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## Cover Art

Luke 2:13-14 © 2017 Timothy R. Botts | Eyekons

# The Advent of the Prince of Peace



December 20—25

The first Church Council  
Euodia and Syntyche  
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“The Prince of Peace”

December 20

## The first Church Council

Acts 15:1-21

*After Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them... [they] were appointed to go up to Jerusalem.*

Conflict resolution is at the heart of any relationship, whether business or personal. Good conflict resolution builds peace. Poor conflict resolution increases discord. Arguments and difficulties come to every marriage, friendship, work relationship, and even among the brothers and sisters of a congregation. How we resolve our disagreements is crucial to our peace.

The Prince of Peace establishes peace between our Father and us by uniting us in His person. The Divine takes on flesh and blood to bring the two parties into one. He removes the source of the conflict, our sin, and puts it to death in His body. He then brings the peace He won to bear upon us as His people. We have peace with our Father.

There is conflict within the early Church between those with a Jewish background and those of a Gentile background. Look at how they resolve this conflict. They get past arguments by relying on Scripture and love for one another. They work to get along rather than working to prove the other wrong. They rightly state that it is not necessary to follow all the Old Testament ways in order to be one of God's people. They also ask the Gentiles to avoid a few things that could cause trouble in their relationship with the believing Jewish faction. After coming to this conclusion, representatives of both sides go out together to promote living in peace with one another as God's people.

Building and maintaining peace is an extension of the peace won for us by the Prince of Peace. We will have conflict. We need to maintain peace, and we maintain peace by relying on the Word of God and our love for one another. We forgive, and we show mercy.

By Rev. Matthew Brackman

### We Pray

*Lord Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace, continue to bring Your peace to bear upon us as Your people. Let Your forgiveness and mercy reign to resolve the conflicts we face in our families, our congregations, at work, or within our communities, so that Your peace flourishes. Amen.*

December 25

## "The Prince of Peace"

Isaiah 9:2-7

*Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David.*

Has the world ever been at peace? One scholar estimates that of recorded human history, only eight percent of the years knew no war. That leaves the possibility that there was still war somewhere without historians to record it.

Some boast in the two centuries of *Pax Romana*, the relative peace brought by Rome conquering the ancient world, around the time Jesus was born. Of course, that only covers the part of the world Rome conquered and dominated. Then, you also have to exclude the two civil wars fought by Romans in those centuries. When looking for something we can call "peace," you see, there are lots of exceptions.

Isaiah foresees an era that would allow us to drop all the exceptions. Isaiah lived in a time that was relatively war-torn. The line of Davidic kings had failed and was being struck down. Still, Isaiah looked ahead generations into the future. He saw a king of the line of David who would be the "Prince of Peace."

David's son, Solomon, gave Israel peace for half a century. When he died, his son's utter foolishness led to civil war and the humiliation of Judah. We need a wiser Solomon who never dies.

"To us a son is born!" That king has been born, and He chose to live where we live. He was crucified "to keep the peace" (John 11:47-52). He overcame death fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy. His enemies can hurt Him no more. His kingdom comes now through faith, but finally of His government there will be no end, for He is the king triumphant over death.

This "Prince of Peace" does not win His peace by dominating others. He comes first as a baby, as a servant, as a subject betrayed by His government. He bears in His flesh the scars of the *Pax Romana*, but gives in His flesh and blood true peace for a feast of victory. And so the nations bring in their treasures, the forests clap their hands, the very stones sing, "Hosanna!" Emmanuel has come to ransom captive Israel.

By Rev. Daniel Guagenti

### We Pray

*All praise to the King! He who was reborn from the dead bears our flesh to bring peace to our rebelling hearts. In Your gentleness give us peace surpassing understanding, a peace we offer to and before all the world. Amen.*

“Peace on  
Earth”

Luke 2:8-20

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace  
among those with whom He is pleased!”

When I was young there was a popular slogan making the rounds on T-shirts and bumper stickers: “peace through the use of superior firepower.” It was a riff on President Teddy Roosevelt’s famous axiom, “Speak softly and carry a big stick.” We build armies and send them abroad in the name of ending war; we arm ourselves, we insist, to keep violence at bay. In short, it is very difficult for humans to imagine peace that isn’t preceded by war, to imagine order than isn’t imposed by force on chaos.

And so the shepherds keeping watch over their fields outside Bethlehem have an encounter with the *sabaoth* of the Lord—the full army of God. These are the shock troops of heaven. The shepherds are, quite reasonably, terrified. Surely the Lord is at last going to bring peace—using His superior firepower.

Yet the general of this army tells the shepherds not to be afraid. The army doesn’t open fire; they sing. They sing of the glory of God coming with peace on earth to people of goodwill. They pin the hopes of peace on a baby wrapped in rags and laid in a food trough in an outlying exurb of the Holy City, Jerusalem.

That baby would grow up to ride into Jerusalem not on a war horse, but on a donkey. The crowds, not of soldiers but of the common people, would cry out, “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest” (Luke 19:38). Then that man would be tried, convicted, tortured, crucified, and die.

That is how God brings peace. Not through the kind of violent wars we wage but through sacrifice, through mercy, through a man who took up His cross and followed His Father’s will. Because of Jesus’ death there is peace on earth with God, and peace in heaven with sinful humanity. That is the gift of Christmas: a peace not imposed but given through the stretched-out arms of Jesus on the cross.

