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HIS GOSPEL IS PEACE

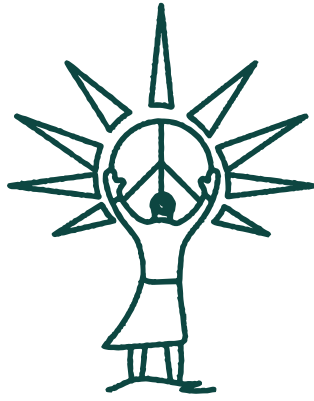
*The Advent
Of Christ
& The End
Of Fear*

HIS GOSPEL IS PEACE

THE ADVENT OF CHRIST
AND THE END OF FEAR



ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS
SERMON SERIES



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Sermons written by Matt Popovits

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**SERIES
OVERVIEW**



To be human is to understand what it means to fear. The smallest child is afraid when the lights turn off at night. The most famous rock star is driven by fear of rejection from their adoring fans. Fear keeps us from the Thanksgiving dinner table (or perhaps fuels the shouting match after the pumpkin pie is served). Fear causes us to stockpile our houses with toilet paper and water bottles “just in case.” Fear elevates and prolongs our anxiety or our shame as we choose to avoid addressing our mistakes - and the mistakes of others - out of concern that we’ll only make things worse.

The season of Advent helps us long for a different reality: one ruled by peace rather than fear. As Pastor Matt Popovits writes in this series, “Christ’s birth and the promise of his second coming mean peace is breaking through.” For the Son of God was born into our tribulation, despair, and fear not just to comfort us but to bring an end to whatever terrifies us most.


This is why the psalmist can assert, “We will not fear, though the earth gives way.”

It’s why one of Jesus’ common refrains is “Fear not.”

It’s why Paul proclaims that the peace of God guards and rules over the hearts of his people.

The Prince of Peace comes to live for us, die for us, and rise for us. In doing so, he overcomes death itself, cleanses us of our sin, defeats the evil one, and makes us righteous. Through faith in our Savior, born Immanuel, we cannot be rejected, we have nothing to be ashamed of, and we have the promise of life everlasting. In Christ alone, fear is exchanged for peace.

For this Advent Sermon series, Pastor Matt Popovits focuses on five places in Scripture where God addresses our fears and proclaims his peace. Despite your worries, anxieties, and very real suffering, we have a God who stands resolute to give us his “peace which surpasses all understanding” (Phil. 4:7).



Whether you deliver these sermons verbatim or adapt them for your specific congregation, whether you use them for your midweek services or Sunday services, we hope you find the words a warm comfort during this time of year as we reflect on the good news of Christ's incarnation and our longing for Christ to return once again.

In addition, we have prepared an order of worship for each service as well as social media and sermon display/PowerPoint slides. You can find all these helpful tools in the Advent Church Resources Download. Finally, we've compiled a beautifully designed devotional to be used in your bible studies or to enrich your individual congregants. Each entry includes a brief Scripture passage, devotion, and prayer for every day of Advent. You can find the free download [here](#) or order printed copies [here](#).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

With each sermon, you'll find an order of worship for each service. We've also prepared social media slides and proresenter slides to be used with your sermons. All of these are available in our Advent Church Resources download.

We've compiled and designed a devotional on His Gospel is Peace to be used in your bible studies or for personal study by your individual congregants. Each entry includes a brief Scripture passage, devotion, and prayer for every day of Advent. You can find the free download for this at our [Advent 2024 Devotional](#), or you may order printed copies from the [1517 Bookstore](#).

No Fear of the Future

Surely the righteous will never be shaken; they will be remembered forever. They will have no fear of bad news; their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the Lord. Their hearts are secure, they will have no fear; in the end they will look in triumph on their foes.

PSALM 112:6-8

LAW THEME:

Our inability to control tomorrow or see the future fills us with dread.

GOSPEL THEME:

The incarnation of Christ means our future is secure and peace in the present is ours.

It's the most wonderful time of the year.

Yet, if that's true, then why are we so anxious? The holidays are supposed to provide an escape from the worries and fears of life. And yet, within our celebrations, uncertainties abound and potential problems lurk, imbuing it all with an air of angst.

There are presents wrapped under a tree with your name on them. You have no idea what's in each package. Will you like it? If it's clothing, will it fit? Will you have to feign



excitement so as not to hurt Aunt Linda's feelings? Someone is always hurting Aunt Linda's feelings.

Perhaps this is also the first Advent in a long while where you'll spend time with your oldest child. She's been hit or miss on the holidays. But this year, she's home and bringing a "friend." At least you think they're just friends. Maybe they're dating, but you're not really sure. Does it make you a bad parent that you can't instinctively infer the status of your daughter's relationship?

There's the office holiday party. Will you get stuck in the corner, chatting with Steve from accounting about politics? Will you be pulled into a painfully awkward attempt at karaoke? Will your boss be disappointed if she catches you leaving early to beat traffic and avoid the present swap?

