

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas  
December 9, 2018

Peace of the Lord

Luke 2:8-14

2:8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

2:9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear.

2:10 And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

2:11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

2:12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."

2:13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

2:14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

## 1. Glory of God

The words, "Glory to God in the highest" of today's reading is "*Gloria in excelsis Deo*" in Latin. Since we sing Latin lyrics in the hymn, "At the end of the wilderness," you may be familiar with this Latin words. "At the end of the wilderness" is a representative hymn of Christmas carols, but "*Gloria in excelsis Deo*" is not praised only for Christmas. The Early Church, add phrases. "We praise You. We bless You. We adore you. We glorify You. We give You thanks for Your great glory..." after "Glory to God in the highest. And on earth peace to men of good will.". The hymn is called "Gloria," or "Hymn of

Glory.” This has been sung every time at worship in many churches until now.

We praise God with the words, “Glory to God in the highest,” but indeed, we can praise by the “peace” which is in the praise, “On the earth, peace comes to people who fulfill the will of God.” Today, let us learn about the “peace.”

In the account of the birth of Jesus, there are several glorious manifestations of God, and each time the word, “Do not be afraid” is spoken. At first, it was when an angel appeared in Zachariah. Since the temple was a house of God, it is no wonder that an angel appears there, and Zachariah was a priest and could have accepted that. But in the days when Jesus was born, there was no such manifestation of the glory of God for a long time, and the Bible said, “And Zachariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him.” (Luke 1:12)

Looking at the glory of God, Zachariah “was troubled and fear fell upon him.” Zachariah seemed to represent the figure of those people who were accustomed to everyday life, worshipping God habitually. Temple rituals were done regularly, but there was no presence of God there. In words, even though the glory of God was praised, no manifestation of the glory of God was seen. The priest was wearing a sacred gown, but the holiness of God was not truly respected.

It may be the same for us today. Church worship is a place to meet God as well as the temple of the Old Testament and its worship, but today, how many people meet with God in church services, seeing the glory, listening to the Word of God? How many come to church expecting such spiritual experience? In modern times, in every country, people are coming to enjoy events and programs, to meet

someone, to show their talents there, and to hear the “self-help” speech which will be useful for their life. Many say, “It’s reality in modern church.”

The place where we meet God, along with the temple and the church, is also the deepest part of our inner face. It is often said that “Inner Temple.” The Holy Spirit lives in the spirit of those who have been redeemed and makes it a place to meet God. The Holy Spirit does supernatural works beyond our power and the power of this world. Even for you, you may have had the courage, confidence, encouragement, and consolation that you have never had before in deep meditation.

If we do not acknowledge every supernatural and spiritual thing, we cannot receive the power of God to make the impossible possible. Also, if someones try to live their life exactly as they decide, they cannot get God’s guidance for their life. If they do not want to change themselves, and are satisfied with everyday matters, and try not to seek God, they will finally end the lifetime without seeing the glory of God and feeling the presence of God. I guess, that how regrettable it is!

Zachariah was troubled to see the angel and fear fell upon him. His excessive fears have never been praised, but for those who are stained with the contemporary tendency to ignore even God’s glory, without fear of God at all, I think that it teaches us the importance of fearing God.

## **2. Peace from God**

The angel then appeared to Mary. Zachariah was afraid to see an

angel, but Mary was not. Why? At that time, women were not allowed to visit the temple just like men. There is a court for women before the temple. Between the court and the temple there is a hedge. It could not be inserted beyond it. Physically it keeps women away from the temple. But, the religious women had the fellowship with God in their own “inner temple.” Mary was one of such women. In Luke chapter 1 to 2, it has been written three times that Mary “was pondering” or “treasured up” in her heart.

This represents Mary’s devotional living. I think Mary was not afraid of the angel because she was watching and listening to heavenly things in her everyday life. However, she wondered what message was that God was telling her until God sent her an angel, then she was greatly troubled (Luke 1: 29). The angel got to know Mary’s “uneasiness,” and spoke her, “Do not be afraid!” Mary was able to receive a tremendously great message of becoming the mother of the Son of God, the Savior, by the word “Fear not!”

Third time, the angel appeared to the shepherds. Midnight, a stronger light than the stars’ gleam shone the shepherds suddenly. This light was the beam from God’s glory. The shepherds were afraid. But here again the angel told, “Do not be afraid!” (Luke 2: 10). A person said that the word, “Do not be afraid” comes out 365 times in the Bible. I could only see 100 verses sites out of the whole Bible, but 100 would be enough. Even by only one word of the mighty God, we will be saved from fear.

