

the

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“Do the work of an evangelist” - 2 Tim 4:5

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Christ Is Our Peace

by the Rev. Archimandrite Fr. Eusebius Stephanou, Th.D.

“Peace” is one of the most abused words in our current idiom. People of all ideologies and styles of life give the impression that they are championing the cause of peace, all the way from activists to ruling officials in government positions.

“Peace” is used either as a catchword in opposition to the establishment or as part of a maneuver to keep the adversary off guard in furthering some sort of causes. Some think of peace as submission of the masses to totalitarian authority, while others think of it as a state of mental suspension and emotional indulgence.

Isn't there more to peace than merely the absence of war? In reality peace is a positive state of the heart and mind. It comes with a person's close relationship to Jesus Christ Whom, the Scriptures tell us, “is our peace” (Eph. 2:14). To think of peace as simply the absence war is the tragic deception in which most people trap themselves in their quest for peace.

Peace begins in the Heart

All conflicts, wars, and acts of hatred stem from disobedience to God's law and alienation from His Spirit. Peace is not so much the absence of something as it is the presence of what is most vital to man's inner and outer harmony – Jesus Christ the Son and Logos of God. Separation from the Lord amounts to separation from peace. To lose one's relationship with Christ is to invite fellowship with Satan and

the enmity that comes with him.

“That which is born of the flesh is flesh; that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit”. This is the law established by God in the very structure of existence. Peace comes from living the life of the Spirit. While war and conflict are the works of the flesh. No human power can alter this law. It is eternal and unchanging. Man can either abide by it or violate it. He can enjoy the benefits of conforming to it or violate it. He can enjoy the benefits of conforming to it or he can taste the bitter fruits of transgressing it. The free choice is ours to make.

Peace begins in the heart. Outer peace that is visible in the relations between men is the natural expression of the peace of the inner man. Hostility and animosity have their inception in the human heart. Men who are not at peace with themselves can never be at peace with their fellowmen. On the other hand, men who are not at peace with God forfeit peace with both themselves and others. Thanks only to the coming of Christ into the world we can have peace that is primary to peace in any expression of human experience. “We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 4:2).

Peace Banished by the Devil

Inner peace is a precious gift that comes from God by virtue of His Holy Spirit that He has sent into the world. The Bible calls peace the “fruit of the Spirit,” Because man experiences it only in spiritual rebirth that is, being born again of the Spirit. It is the state of God's Kingdom. But “Unless a man is born from above he cannot see the Kingdom of God.” Apart from inner regeneration man's life is forever devoid of peace.

Being a special endowment of God, it is a target of the devil's assault and a continual object of his scheming in his attempt to destroy man. If he can rob man of his inner peace, then he has won the supreme victory. All other evils follow naturally from the loss of peace, namely, fear, anxiety, irritability and finally hostility.

The peace of the soul is not an inalienable possession. It can be lost much easier than it is won. The devil strives to banish it in subtle and intangible ways. Much of his success is on the level of the subconscious. Here undetectable fears, anxieties, and tensions stemming from remote causes find a permanent place. In the secret chambers of the subconscious the devil finds his most popular hiding place. It is during its formative years that a child can fall prey to demonic influence and later become afflicted with neurosis and even psychosis.

Mental Illness and the Loss of Peace

In our lost and despairing world when mental illness has reached epidemic proportions, the peace of mind and soul has become a rare commodity.

Thousands of people each day are admitted to mental hospitals or to psychiatric departments in this country alone. There are many attempted suicides every day as well. It has become obvious by now that the America's number one sickness today is not cancer. It is not heart disease. It is mental sickness.

There was a time when roaming mad dogs were a source of terror. But today we seldom hear of mad dogs any more. It is the people that are going mad. America is going mad for sin and the things the devil offers: money, liquor, drugs, and the lusts of the flesh; then it goes mad mentally. The Bible clearly warns man against disobeying the law of God. He can never get away with it: "The Lord will smite thee with madness..." (Deut. 28:28).

During His earthly ministry Jesus cast out demons from many who possessed. He came into the world to destroy the works of the devil and to liberate mankind and make him a sharer in divine peace and blessedness. But even today there are many demon-oppressed who either have lost their sanity or are on the verge of losing it. Among these are even young people who from childhood have been progressively oppressed by demonic powers because of disobedience to God's law in the family.