And speaking of work, what about that holiday bonus? You certainly need it, but it's never a guarantee. Should you ask and risk sounding presumptuous or should you wait it out, hoping that if it doesn't arrive you'll find another way to pay for the pile of presents sitting in your Amazon cart?

These concerns may seem petty, but they are real. And they pile up. Advent, Christmas, and life in general are filled with things we can't predict, outcomes we can't control, and futures we can't foresee. The sum total of these weighs us down and fills us with dread.

Yet, the good news of Advent is that our days of anxiety are numbered. The birth of Christ and his imminent return mean that an era of peace, which will know no end, has begun to break through. It is a peace that will erase all manner of fears. And while this peace will not be fully realized until Christ comes back, it is nonetheless a peace that is available to us today.

Our list of fears is long. But at the top of that list for many is a fear of the future. The details of tomorrow are unknown to us, and the uncertainty stirs immense anxiety if we sit



with it for too long. The choices we make right now are not a sure-fire guarantee of any specific outcome or protection against particular tragedies. We lack control. And there is nothing we fear more than not being in control.

Psalm 112 is a future-focused poem. The writer, likely King David, peers into the unknown and offers bold predictions about what is in store for God's people. And his take on our future is glowing.

Our households will be filled with blessings. Our hearts will be overflowing with grace and mercy for others, and our hands will be eager to show generosity. We will be unmoved by the evils of this world and utterly satisfied with the things of God. Most notably, he writes that in the future, we will "have no fear of bad news" (112:7), and our hearts will be without anxiety over the unknown. He says that we will be "steadfast, trusting in the Lord" (112:7). Let that sink in. David says that in the future, we will not only enjoy material blessing and spiritual maturity, but that we will possess an unshakeable internal peace.

Can you imagine having not even the slightest ounce of fear over bad news?

How can David speak with such joyful certainty about tomorrow? What does he know that we don't? What's the key that he holds that the rest of us lack?

The answer is found in the previous psalm. Psalms 111 and 112 are intended to be enjoyed together. And while 112 looks boldly into the future, Psalm 111 is anchored in the past. David recounts, in broad strokes, the history of God's goodness to his chosen people. God has provided for us everything from the daily provision of our most basic needs (111:5) and spiritual sustenance through his Word (111:7) to ultimate redemption out of slavery in Egypt and from the hand of every other foe they've ever faced (111:9). Looking at all that God has done, David can't help but declare, "Great are the works of the Lord...holy and awesome is his name!" (v.2, v.9)



This pondering of God's past faithfulness stirs a sense of fear within David. But it's not a fear of punishment or pain. David is not scared as he reflects on God's goodness. No, what David is feeling is a kind of awe and respect. David is humbled. He feels indescribably small as he considers God's power, and he feels incredibly loved knowing that God uses it for David's good.

And it's this fear--this deep awe and respect, this mix of humility and honor--that propels David into the bold predictions of Psalm 112 and his confident take on tomorrow. It's his fear of the LORD, grounded in God's work in the past, that erases David's fear of the future.

And that's it, my friends! David has given us a gift this Christmas! Did you catch it?


The way forward is backward. Heading into the future with confidence, with peace, with joy--despite all its unknowns--begins by looking backward at the settled history, the objective truths of God's goodness.

The way forward is backward.

The antidote to our fears of tomorrow is fear of the Lord today.

It is respect and awe for all that he's done in the past.

Let's look backward for a moment, shall we? What have we seen God do? Certainly, we could recount all of the awesome acts of the Old Testament. We could write a long list of every personal need, big and small, that he's ever met. We could recite the blessings of each day that we so easily overlook, like the breath in our lungs, the clothes on our backs, and the tech in our pockets. But let's consider the season of Advent that we are in. What is it that we are anticipating? What good work of God are we rehearsing and reflecting on?



It is an act so breathtaking and profound, so generous and loving, that it makes everything David recounted in Psalm 111 pale by comparison. It's an event greater than the Ark, the Exodus, and every mighty and good act of God that David recited combined. It's a moment of more intimate and impactful provision than every gasp of air he's ever supplied to you or the daily bread he's ever baked for you.

On what are we reflecting at Christmas? You know the answer.

It is God who came to earth *for you*. It is the same God, whose power and might stir fear in us, wrapping himself in weakness so that he might be near to us. It is God, unwilling to abide by the distance and the dysfunction that separates us, bridging the divide and setting up camp among us, as one of us, so that he might—through love, through sacrifice—lay claim to us and guarantee a glorious future for us. The eternal, only-begotten Son of God takes on *our flesh and our nature*. He is made man in what John Owen called “an incomprehensible work of wisdom, love, and power.” *That* is what we reflect on this time of year.

The way forward with peace is looking backward with reverence and awe.

For many, facing the future means spending countless hours pondering the possibilities and steeling yourself for the worst-case scenario. We think, “If I can conjure up the awful realities in my head, then I will be prepared when the awful things land in my hands.” But ask any anxious person how well that works. Spend too much time fretting over the terrible possibilities of tomorrow, and the only thing you're guaranteed is that you'll be ruined today.