The opposite of “fear” is “peace” or “serenity.” The angel said, “Do not be afraid” to Zachariah, to Mary, and to the shepherds. In other words, the angel said, “Peace be with you.” The glory of God is

a terrible thing to sinful human beings, rather than a fascinating one. In the Bible there are written about those who lost their lives struck by the glory of God. When Isaiah saw the glory of God in vision, he cried, “Woe is me! For I am lost!” (Isaiah 6: 5) When Paul was still called “Saul,” he was struck by the glory of Christ and fell to the ground, and he became blind. (Acts 9: 3-9) When John became "islander" and stayed in Patmos, when he saw the glory of Christ, he became like a dead man. In Revelation 1: 17 it says, “ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.”

And the Revelation continues saying: “But he laid his right hand on me, saying, ‘Fear not, ....’” Jesus himself stretched out his hands saying, “Do not be afraid” to John. God has announced “peace” and “serenity” to those who are sinful and lost when they go before the holy God.

### **3. Peace of Christ**

“ Peace” is called “*Shalom*” in Hebrew. This word has several meanings. One of them is “a state without war.” When it is called “peace” in Japanese, there is such a meaning. In addition, “*Shalom*” also means “prosperity.” When Jesus was born, the Roman Empire ruled the Mediterranean world. The long and lasting war has ended and it has become a peaceful time. People called it “Peace of Rome” (*Pax Romana*) and they enjoyed it. But to the Jewish people, it was nothing but a humiliation. “Peace”, that the Jewish people wished, was that the independent and prosper country of the Jewish people like Solomon's time. And people expected that from the “Messiah.”

However, “peace” that God gives through “Messiah” was not such

a thing. It was “inner peace.” In Japanese, it is translated as “*heian*.” (serenity). However, the inner peace in the Bible is not the same as serenity in Japanese. “Serenity” in the sense of Japanese is “to understand that all circumstances are temporary so that keep the mind calm.” There is only relationship between myself and the environment there. It is “serenity” that people try to create through their self-enlightenment.

But, “peace” in the Bible challenges our relationship with God. There is something incompatible between the Holy God and sinful human beings. Sin is like a waging war to God. There is no absolute chance for a human to win, but there is only ruin. But what if God has offered a settlement from God and God has filled all the terms of the settlement? What we need to do is just surrender to God and swear obedience. Indeed, God met all the conditions for our reconciliation with God on the cross of Jesus Christ. God forgave our sins and we were accepted as His own people although we were His former enemies. The death of the cross of Christ is to repurchase us, who were slaves of sin. And it is called “redemption.” But because we can obtain peace with God by the cross of Christ, it is also called reconciliation.” Romans 5:10-11 says, “For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”

Romans 5:1 says, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” It has begun. “Peace”, that the Bible teaches, is from our Lord Jesus Christ. It

restores our right relationship with God. Therefore, this “peace” is called “peace of the Lord.” (*Pax Domini*) Among Jewish people, “*Shalom*” is a word of greeting, but the early church also greeted each other in worship by saying “Peace be with you!” Since the early Christians, who were filled with faith and the Holy Spirit, experienced this “peace of the Lord” on a daily basis. I think they could not stop expressing that “peace” in their worship service. This peace still lives in those who believed in Jesus Christ and were forgiven sins. It is given to all those who ask. We can approach God by the “peace of the Lord,” praise God’s glory, and and serve God without fear.

This is the “peace” that the angel told the shepherd by saying, “Do not be afraid!” and “on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” It is said that this “peace” can be given to “people who God is pleased,” but who are they? Are they special and respectable people? No, rather, they are people who know their own sins. They admit that they can not save themselves and surrender to God with a white flag. “God saves people by Jesus Christ.” There is no more certain about God’s favor than this. People, who accept “reconciliation” that God offers, are the ones who God is pleased. This Christmas, receiving this “peace,” or “serenity,” Let us praise the glory of God that will save people.

### **(Prayer)**

God, Who is in the glory, You have reconciled us through Jesus Christ. With this reconciliation, we can have peace and serenity for real. Please make us those who enjoy and celebrate this peace in this season. With thanks we pray this in the name of the Lord Jesus who

will tell us, “Do not be afraid,” and “Peace be with you.” Amen.