story were astonished, **19**but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. **20**The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.

Somewhere in the hills surrounding the sleepy village of Bethlehem, the first Christmas concert took place. While there had been no specific advance billing for this concert, providing information as to its exact day, time and location, there had been some hints several hundred years earlier by certain prophets of God, such as the words from Isaiah that Pastor McLane read which declared: “A child is born to us, a son is given to us. And he will be called the Prince of Peace.”

The audience for that first Christmas concert was a few shepherds, deliberately chosen to be the first to hear the Good News of Jesus’ birth. We might find it odd that heaven would put on such a massive display of its splendor for a small group of relative nobodies. If you or I were in charge of the concert, we probably would have scheduled it at noon in the great temple in Jerusalem where it would be filled with people attending the midday prayer and sacrifice service.

The very setting of this announcement is itself Good News for it reveals that heaven chooses to be for all people, regardless of status or accomplishment. Each one of us was created in the image of Almighty God as an original masterpiece and that gives us enormous worth and value to him. He desires for everyone to hear the message of the angels.

“Peace on earth.” That’s exactly what we need right now in this world of ours. Anger and frustration and impatience are strong, and they seem to mock any promise of peace on earth. Still, we do not give up praying for peace. Peace in our families, peace between neighbors, peace in our government, peace in war-torn areas of the world . . . and peace within ourselves where our worries for today and anxieties about tomorrow rob us of sense of well-being.

The first Christmas concert has come to an end. The dazzling angels have returned to heaven and the night settles in once again. The shepherds have a choice of what to do next. They can return to their task of shepherding, having enjoyed the spectacle but deciding it’s time to get back to work. Or, they can go to Bethlehem and see the wonderful thing about which they have been told.

What will you do when the celebrations of this Christmas season come to end in the next couple of days? Will you return to life as it was before hearing these words of Good News, or will you go to Bethlehem and see, so to speak, the One about whom Christmas is all about? He came into this world and was born a child not simply for us to enjoy his annual birthday party. He came to give his life on a cross for the forgiveness of our sin. Will you turn to him today, place your trust in him, giving him glory in the highest and thereby experiencing his peace in your heart, not just today but every day of the year?