That's not to say we should avoid preparing for the future. But there is a difference between preparing for the future and wringing our hands over it as if by doing so, we can control it. We cannot. If we learn anything from David in these Psalms, it's that the best way to prepare for the future is to anchor ourselves in God's goodness in the past so that the unchangeable truths of God's activities of yesterday might fill us with peace today and confidence about tomorrow.



The problem, you could say, is that we fear the wrong things.

We fill ourselves with awe and wonder over the unknowns of tomorrow and the fruit is dread. Instead, we are invited to cram our hearts and minds full of wonder and awe—or holy fear—of the God that loves you, the fruit of which is peace in the here and now that is yours today.

What if you chose to reframe the activities of Advent and Christmas? What if you chose to see decorating and celebrating advent calendars and church services not merely as acts of nostalgia for yourself or memory-making for the kids? What if you saw all of this looking back on Bethlehem as a means of preparing for your own future, a way of filling today with confidence in God's goodness to carry into tomorrow? What if this Advent, with all of the activity it entails, is an act of investing in how you'll see the future, long after the tree is taken down and the lights come off the house?

This Advent, we look back on the events of Bethlehem with awe and joy so that we can look ahead, when the holidays are over, with lasting peace and enduring hope. Surely, this God, who has done such a marvelous thing in our *past* (sending his Son to live with us and die for us), can be trusted with our future. God's work in the past opens up the future, and this is all connected here and now. Because the Lord has sent me in the present with this exact promise: all of God's work in the past and in the future is yours, right now, in the present.

Life is filled with things we can't possibly predict. But take heart: our days of being anxious over the unknown are numbered. We have peace as we face the future. The God who's shown his power in the past also holds tomorrow in his hands. This God who arrived in the flesh for you at Christmas is coming again for you in the end and reigns over every moment in between.

May we fix our eyes on what he's *done* and have no fear over what's to *come*. [Amen.](#)

No Fear of Failure

When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.” When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

MATTHEW 17:6-8

LAW THEME:

We are consumed with worry about not being or doing enough.

GOSPEL THEME:

Christ, in his advent, meets us in our weakness and offers us mercy.

There’s a lot of pressure on us this time of year. We don’t often articulate it. But we certainly all feel it.

We feel the pressure to create a “core memory” for the grandkids. We want the card we send to friends and family to have the cutest possible picture on the front—and by cute, we mean a picture that proclaims, “this family definitely did NOT get into a fight on the way to meet the photographer.” We need the gift we’ve chosen for our spouse to bring a tear to her eye and the decorations on the house to be the envy of the neighborhood. Pastors and church leaders feel it as well. The special services, the favorite songs, the



pageants that get performed and the sermons that are preached all have to hit just the right note or else we've missed an opportunity.

The stakes of the season are high.

At least, that's how it feels. And there is no room for failure.

In that sense, the Advent and Christmas seasons aren't all that different from any other. The pressures of life, the fear of getting things wrong, of missing out, of wasting an opportunity and of somehow *failing* are unending. Do you feel it?

We can imagine that the disciples, especially Peter, James, and John (that triad of most trusted followers) experienced increasing pressure as their apprenticeship of Jesus moved forward. With each miracle he performed and profound sermon he preached, it became clear that Jesus was much more than a mere rabbi. The expectations placed on Jesus—and by extension each of the disciples—grew, along with the size of the crowds clamoring to hear his words or be touched by his hands. And within Peter, James, and John there was, perhaps, an increasing sense of responsibility to fully grasp just who Jesus was and to make the most of the privilege of being his friend and serving at his side.

I imagine they didn't want to fail. Neither would I.

In Matthew 17, Jesus takes his inner circle on a hike to the peak of a high mountain. He's literally curating a "mountain top experience" for Peter, James, and John. At the summit, Jesus is temporarily transformed. The glory of his deity begins to shine through. Then Moses and Elijah make an appearance. These two most important figures of the Hebrew faith converse with Christ like they're long lost friends. Peter, stunned by what he's witnessing, interrupts the moment with talk of setting up tents to prolong the miracle and making sure Jesus knew that this moment was special. Some people, when overwhelmed, don't run and hide, they just ramble on. Apparently, that was Peter. The voice



of the Father then booms from a bright cloud, telling all those at the summit to defer to Jesus, his Son; striking terror in the trio of disciples and sending them to the ground.

Their suspicions were right, Jesus was much more than a charismatic rabbi with a flair for the dramatic. He was God's own son. The Messiah.

Sprawled on the ground, the disciples are overtaken by fear, likely wondering, "What have we been caught up in? What have we gotten ourselves into?" And then this happens: *Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus (Matt. 17:6-8).*

Jesus would have had to kneel and join them on the ground in order to touch them. And it would have taken a moment to kneel next to each one, to place his hand on their backs or softly on the tops of all three trembling heads. And when they opened their eyes they saw only Jesus. The same Jesus just revealed as divine, but this time back to normal, calling them by name, and telling them not to fear.