The Only peace Table

The urgent need of countless people of all ages and of both sexes is to find peace in order to save their sanity. From the time laboratories began to turn out tranquillizers, they have had to work around the clock and build new

plants to meet the demand of the buying public. Why? To tranquilize America. Because she has rebelled against God and has gone mad. She has been giving official endorsement to moral license, free sex, pornography, violence and the breakdown of family life. Even churches are beginning to sanction situation morality and relativism in belief and practice.



But it is the power of God alone that can provide the tranquility for His people: "Great peace have they that love Thy law." God sent His Son into the world to lift the curse of sickness and death. Jesus Christ offered His life upon the Cross so that man in his predicament could find healing, deliverance and peace with God and thus with Himself and fellow man. Jesus is the "Prince of Peace" because He establishes His throne in the hearts of men and woman, not in palaces of earthly kingdoms. The "peace on earth" is a gift that comes with complete submission to Jesus Christ and with rebirth in the Holy Spirit.

Peace can never be negotiated. It is a gift given freely by God. It is futile for men to meet around peace tables in the effort to secure world peace. The only table at which peace can be guaranteed is the Table of the Lord's Supper where man receives the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God and his fellow men. Apart from the Communion Table men are condemned to perpetual conflict. What they think of as peace is but an uneasy armistice between unending war. Peace is given freely to everyone that repents of their sins and bows their knees to the Cross of Calvary. God's infinite love has made it available

to all those who receive Jesus into their heart as their personal Savior.

Finding peace in Jesus

Hundreds of thousands of young people today are finding healing and rest of soul in Jesus. Drug addicts who were hooked on drugs are beginning to discover the wonderful power of Jesus. The serenity and smiles on their faces are proof enough of the genuineness of their new discovery and regeneration in Jesus Christ. The testimonies of these young people is stirring evidence that the Lord can work tremendous miracles in the lives of those who have accepted Him in sincere faith and commitment.

But true peace knows no compromise with disobedience. Those Christians who think they can hold back from God part of their life are courting disaster. It is all or none at all for Christ. Trying to cheat is simply inviting the devil to take over and to arouse inner disturbances. If you give an inch to the devil, he will take a yard. It isn't worth it. Hold on to Christ in a life of faith and prayer and you will want to shout it from the roof tops: "Christ is our Peace".

Dear friend: no matter how deep you are in sin and neurosis, turn to Jesus. Hand over your life to Him. Seek His healing Spirit that can banish the demons that lurk in your heart and trouble you mentally and physically. Save yourself from the madness that is sweeping this land and from that eternal outer darkness of pain prepared for the devil and his angels.

Christmas means that hope has come to the world. It is foolish to suffer the anguish of fear and of the unknown, when all the while Jesus is present and alive in the world. He invites you and reaches out for you in love and compassion. There is no reason why you should endure the pangs of guilt and despair. Jesus wants to have you share that supreme victory, that victory over fear and hell. He searches out to find you and to make you a child of God's everlasting Kingdom of peace and righteousness.

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The Message of Christmas

by John Kaniaris

Therefore, the Lord Himself shall give you a sign! Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Isaiah 7:14

For the longest time he had waited, as long as he could remember until at last he was a very old man. Many seasons had past, from day to day, in the night watches, in new moons and feast days. Faithfully he kept his vigils looking and watching expectantly for that sign. The prophet said the Lord would give his people a sign, a virgin shall conceive. But who is this virgin maiden that she will bear Immanuel? Bear the Messiah. How would this be? Yet, he knew in his own life, that brief moment in time, his encounter with a heavenly messenger was very real.

The prophets had long foretold of the Messiahs birth, the Jewish King to be born in Bethlehem.

“But thou Bethlehem Ephrata, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be a ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” Micah 5:2

Even so, the Magi, Wise men from the East also perceived and recognized a sign. The sign of an unusual and extraordinary star. One that would lead them to the land where a King was to be born. They searched ancient texts; they studied the stars, and apparently knew of the Messiah's Prophecy.

They were educated men perhaps studying the Hebrew Scriptures. They trusted this sign, “His star”, and this amazing heavenly phenomenon. All

preparations were made for this long journey, provisions and supplies gathered. And each wise man, pondered in his heart, how to honor this newborn King. And so they began their journey, into a foreign land, following the star to which they rejoiced exceedingly.