By Rev. Charles St-Onge

We Pray

Glory to You, O Lord, in the highest heaven, and praise to You, O Christ, for  
Your sacrificial death that brought us true and lasting peace. Amen.

Esau Receives  
Jacob

Genesis 33:1-20

Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and  
fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.

We know that God forgives us, and in our sinfulness, we can only rest completely on His undeserved mercy. When you have a son or daughter, you have an understanding of how much our heavenly Father loves us. We can understand the story of the Prodigal Son somewhat because we love our children with a generous love. I’m not saying it should be this way, but our children can sometimes get away with a lot. There are times when our children do things they’re not supposed to do, but when they correct their behavior we immediately and unconditionally forgive them.

But then there may be folks in our lives to which we don’t extend that same grace. Brothers and sisters have a shorter leash, depending on our relationship with them, perhaps. Strangers even shorter. Some wrongs can keep people from forgiving one another for years or even years upon years.

The Lord’s Prayer reminds us that if we want God’s forgiveness, we must also be able to forgive others who have sinned against us. Yet there are times when we hold grudges, due to painful memories and experiences.

Esau had all the reason in the world not to forgive Jacob. He had lost his inheritance because of Jacob’s clever trickery and treachery. Four hundred men were coming along with Esau. Jacob was afraid, but he trusted in God’s promises. It was time for Jacob to return home, and he rested on God’s mercy. He brought his fear to God in prayer (32:9-12).

There are difficult problems beyond your solving, problems involving difficult situations and requiring solutions that can only come from God. Bring these problems to God in prayer and ask for His help. He does care for you, and He does bring solutions-not always what you expect.

Esau embraced Jacob and forgave him. God will help you too.

By Rev. Chris Truelsen

We Pray

Dear Lord Jesus, Your great forgiveness is a mystery, but I gladly accept Your mercy and grace. Help me extend this same mercy to others. Amen.

## Euodia and Syntyche

Philippians 4:2-9

*Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me.*

Who were Euodia and Syntyche? Were they dear friends who had a falling out? Were they leaders in the church? What was the nature of their disagreement? Were they arguing about a matter of faith and teaching? Was it about who was in charge of the church potluck? Was it regarding how best to help those in need? Did their personalities just clash?

We don't know the answers to most of these questions. We can reasonably assume the issue was not about faith and teaching, or Paul would have given correction. We know these were two women in the church who have worked with Paul and whose disagreement affected the life of the church. This issue was not a reason to upend the peace of the Lord among His people.

Paul also called upon their brothers and sisters in Christ to help them. This peace and unrest is not healthy for the body of Christ, and the rest of the body should be of help and service to their sisters.

It may sound surprising, but we don't have to be best friends with everyone at church. However, since we are going to be spending eternity together, we probably ought to learn how to get along.

Notice the source of peace. The resolution to this conflict is peace in the Lord. In Christ we have peace between us and our Father. We then extend this peace to one another. We are to love one another as Christ has loved us. It is no accident that in the next couple paragraphs Paul talks about rejoicing, being reasonable, and focusing on what is honorable and pure. It is hard to rejoice together while giving someone the evil eye. We certainly don't look reasonable if we're throwing shade.

These women, you, and I have peace in the Lord. We live in His peace and work to maintain His peace among us.

By Rev. Matthew Brackman

### We Pray

*Come, Prince of Peace. Establish Your peace within us and among us. Let us find rest for our souls in You, and let our lives with one another be blessed. Amen.*

## No Evergreens for Jonah

Jonah 4:1-11

*And should I not pity Nineveh...*

You know the story of Jonah and the whale. God sent Jonah to pronounce judgment on the city of Nineveh, the capitol of the Assyrians. Jonah didn't want to go, so he got in a ship, planning to sail far away. But God brought Jonah back by means of a great fish.

You know the story. But there is one detail you may have overlooked. You might assume that Jonah ran away because he feared the Assyrians. The Assyrians were famous for their cruelty. Torture was their common practice. They were also enemies of Israel. They destroyed the northern kingdom and carried the people into exile. It seems logical that Jonah ran away because he feared the Assyrians.

Not so! The truth comes out after Jonah completes his mission. After being spit up by the whale, Jonah finally goes to Nineveh and delivers the message. "In forty days Nineveh will be overthrown!" Then, something wonderful happens. Instead of getting angry with Jonah, or just ignoring him, the Assyrians repent. Every person, from least to greatest, asks God for forgiveness. So God forgives them. The destruction Jonah prophesied did not happen.

This is what Jonah feared. This is why he tried to run away. He did not fear the Assyrians. But Jonah was afraid that God would forgive them. Jonah knew God too well!

Like Jonah, we might sometimes wish that God would get revenge on our enemies. We might want God to destroy all the evil-doers and all the people who hurt us.

But, as Jonah new, this is not what God is like. When there is repentance, God gives forgiveness, to everyone. God is merciful to our enemies, even if we don't like it.

But that's good. Because it means God will also have mercy on us. God had pity on Nineveh. And God has pity on you.

By Rev. Jonathan Mueller

### We Pray

*Merciful Lord, as You once showed mercy to Nineveh, grant mercy to our enemies, and to us. In Jesus' name, Amen.*