This moment for Peter, James, and John was critical—not merely the moment of transfiguration, of surprise appearances by Old Testament celebrities, and the booming voice from the cloud anointing Jesus—but this moment of compassion, this moment of gentle touch and of calming fears. They needed this moment.

In order for the three disciples to face the future, with its very high stakes, they needed to know two things. Yes, they needed to know who Jesus truly was with all of his power and might. But they also needed to know that this great and glorious Jesus was not above joining them on the ground, placing his hand on their shoulders, speaking calmly into their ears, and placing his very presence before their eyes. They needed to know that this Son of God, greater than Moses and Elijah, was willing to draw close, willing to look them straight in the eyes, push every possible distraction out of frame, and say, "Have no fear."



They needed this moment.

They needed to know that this glorious and powerful Jesus was *with them* and that he was *for them*.


An interesting thing happens when you realize that the Son of God has touched your shoulder, called you by name, and invited you to follow. Your fears start to fade and failure becomes less of a concern. The apostle Paul would later express it like this, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31)

Indeed, this is what makes the advent of Jesus, the birth of Christ, such a pivotal and powerful celebration for us. We have the gift of knowing what Peter, James, and John discovered on the top of that mountain. We know who Jesus is and we can look back at his birth and appreciate it, more fully, for what it is. This is God himself, God’s own Son, kneeling down and joining all of frightened humanity on the ground. This is God—in taking on skin and bone, in being born a man—touching each one of us on the head to let us know he’s near. This is God squaring up with us, and filling the frame so full of his presence that we have no choice but to focus on him, and push away all else that might distract us from his presence.

This is the God of the universe saying, “I am with you. And I am for you.”

If that’s the case, if this is true, then how might this change our relationship to the stakes of life and the pressure we feel to perform, be it at the holidays or any other time? How should the advent of God, who has made plain his love for us and his presence with us, affect our fears of failure?

Allow me to make a few suggestions. First, the revelation of God in Christ to humanity—be it in weakness in a stable or in glory on a mountaintop—has the effect of putting failure into proper perspective. Christmas memories do matter. The mission handed to



the disciples was literally world changing. Life has purpose and your days have meaning. There's a way to do it all well and to mess it up royally. Life indeed has stakes.

And yet, with the hand of Christ on our shoulder, with the promise of Christ at our side, and with *ultimate* victory in Christ guaranteed through his resurrection how far can we fall, even if we fail completely? If Christ, who is for us, has overcome the world, then no failure of ours can ever be the end of the world.

Second, the revelation of God in Christ creates opportunity within failure. In fact, you could make the case that it turns failure into our friend. By drawing near to sinners in Christ, God has made his love for failing and flailing humanity clear.

It then stands to reason that failure itself presents an opportunity to experience God's grace anew, to meet Jesus on the ground and to hear him say, "Have no fear." In each show of weakness we have waiting for us an encounter with Christ, more palpable and meaningful than our moments of glory.

There is a lot of pressure this time of year. Where do you feel it? Is it the shopping that's still not done? Maybe you're meeting the soon-to-be in-laws for the first time and you're anxious about making a good impression. Or perhaps your son has a solo in the school play and he's worried that if he cracks a note it'll ruin Christmas. Whatever it is, the pressure is on and the stakes feel high. Failure does not feel like an option.

But consider this: what if the bad thing happens? What if the gift gets lost in the mail? What if you make a fool out of yourself to your fiancée's mom? What if your kid croaks in his pageant debut? (He won't, by the way. He's going to crush it.)

What if you find yourself on the ground in terror, with the worst case scenario having come to life? What if failure makes an appearance this advent?



It might. But be not afraid.

Because even if it does, someone else is guaranteed to arrive right along with it. And his presence puts weakness in its place. He shrinks the stakes of our problems down to size, and he makes failure itself our friend. Because in every struggle, we have the promise of his hand being upon us, his Word being spoken to us, and his victory set before us.

Even if we fail, we will be fine. [Amen.](#)

“

If Christ, who is for us, has overcome the world, then no failure of ours can ever be the end of the world.

No Fear of Lack

Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.

LUKE 12:32

LAW THEME:

We live in constant fear of not having or giving enough.

GOSPEL THEME:

In his advent, Christ brings with him the promise of total provision.

What will it be this year? Which gadget or toy will win the viral marketing sweepstakes and become the “must-have-yet-impossible-to-acquire” item of the holiday shopping season? It’s always something.

Previous generations had Cabbage Patch fever. There was the Tickle Me Elmo craze of the mid-90’s. And in recent years, it’s been all about technology, with parents scrambling for the latest phone for their teen or a third Nintendo Switch for the house—you know, so that each kid can have their own.

Without fail, each year, there are some must-have items that become cultural symbols of sorts. The toys, the tech, whatever it is, become signifiers of something greater. They



become emblems of what it means to be truly blessed as a child and exceptional, if not extravagant, providers as parents.

