

# Christmas Messages of Hope and Peace

## *Peace in the Here and Now*

The prophet Isaiah foretold of a child who would be Prince of Peace, whose kingdom would know endless peace. Hundreds of years later, on the night this child was born, angels announced the arrival of peace on earth. This child brought a kind of peace that will one day transform the whole world. We get glimpses of his peace this time of year, when we gather after dark to sing carols, light candles, and hear the familiar story of that night long ago when heaven came down and touched the earth. But too quickly, that fleeting glimpse of peace is drowned out once more by the noise of everyday life.

Lasting peace, the kind only our Prince of Peace can deliver, still seems so far beyond reach these many centuries after his birth. The battlefields of Syria, the streets of Chicago, the custody battles being waged in courtrooms near and far, the private warfare around kitchen tables, all the conflicts that rage on around the globe long after they've disappeared from the headlines... these things could be evidence that lasting peace is nothing but a pipe dream.

But the peace our Prince brings is not defined by the absence of conflict. It's defined by the presence of justice, righteousness, healing, wholeness... that is, by the presence of God, the Word made flesh, who chose to dwell among us in spite of the conflicts that rage around us. Isaiah and the angels can announce peace, even in the midst of a chaotic world, because the child who brought God's peace to earth is himself Creator and King of the universe, with God from the beginning.

In Jesus, God recreates our story, and not just by giving it a different ending. God's gift of Jesus interjects hope into our lives now, making it possible for us to know peace now, even when this world says there is none. And that's true whether we're in the middle of a hard day at work, or struggling to recover from this winter's nasty virus, or standing in the cold wind up at the cemetery. Jesus is our peace when things are going just the way we want them to go, and when nothing seems right.

Or, at least he can be. It's a gift he offers to each of us—the deep and lasting peace that surpasses understanding. Seems like a gift too valuable to leave unopened....

*Rev. Katy Anderson*

*Shared Ministry of Hope Lutheran Church & All Saints Episcopal Church*

## Chamber Chatter

Thursday, Dec. 31, 7 p.m. to midnight, Heppner SDA Church: Come out for nonalcoholic family fun. Enjoy refreshments, games, movie and more. The church is located at 560 Minor Street; contact 541-561-9132 for more information.

SAGE Center – Christmas Lights show, 4:30 – 9 p.m. daily until Friday, Jan. 1: Make sure you take the time to check out the agriculture-themed Christmas lights show. Donations of non-perishable food items are being accepted for the Community Action Program of East Central Oregon (CAPECO) for the duration of the display. The canned goods can be dropped in marked containers at the front doors of the SAGE Center.

Thursday, Jan. 14 - 6 p.m., Heppner Chamber's Town and Country Community Awards Event: This year's event is sponsored by Invenergy, LLC dba

Willow Creek Energy (gold sponsor) and Northwest Farm Credit Services (silver sponsor). Come out and help the community recognize and celebrate the Man of the Year; Woman of the Year; Business of the Year; Citizen-Educator of the Year; Youth Award and Lifetime Achievement Award. Pudding on the Ritz will cater the evening meal and will be serving prime rib with au jus and horseradish sauce; baked potatoes with sour cream, butter and bacon; dilly green beans; cranberry pecan romaine salad; rustic bread; pumpkin dessert square; and beverage. Tickets will be available on Monday, Dec. 28 for \$20 per person at the Bank of Eastern Oregon, chamber office, city hall, Community Bank and Murray's Drug. Please purchase your tickets early so we can make sure we have enough food and seating for everyone.

## ODOT warns of winter weather hazards

BEND—Winter weather, including snow and high winds, is adversely affecting driving conditions across the state, especially in Central and Eastern Oregon. In addition, forecasters are predicting high winds and precipitation in the Willamette Valley, which will cause additional driving challenges.

ODOT is asking motorists, both in private vehicles and large commercial carriers, to drive according to these inclement weather conditions, including slowing down and turning off cruise controls.

For drivers anticipating travel throughout Oregon during periods of hazardous weather, which may persist this week in Eastern and Central Oregon, ODOT recommends checking Tripcheck.com or calling 511 to be aware of current highway hazards.