The shepherds no less, humble men watching their flocks, were



also to behold an extraordinary event. The angel of the Lord appeared to them, ***“and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid”***. Who wouldn't be frightened and astonished at this apparition in the silence of the dark night? *No ruling King, or wealthy prince or priest was given this privilege. “Truly God had chosen the weak things of the world, shepherds, to confound the things which are mighty”. 1 Cor. 1:27* They not only saw the angel of the Lord and the heavenly host, but they also heard the message proclaimed.

“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For unto you is born in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger” Luke 2:10-11.

Even so, this elderly devout man waited. He remembered, early in life, searching and studying the ancient scrolls, the prophets and the law. He loved the holy writings and pondered in his heart the words of the prophets.

He was known to all as a just man and a scholar. As it happened, he was asked with other Hebrew scholars to translate the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek. Beginning to translate in the book of Isaiah, he came to this passage which puzzled him.

“Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son and shall call his name Immanuel.” Isaiah 7:14.

Being of a scholarly and analytical mind, he believed this to be an error. Logically, rationally, it didn't make sense. So he proceeded to remove the word “virgin” and replace it with “young woman”.

Just at that very moment an Angel of the Lord appeared to him and refrained his hand from changing the word. He declared to him that the prophecy was true and a virgin shall conceive. And to prove to him the will of God, the angel promised that he would not die until he had beheld with his own eyes, the Christ, born of a virgin.

Some have written that this

man waited for over 100 years for Christ to appear.

Finally, the time of the fulfillment of the Lord's promise to him was at hand. We all have heard the story written in the gospel of Luke. But now we are captivated to behold it through the eyes of Simeon, a man who waited a lifetime.

"And when the days of her purification according to the Law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord." Luke 2:22

"And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the spirit, into the temple. When the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law. Then took him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now let us thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word. For mine eyes have seen the salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel". Luke 2:25-32

Brethren, what can we learn from these scriptures and the witness of Simeon's great faith, perseverance and hope? And the Magi, the wise men from the East, and the humble

shepherds, do they speak to our hearts?

The Nativity of Christ, is the time of reflection, faith, hope, and promise. Laying aside for a time our



worldly cares and pursuits and thinking about God's greatest gift, the Lord Jesus Christ. Are we as wise men, diligently seeking the Christ Child and making provisions in our life for the journey? Which star are we following?

Or perhaps, we feel we are as laborers in the field, like the shepherds facing hardships, dark and cold nights and wild beasts. Yet the heavenly messenger appeared to them and they rejoiced. Do we run with haste to see the Savior, Christ

the Lord?

Perhaps we can say we are as devout and wise as Simeon. Who studied the scriptures, prayed faithfully and waited a lifetime. What or whom are we waiting for in our life?

"Dear brothers and sisters in Christ who are zealously seeking Christ. "Fix your eyes upon Jesus." Hebrew 12:2

Have you lost hope and become discouraged? Behold the Son of God! Behold The Saviour, Christ the Lord! Rise up and rejoice in Him!

Are you asleep? Awake! Awake and hear the Angels voices proclaiming the birth of the Savior, Immanuel, God with us. God with you!

Are you empty and lost? Brethren, Christ and Christ alone can fill your emptiness with ultimate peace, hope and eternal life.

St. Porphyrios said it best: "When people are empty of Christ, a thousand and one other things come and fill them up: jealousies, hatreds, boredom, melancholy, resentment, a worldly outlook, and worldly pleasures. Try to fill your soul with Christ so that it's not empty."

May your journey to the Feast of the Nativity of Christ, bring you to a renewed, intimate and joyful union with Jesus Christ. Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

Christmas Wishes from St. Symeon's

During our Board of Directors meeting held in November, the Board had unanimously decided to make some very substantial donations to different Orthodox missions, both nationally and internationally, for the furtherance of the Gospel. We have also financially assisted in disaster relief for a number of people who had been adversely effected in Panama City by Hurricane Michael. We truly appreciate your continued support of this ministry and we are looking forward to minister to many more people in the near future. This has only been possible because of your love and support. We are thankful for each and every one of you. Those of us on the Board of Directors of St. Symeon's want to wish you and your loved one's a **Very Merry Christmas and a Blessed and prosperous New Year!**