Under the surface of the annual scramble for the right gift, beneath the wishing and dreaming for that *one* perfect present, is a fear. It's a fear we carry with us year round, not just at the holidays. It's a fear of going without. It's the fear of me, or someone I care about, lacking something essential to our well-being. It's not a fear that is unique to the holidays. Rather, at this time of year we place an odd sort of spotlight on this fear, sprinkling it with cinnamon and nutmeg, wrapping it with a bow, and placing it under a tree.

The fear of not having enough is always in front of us. I'd be willing to bet that you have a list going right now of the food, the clothes, the gifts, you need to grab in order for the next few days to be okay. Some of you may have been tending to that list during this very sermon, opening the Notes app on your phone and jotting down a couple items just in the last few minutes. It's never not on our minds.

And we aren't alone. Standing in front of his disciples Jesus gave them a command, "Do not be anxious about your life" (Luke 12:22). It stands to reason that Jesus had to offer this imperative because indeed there was, among the disciples, a lot of hand wringing and worry about whether or not their needs and wants would be met.

For the disciples, it could be that this fear was intensified due to the adventure they found themselves on in following Jesus. Life was getting a bit crazy for them: crowds of thousands gathering wherever they went, ever-increasing tension with the Jewish authorities, and a recent realization that Jesus was not just a wonder-working rabbi with incredible charisma but indeed divine. The disciples were attached to something, to *Someone*, much bigger than they could have ever anticipated. They must have wondered, "Are my needs an afterthought in all of this? Am I going to be okay, if I stay attached and involved?"



And perhaps you've wondered the same. No, you don't doubt that Jesus has your best interest in mind on a grand scale—forgiveness, eternity, and all of that. But let's be honest, have you ever worried if, in the course of earning and offering to us the BIG things, he might overlook or undervalue the little things? Have you thought, "I know Jesus has saved my life in the end, but will I lack what I need to live my life today?"

To such concern Jesus offers the imperative: "Do not be anxious about your life." But he doesn't stop there. He does more than command us to quiet our fear, which on its own could feel cruel and impossible. No, he also offers a word of comfort, he hands a couple of truly incredible promises to us. He gives comforts and promises that accomplish his own command. He quiets our anxieties. He silences our fear of lack with the power of his own Word.

So, what is that Word? The Father knows our needs (Luke 12:30), and he is giving us the kingdom (Luke 12:32).

Think for a moment about your day-to-day needs. The list is long, the details are mundane. It includes everything from breath in your lungs to gluten free cereal for breakfast. And now consider what Christ is saying, "God the Father knows these needs." The Father, in his indescribable glory and his unmatched might, is aware of your need for antihistamines in the spring, a snack before bedtime, and a jolt of caffeine at just about all times. God knows you need these things!

But there's more. Not only is he aware, down to the detail, of what you need and is willing to provide each part and piece, he's offering something even greater to us, his children. "The Father has been pleased," Jesus says, "to give to you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). The kingdom!

Some might dismiss these words as a reference to the promise of eternal life, to comfort that comes only after we've died. But that's not what Jesus is talking about. It's certainly



not the only thing Jesus is talking about. God's kingdom is not so much a location as it is an event. The kingdom of God is the reign and rule of God. Jesus is promising that you and I have been given full access to the activity of God, not just tomorrow but today, here and now, in the midst of our mundane needs.

There are, for those who belong to Jesus, two types of provision promised by Jesus. God knows, down to the last detail, what we need physically and emotionally in order to be okay each day. And he will provide those things. And on top of this fundamental provision—flowing in and over and through it all—is the otherworldly activity of God: his grace and mercy, his love and power, his peace and promises given to sustain us, empower us, and transform us now and into eternity.


Every time you order groceries online and pick them up an hour later without having to exit your car, God is keeping his promise to know and meet your needs.

And each time you enter the church and come to the Lord's table, being fed with forgiveness and given strength by God's Spirit, God is keeping his promise and offering the kingdom.

Whenever you pull on your favorite shirt that fits just right and slide on the shoes that sit next to the door, God is keeping his promise to know and meet your most basic needs.

And every time you hear the message of God's mercy in Christ, proclaimed to you from the pulpit or streamed on your favorite preaching podcast, God is speaking life into you and keeping his promise to bring his kingdom to you.

With the first sip of coffee in the morning, God is keeping that promise to know and meet your needs.



And with every kind word or act of compassion from a follower of Jesus God is finding you, keeping his promise, and offering you the kingdom.

In all of it, the God of the Universe is reaching out from eternity to care for you. He's making it clear that he sees you and loves you. And he's making it possible for Christ's own command, "do not be anxious," to be fulfilled in you.

And this is part of what makes Advent and Christmas so satisfying to celebrate. It marks the inbreaking, the inauguration, of our utter confidence in God's extravagant provision. God's own Son has come to live with you, die for you, and rise out of your grave for you. And top of all these things, as if this wasn't enough, this same Son opens your eyes to see countless other daily essentials that God gladly gives to you. For people of faith, Christmas is a joy to celebrate because it means the end of ever having to wonder, "will we have enough?"

