

The Peace of Christ

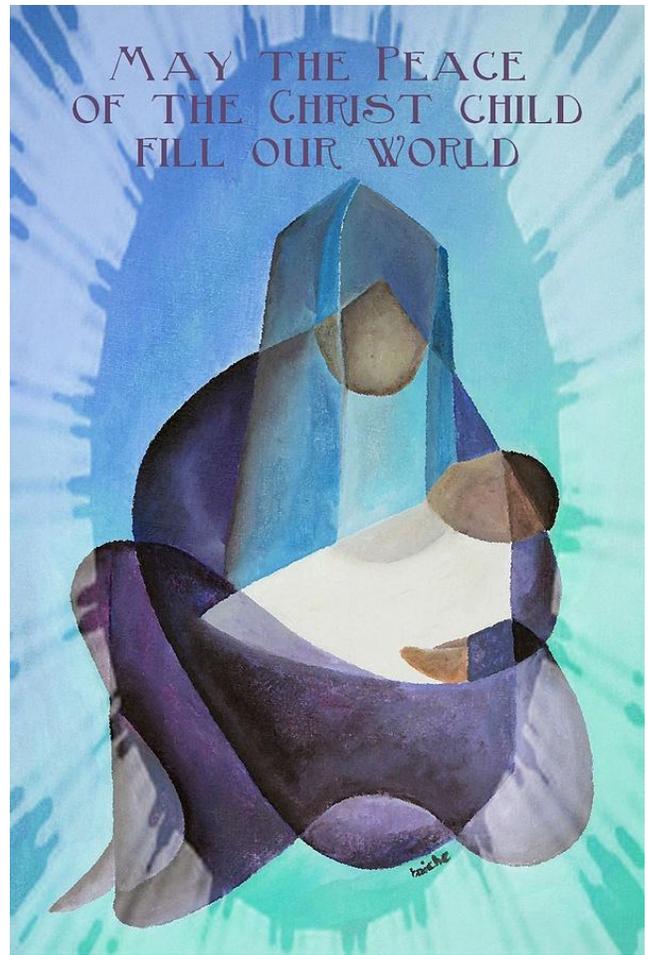
Peace seems to be as elusive as ever. Whether we are focusing on the inner peace that we often associate with the peace of God or the peace that many give their lives to preserve in war, real peace flows from the human heart—not down the barrel of a gun. We will not find real peace, however, unless we begin with God. Experiencing God’s peace requires a specific foundation. That foundation is God’s grace. Without God, we have no hope for peace.

With God’s grace we are equipped to share mutual respect for our neighbors. We also are able, with God’s grace, to heal inwardly from the spiritual challenges and damages that most of us encounter almost daily. Because of God’s love we can hope for the future of all of God’s people. If we are blessed to arrive at this stage, then we face another huge step. We face a particularly spiritual challenge to our inner peace when we are asked or forced to go to war. Inner peace does not survive very easily or for very long when we are violent toward anyone. We cannot delude ourselves into believing that war and peace can coexist in anyone’s heart. Thinking that we can do so only makes us more neurotic as a nation and as individuals. Nor does it clear the way for the advent of the One we know as “The Prince of Peace.”

There are other roadblocks to our inner peace with God. A major distraction from God is the compulsion to buy things all year long, many of which we don’t need, and then intensify our search for “right things” to give to each other at Christmas. We get so caught up in exchanging gifts that we risk missing the greatest gift of all—the life of Jesus whose birth we celebrate at Christmas—the Incarnation. It is the entering into the world of a human baby utterly unique, for Jesus is the Son of God. However, that does not resonate with a lot of us who have allowed our faith to weaken, deteriorate and then die as well as those who never had faith in God.

On the plus side, there are many Christians who don’t come to worship all year but who do attend worship at Christmas. Perhaps we/they feel God’s invitation in our hearts to come back, to be reminded of what we’ve known for a long time. Christ is born in Bethlehem. This Christ (Savior or Messiah) came to proclaim the coming of God’s kingdom of God’s love.

Among his many teachings, Jesus taught, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” (Matt. 5:9). Matthew records the words spoken by Jesus near the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. Do these words leave us wondering, “How can I be a peacemaker for others when I am not at peace even with who I am?”



May the Peace Of the Christ Child Fill Our World, by Taiche, 2013

It is a legitimate question, but before we can become peacemakers or even people with our own inner peace, we need to take inventory of our spiritual lives. We can begin with wherever we *are* as spiritual people—not with where we *think* that we should be. Part of our task is to look outwardly and ask, “How do people experience me as a spiritual person?” We probably need to do this more often than just at Christmas. I have done this at different points in my life, and it can be a difficult and even embarrassing spiritual exercise.

When I began this process 50+ years ago, there was a lot about me that I was not ready to face. Yet, I have experienced God as One who has never deserted me as I sought to understand myself more fully. Nor has God ever failed to help me to take the next step in changing and growing as a spiritual person. God continues to remind me that I belong in God’s family. God reminds me that all people from whatever background we emerge are in God’s family.

Christmas is both another day in my spiritual journey as well as a special holy day for me. Jesus was not just born. Jesus was born into a very human family just like yours or mine. Long before he suffered an ignominious death, Jesus lived a human life that was meant to announce the reality of God’s family (kingdom or realm) based on God’s love for each of us. I have been blessed with many people who loved me over the last 50+ years, even when I did not feel very lovable. They have taught me that God can bring peace to even the most troubled souls. I now experience Christmas as a time for worship but also of gratitude for all that God has done to make the peace of Christ real to me.

Is that so strange? Why would we not think of peace when we celebrate the coming of God into the world? After all, God came in the gentlest of ways. God came as a helpless infant who, as an adult, proclaimed the coming of God’s reign. As part of his preaching, Jesus stressed the importance of being peacemakers. He said to his followers, “Blessed are the peacemakers.”

Are we ready to allow God’s grace to change us from where we are as spiritual people to where God wants us to be? If we are, then God will ask us first to be at peace with God and then to become peacemakers or, with God’s help, to be makers of peace. The incarnation and the birth of Jesus is a reminder that God came to us as a normal human baby—not in anything resembling God’s infinite glory.

This helpless child, who was also the Son of God, demonstrates the lengths to which God will go to reach out to us. Even those of us too young to understand why we are in worship recognize when we are accepted and loved. There is nothing that children must know that is not summed up in the song so many of us learned to sing in church: “Jesus love me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so, little ones to him belong, they are weak, but he is strong.”

As always, I welcome your [responses](#).

Rev. Larry LaPierre

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