ODOT recommends

the following safety precautions:

- Be ready to use your chains. Be patient. Go slow.
- Expect a long commute that could last hours. You never know when weather or traffic incidents will cause the road to be closed for extended periods.
- Keep fuel tank full (in case you get stuck in road closure).
- Carry emergency supplies (water, food, warm clothes, flashlight, etc.)
- Turn off your cruise control.
- Increase the following distance between you and the vehicle ahead of you.
- Keep cell phone charged up (but don't use it while driving).
- Keep a watch on weather conditions throughout the day in anticipation of the next snow storm that could make current road conditions worse. Tune to local radio stations for

# The Gift of Supernatural Peace—Calm in Chaos

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given and the government shall be upon his shoulder and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.” (Isa. 9:6 KJV)

Robert Louis Stevenson tells of a storm that caught a vessel off a rocky coast and threatened to drive it and its passengers to destruction. In the midst of the terror, one daring man, contrary to orders, went to the deck, made a dangerous passage to the pilot house and saw the steersman, lashed fast at his post of holding the wheel unwaveringly, and inch by inch turning the ship out once more to sea. The pilot saw the watcher and smiled. The daring passenger went below and gave out a note of cheer: “I have seen the face of the pilot, and he smiled, ‘all is well.’”

Does our heart smile in the middle of terror and unrest? Jesus said, “Peace I give you.” It's because we have the Prince of Peace living inside of us. Jesus gives us continual reminders to not take on anxiety and fear. In fact, He desires that we give ourselves reminders that we have a promise of the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. You heard me say, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.” (Jn. 14:27-28)

Reminder One: Peace I leave you.

Reminder Two: Peace I give you.

Reminder Three: Don't let your hearts be troubled or afraid.

Have you heard the saying “peace of mind”? It means...

The Prince of Peace Himself guards our hearts and minds. “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 4:6-7 NIV)

What are we supposed to do in troubled times? God's word pleads with us to pray and give petition, despite what the NY Times article says in bold headlines. God still works through our prayers. He also asks us to give thanksgiving as He inhabits the praises of His people. I can appreciate the scene in the Titanic where the musicians are playing as the ship is sinking as if to add calm to chaos. Jesus wants us to take our eyes off of the troubled times and place our eyes on Him or we will surely sink.

It is knowing that we are at peace with Christ. We can have a peace that Christ is our Redeemer, the only one able to restore our souls, the one you can walk in complete harmony with, and the one who is the Captain running your ship. He sees your storms and is confident that He will steer you through them by keeping you calm or just calming the storm as it is the Master Captain's choice.

Our God is the ruler and distributor of peace. When Jesus left this earth He sent the Holy Spirit to provide counsel, peace, joy and love. We have access to all of those fruits because this is our new identity. This is supernatural living and it means knowing that we have access to supernatural peaceful living at all times. The Lord thinks that you are a keeper and He promises the comfort of His Holy Spirit for eternity.

Jesus did not promise a life without trial but He did promise supernatural peace found only in the Prince of Peace. Man cannot destroy the peace that God has ordained for those that belong to Him. It is not only possible but it is promised, and this peace surpasses all human understanding. I pray that you will allow it to guard your heart this Christmas.

(Num. 6:24-26) “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.”

*Tony Long-Drew, Pastor*

*Christian Life Center*

## Christmas celebrations at area churches

**Willow Creek Baptist Church**—Christmas Eve service Thursday, Dec. 24, at 5 p.m. The service will include singing Christmas carols, harp and violin music, and scripture reading. Worship weekly at 10:45 a.m. every Sunday.

**Shared Ministry of Hope Lutheran and All Saints Episcopal**—Christmas Eve festival service of lessons and carols, candles and Communion at All Saints Episcopal Church Dec. 24 beginning at 7 p.m. On Sunday, Dec. 27, lessons and carols, also at All Saints, beginning at 10 a.m.

**Christian Life Center**—Christmas Eve candlelight service Dec. 24 at 8 p.m. Dessert will follow.

**Heppner United Methodist Church**—Christmas Eve service Thursday, Dec. 24, at 7 p.m. for a festival of nine lessons and carols.

**Church of the Nazarene**—Christmas Eve candlelight service with Christmas carols, scripture reading and lighting of the Advent candles Thursday, Dec. 24, at 7 p.m.