We will. We shall. We do. Why? We have the person and the promises of Christ!

May that truth shape our celebrations this year, especially our gift giving. Whatever we give to those we love — whether it's that "must have" tech item or something practical and essential like shirts and socks — may we do so with joy.

We need not give as a way to subconsciously quiet each other's fears of lack, our lingering worries that we will go without. In Christ, our giving is an expression of our confidence in God's provision, seen most clearly in the incarnation of Christ.

This Christmas, may we seek to share with others the feeling we ourselves enjoy at all times: we are seen, we are loved, and from daily bread (like socks and shirts) to the very Kingdom of God (the *true* must-have-item), in Christ, we will never, ever go without. [Amen.](#)

No Fear of Man

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

ISAIAH 9:6-7


LAW THEME:

We obsess over and idolize the power and influence of others.

GOSPEL THEME:

Christ is born in weakness but is greater than man, and uses his greatness to make you a member of his family.

Christmas is not a competition. We must remind ourselves of this. It's not a fight for the tallest tree, the best lit house, the most presents, or the cutest card. It's not a race to see who cares about the holiday the most or who can go the hardest at showing some Christmas spirit.



But we must admit, it can feel a bit competitive, can't it? And yet, let me remind you, Christmas is not about us. It is not an opportunity for us to show the world how great we can be.

No, Christmas is about the greatness of God; a greatness demonstrated in his willingness to become very, very small for us.

Now, don't misunderstand. Jesus, born of Mary in the easily overlooked town of Bethlehem, is no ordinary baby. He's small in size and weak in stature, as is the case for all infants. But this son of Mary is *also* the Son of God. And if you know the story, then you know the greatness that is to come once this kid grows up.

Here's a reminder of what we are in for: he will be a teacher unlike anyone we've ever heard and a miracle worker who makes jaws drop. He will rise from the dead and ensure victory over the grave for you and me, and he will ascend to the right hand of the Father, from where he reigns and rules to this day. And let's not forget his promised return. This Jesus, who arrived in weakness will return in unmatched glory!

The prophet Isaiah, who foretold Jesus' first advent, was also looking forward to a second one. And he promises a future, upon Jesus' return, where his reign and rule are established in full. This small Savior's shoulders will eventually hold the well-being of a brand new world (Isa. 9:6), one where every bad thing is replaced by good things and where we will enjoy the unfiltered, unhindered, and unrelenting peace of God (Isa. 9:7).

Sure, for now this Savior is small, but his greatness will soon begin to shine, and one day we will all see just how grand, how wonderful, how incredibly *massive* in majesty he actually is!

And this, my friends, is good news for our fears. As the glory of Jesus is revealed, our worries, fears, and anxieties can't help but shrink in response.



This particularly applies to our fear of man. And my goodness, we have such a fear of man.

We make other people—their opinions, their approval, their power—so big, don't we? We inflate their influence to almost idolatrous levels in our hearts, wondering constantly about what they think and where we stand and how we are doing, so much so that there is virtually no space left at all for us to marvel at Jesus. We let colleagues, our kids, the in-laws, politicians, and online personalities take up all the space in our hearts and minds. We let them loom large.

A sure sign that the fear of man has become outsized in your life is the distinct absence of two things: peace and joy. The fear of man infuses life with an anxiety and seriousness that suffocates fun and tranquility. There's little to no time for a slow, relaxed breath or a deep and carefree laugh when you've got other people to worry about. Our time is consumed with comparing ("Bob's Christmas bonus was bigger!"), competing ("next year our tree *will be* taller!"), and contending for ourselves ("Our Christmas card is cute enough, right honey?") against these giant figures.

But take heart. The birth of Christ means that a reversal, a right-sizing if you will, has begun to take place between God and man.

God has come to earth, small and weak, but he grows in greatness. And with his return around the corner he's only going to get greater, bigger, more glorious and grand. And as our grasp of Jesus' greatness increases, our fear of man can't help but decrease, to shrink and shrivel until it has little sway over our lives. Imagine for a moment the freedom, the peace and joy, of being unthreatened by the opinions, ideas, and actions of other people. Imagine our hearts' joy at being untethered to the will and ways of other sinful men and women. It's hard to even grasp. We can barely fathom such a future.

And yet, as this newborn Jesus continues to shape our lives, that day is coming.




Just think of how Jesus, once he commenced his earthly ministry, lived with freedom in the face of others. He refused to be controlled or compelled by a fear of man—even men of tremendous power and influence. This baby, meek and mild, will eventually be threatened by religious leaders. He will face rejection from his own family and alienation from his community. He will have insults shouted at him. He will be tempted by his own disciples to find an easier path. He will be denied by his best friends. He will be spat upon, beaten, and ultimately he will be crucified. He will be killed by selfish and scared and sinful men. But none of it will cause him for a second to shrink from the task or shirk his mission of saving the world.

