

## Finding PEACE in Advent!

### Group Intro: "Peace on Earth"...really?

The Bible speaks often of peace, but rarely to describe the absence of conflict, chaos, or struggle. Those challenges are a natural part of living in an earthly world damaged by sin, selfishness, and injustice. Advent reminds us that a day will come when God will put all things right, but how do we experience peace in the waiting? The Hebrew word **Shalom** can be translated as "peace", but more accurately describes a condition where "things are in order". That doesn't mean a perfect life, but reflects when my relationship with God and with others is right. Are you at peace with God and others - are these relationships "in order"? That is where God's **Shalom** is found!

- **Read Luke 2:8-15** - a familiar announcement of peace to shepherds in a field near Bethlehem, the region where David tended his father's sheep as a young boy. Still today most shepherds in Israel are young girls and boys about 8-12 years old. What parts of the angel's declaration catch your attention? What emotions do you think the shepherds experienced?
- **Why the announcement to shepherds?** - the Hebrew prophets described the religious leaders of Israel as "shepherds", usually not in glowing terms! **Read Jeremiah 23:1-6 and Ezekiel 34:1-4, 22-25, and 30-31** - How are the religious leaders ("shepherds of Israel") described? Who is going to save God's people (His "sheep")? How is the "shepherd" that God will raise up described? God invites shepherds from David's fields to visit the newborn Messiah, but where are the religious leaders of Israel? Interestingly, Israel's shepherds don't welcome Jesus, so God invites an unexpected group who obediently travel to Bethlehem! The religious leaders were so caught up in their practices that they missed the miracle that God was doing. How does this happen?
- **Michael (?) and the angelic army** - Gabriel is named as the messenger to Mary in Luke 1, but this angel is not named. The Host of Heaven (angelic army), however, is led by Michael - who also appears leading the **same army** at the Return of Jesus in **Revelation 19:11-16**. The angelic choir at Jesus' birth foreshadows their appearance with Jesus at His second advent as the Victorious King who defeats the enemies of God and even Death itself (1 Cor 15:20-28). Jesus comes humbly to bring peace in His first Advent, but returns as a conquering warrior - both times with Michael and the Host of Heaven!

### "Hark, The Herald Angels Sing!" by Charles Wesley

Hark, the herald angels sing, Glory to the Newborn King  
Peace on earth and mercy mild, **God and sinners reconciled**  
Joyful, all ye nations rise, Join the triumph of the skies  
With the angelic hosts proclaim, "Chris is born in Bethlehem"  
Hark, the herald angels sing, Glory to the newborn King!

Christ by highest heav'n adored, Christ the everlasting Lord  
Late in time behold Him come, Offspring of the Virgin's womb  
**Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail the incarnate Deity**  
**Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel**  
Hark the herald angels sing, Glory to the newborn King!

Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace, Hail the Sun of Righteousness  
**Light and life to all He brings, Ris'n with healing in His wings**  
**Mild He lays His glory by, Born that man no more may die**  
**Born to raise the sons of earth, Born to give them second birth**  
Hark the herald angels sing, Glory to the newborn King!

**Come Desire of nations come, Fix in us Thy humble home**  
**Rise the woman's conqu'ring seed, Bruise in us the serpent's head**  
**Adam's likeness now efface, Stamp Thine image in its place**  
**Second Adam from above, Reinstall us in Thy love**  
Hark the herald angels sing, Glory to the newborn King!

**Discuss** - this carol has some of the most rich theological language about Jesus in all of the songs of the Church. Note the passages in bold - which one particularly stands out in thinking about what Jesus means to you?

**Pray for one another** - Give thanks to God for Jesus, pray that we would know peace in Christ this season!