Facing the worst of what man has to offer, he will be unblinking, unyielding, unintimidated, and unmoved. In all things, at all times, Jesus will refuse to be bound and burdened by the wants and wills and opinions of others. And he will do it all for you.

For example, one evening Jesus was invited to dine in the home of a Pharisee. The host was quickly bothered—Luke says, “astonished”—by the fact that Jesus did not oblige the pre-meal cleansing rituals that such sticklers to the law prided themselves on. Jesus seized on the opportunity to detail the hypocrisy of the spiritual elite, noting their love of external cleanliness while giving no attention to the need for actual repentance. The critique offended his host. The other religious experts jumped to the Pharisee’s defense. But Jesus wouldn’t budge. He doubled down, taking the religious lawyers to task for laying burden after burden upon God’s people. The exchange intensified the target on Jesus. It made life more difficult and dangerous. But Jesus was undeterred. The message must be preached. The mission had to move forward.

This is astounding, isn’t it? We who struggle so much with these things, we who fear all the wrong people and obsess over the wrong things are on the receiving end of this man’s actions. We are loved like this by the One who is greater than all things! It boggles our minds. And yet it is so simple and so clear. God’s love for us is great in Jesus Christ. This baby was born to live, die, and rise for us. And because of that work, we



now have full acceptance in the Father's family. This work of Jesus is undeserved and unearned. We can neither exhaust its benefits or intensify its merits. We just have it, in full, forever. What a gift.

Christ won this gift for us, in no small part, because he lacked completely what consumes constantly: a fear of man. He saw mankind's small stature and its weak state with clear eyes and, as a result, he would never blink.


Isaiah, in another prophecy about the coming Messiah, spoke of this when he wrote, "The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him [Christ], the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord" (Isa. 11:2-3a).

From the moment of his birth and this mission commenced, Jesus was filled with a Spirit of obedience to the will of the Father. He was delighted to do what the Father wanted, which was to save you and me. Isaiah reveals that it wasn't so much that Jesus was *without fear* but that Jesus held a *proper fear*. Not fear of man, but fear—respect, admiration, awe, love—of the Father, alone.

Let that sink in. Jesus perfectly possessed and obediently lived out what you and I so often and so utterly refuse to grasp and fail to do. While we are out here living as if God is tiny and man is massive, Jesus was the pure opposite. He saw the Father as great, glorious, and worthy of obedience. He saw man as small and in need of a savior. He saw rightly. And he acted accordingly. And we reap the benefits.

So let us return to where we started.

Christmas is not a competition. It's not yet another chance for us to try and prove how great or good or loving we are. No, Christmas is, among many wonderful things, an invitation. It is an invitation to right-size our view of God, of man, and of ourselves.



Christ is born. God has gotten small. And in doing so, he will show us all just how grand and glorious, awesome and loving he actually is.

May our eyes grow wide as we take him in and may our fears of man grow faintly dim, until they are insignificant, immeasurable even.

The fear of man is a snare (Prov. 29:25). But those who belong to the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace? We are safe. We may be small, but he whose birth we celebrate is great. [Amen.](#)

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This work of Jesus is undeserved and unearned. We can neither exhaust its benefits or intensify its merits. We just have it, in full, forever. What a gift.

No Fear

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

COLOSSIANS 3:15

LAW THEME:

We fail to grasp the gift of peace that is ours in the birth of Christ.

GOSPEL THEME:

Christ has come, quieting your fears and filling your life with peace.

At Christmas, kids get the run of the house.

We didn't make this rule, but like it or not that is the rule.

At Christmas, especially Christmas morning, the kids run the show. They decide what hour the house will awaken, which is almost certainly guaranteed to be earlier than you'd like. They set a tone of excitement as they empty stockings and rip paper. Dad, you'll be relegated to holding a black trash bag and collecting the mess that they make. And the kids set the agenda for the day. And on that agenda is just one item: enjoy the gifts and gadgets and brand new things. There will be no tasks or chores of substance accomplished on Christmas Day, just LEGOs being built on the living room floor and



the sound of aliens being destroyed on their new video game console. Merry Christmas! The kids are in charge and these are the rules—at least until just after 7:30PM, when they pass out on the couch while watching *The Grinch*, a byproduct of having scurried out of bed that morning on Bethlehem time.

And before you're tempted to bemoan this fact, consider the following. First, this is a rule and a ritual that is *fleeting*. Enjoy it while it lasts. Turn to anyone with grown children and they'll tell you that these Christmases vanish quickly. Before you know it, you're begging a teenager to be up before noon or watching grandkids open presents over Zoom. Second, it's *fitting*. It is utterly appropriate for kids to get the run of things on Christmas, given the true meaning of this moment.

What is Christmas, what is the incarnation of God with mankind, other than a child—a baby, even!—come to have the run of the house? He's come to rule, to wake everyone up to the gifts that have appeared, to set a tone of joy and to set the agenda for our days. Only with Jesus it's not LEGOs on the list of to-do's but love, the love of God made known to man through his life, death, and resurrection. There is however at least one notable difference with this child's arrival. Whereas our children can sow chaos, even on Christmas, the Christ child brings peace. The angels announced it, saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" (Luke 2:14)

Christ is born, and this child has come to have the run of the house, filling it with good things, chief among them the peace of God!

What does it mean for Christ not only to be celebrated today, but for him to have the run of our house today and each day after? What might it be like if the peace of God—promised at his birth—filled up every room of our lives?

It might help our imaginations if we reminded ourselves what the peace of God actu-



ally is. The peace Jesus promises is a byproduct of his presence. It is a quiet disposition of the heart, a non-anxious center that starts to form within you that comes from hearing and trusting that the Lord is here and *he is for you*. When that truth hits home suddenly every equation in life changes. The God of the Universe is here, he is near, and he is on our side? Suddenly nothing can be seen the same. If that is true then all types of threat, all sources of angst, all manner of fear starts to shrink.

Imagine for a moment that on Christmas morning you open a box filled with all kinds of riches, from dollar bills to gold bullion, millions of dollars stuffed in a recycled Amazon box, wrapped up, and given to you. Once you authenticated the gift, determining that it was honestly acquired, freely given, and otherwise legitimate, your vision would suddenly and drastically shift. You'd see the threat of your debts, bills, and college tuition differently. They'd still be awful, but their sting would be numbed, their power muted. How? A gift greater than your financial fears was in your hands. You would have some peace.

The same, and so much more, is true for us. A gift greater than our fears has been given to us. The dwelling place of God is with man and he is lavish, unthrift, and unbound in his generosity—his hands overflowing with love for us. We have peace.

In his letter to the Colossians, the Apostle Paul commends early Christians to lean in to the implications of Jesus' work. They are "alive with Christ," he writes. And while the full glory of this new life is, for now, hidden with Christ in the heavenly realms, it is nonetheless a reality. They *are* brand new. They *are* forgiven. They *are* alive forever and nothing will ever take that away. Reminding them of these truths, Paul then says, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts..." (Col. 3:15).

Paul is encouraging them, and through them, us, to let the Word of Christ have the run of the house. He's inviting us to let the truth of who Christ is, and all that he's done, be



the umpire and arbiter of all reality, interpreting all that takes place through the lens of his love.

To let the peace of Christ rule, for this kid to have the run of the house, is to say in the face of all kinds of calamity, “Because of Christ, I’m going to be alright.” It could be that one of your children fails to call on the holiday, family dysfunction gets put on display at grandma’s get together, higher than anticipated credit card bills come due after Christmas, or political disagreements have pulled friendships apart in an election year. The peace of Christ is ruling, the person of Christ is running free when, by the power of God’s own Spirit, we look at such troubles and we hear these words, “Christ has come, Christ has died, Christ has risen, and Christ will come again. All is not lost. I am going to be okay.”

There is probably someone hearing these words and wondering if all these good things said about Jesus apply to them. Yes, you grasp the idea that Christ has come and that his presence brings peace, and that this peace is crouching at the door, like a kid waiting to get the green light from mom to come downstairs on Christmas morning. You understand that the peace of Christ was made to have its way in our lives, changing how we perceive each moment. Intellectually you grasp it, but still you wonder: is all this for me? Am I among those who, as the angels proclaimed, “God is pleased” to give this gift? (Luke 2:14)

And the answer, of course, is yes! And here’s how you know. You are here. The peace of the Word of Christ and the fears he conquers are being proclaimed into your ears. Count yourself among the shepherds. Was there any doubt that they were recipients of this good news and this great gift? None at all, the message was being shouted in the skies above their heads, and today God declares this same message to you. No one accidentally overhears God’s message of mercy in Jesus Christ. If it’s in your ears and before your eyes, then it is for your heart. This promise, this peace, this child, is all yours.



At Christmas, kids get the run of the house. That's just the way it is. Those are the rules. There's no use fighting it. Besides, you must admit you kind of like it: the mayhem with the presents, staying in your pajamas for far too long, the lawless day of play and food, followed by a nap on the couch and then more play. There's something about a child running your world, that makes all seem right in your world, at least for a moment. At least for a day.

Enjoy it while you can. It is fleeting. And remember, that it is quite fitting. It is utterly appropriate for kids to get the run of things on Christmas, given the true meaning of this moment. Just as it's appropriate for children to have the run of the house on Christmas morning, it is appropriate for this child born to Mary to have the run of the universe, for him to upset the agenda with mercy and grace and to set a tone of joy. He's here to make every fear small, because he—though now a child—looms larger and greater than them all. But his reign is not fleeting, it is forever.

He has come, by virtue of his presence, to make peace rule in every nook and cranny of your existence, into every room and each corner of your life.

Oh come, let us adore this child who called us out of our sleep and toward the gifts that lay ready for us under his tree. May we see every trouble in light of his promises and quiet every fear with the reality of his arrival. May the peace of Christ have the run of the place.

Why? Because that's what we do at Christmas.

Like it or not, those are the rules. [Amen.](#)