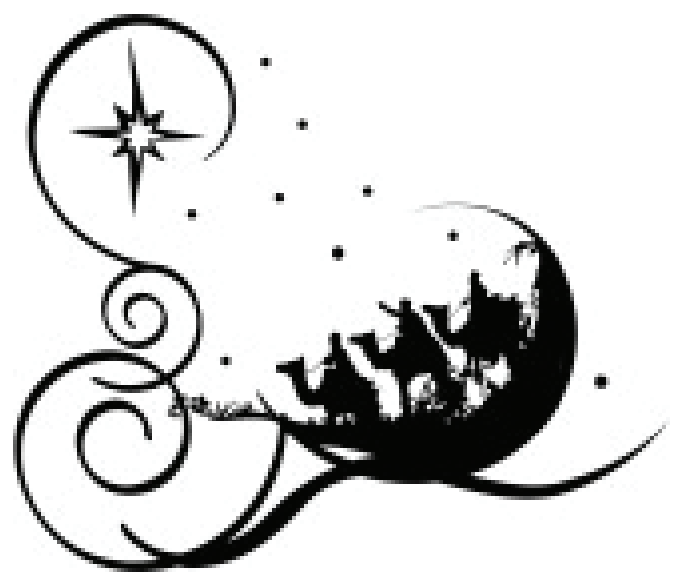
**St. Patrick's Catholic Church**—Christmas carols, candlelight procession and blessing of the nativity scene Thursday, Dec. 24, at 8:30 p.m. with Christmas holy vigil to follow at 9 p.m. On Friday, Dec. 25, Christmas Mass will be celebrated at 11 a.m.

**St. William's Catholic Church**—Friday, Dec. 25, Christmas carols, blessing of the nativity scene and Christmas Mass at 8:45 a.m.

update travel information.

“ODOT appreciates the patience of travelers who delay their trips or experience longer commutes,” stated an agency release. “We cannot be everywhere

at once to clear the roads and we cannot clear the roads when they are stacked with traffic. The cooperation of the traveling public is imperative in keeping the highways passable.”



## A Gift Like No Other

When we think of Christmas we often think of the giving of gifts, the smell of freshly baked cookies, decorating the tree, and shopping centers. Of course, for some, thoughts of long lines at those stores along with the January credit card bill can strike fear in the heart of even the most devoted holiday enthusiast. Still for others, Christmas can be a time when the loss of a loved one becomes especially poignant.

These are often our experiences this time of year. Some are good and wholesome, while others may not be so pleasant. However, there is another side to the experience and story of Christmas.

On December 25 the world stops to remember a baby who was born 2,000 years ago. As strange as that may seem, the story gets even more incredible when one considers that this baby is like no other child before or after Him. This baby was Almighty God, come to earth as a helpless child who would need to be clothed and fed, just like every other baby. Why would God, a being who has everything, knows everything, and needs nothing take on such a humble disposition?

The answer is the meaning of Christmas. God came to earth that first Christmas night on a rescue mission to fix a desperately broken world. God broke into the world as a man to live so that He could be nailed to a wooden cross and die for us. Each one of us, because of the holy justice of God, deserved that kind of death. However, because of God's great love for us, He died on a cross so that we would not have to face that kind of death. Instead of eternal death we can receive the gift of eternal life. The only requirement is to accept this free gift by admitting that you have messed up and done wrong, believing that Jesus died in your place, and then begin walking in His way. This is a Christmas gift like no other! Have you ever asked Jesus for this gift? If not, why not receive it today? You will never be the same again.

May your heart be filled with joy in Jesus this Christmas as you ponder who He is, why He came to earth, and what He has accomplished for you. Then you can truly sing with the angels of Christmas, “Glory to

God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people He favors!” (Luke 2:14).

*Tripp Finch, Pastor*

*Willow Creek Baptist Church*

## Christmas Hope in the Midst of Chaos

It was cold and dark in the church on Monday night when I ran by to pick up a forgotten item from Sunday's service. And as I walked up the aisle, my mind was full of everything that must be done in the next few days. Making those lists and checking them twice.

But when I stopped to admire the beautiful swags on the wall and the banners of Advent that proclaim Hope, Faith, Joy and Peace, I began to think about the life of our church and its own story of Christmas these past 100 or so years.

The story of the birth of Christ told and re-told over time, using scripture found in the books of Isaiah, Titus, Luke, Matthew, Mark... each offering a glimpse, a prophecy, a kernel of information about that night more than 2,000 years ago.

Those tidbits cobbled together into the greatest story of love ever told. A story we celebrate each year as we gather in worship on Christmas Eve.

As I sat there, I could imagine the men and women from so long ago arriving near midnight brimming with hope. The hope of a new life, in a new land, for an immigrant family. The desperate hope of a community that its young men would come home from wars unscathed.

Did Mary have the same hopes? The same dreams? Was hers the hope that the baby she carried for all humankind would be enough?

Think about the great faith it took for those families to pull up stakes, cross a country or a continent and settle in this little logging town. They built our church and even put it to rights when a flood moved it down the street. Great faith indeed.

And the simple faith of that tired young woman who traveled far to birth the babe that would change our lives in breathless wonder.

If you sit very still when the church is really quiet, you can almost feel the joy of Christmas. The music, the pageants, the readings, the excitement. The story of the Nativity presented in so many ways.

And the joy of a miraculous birth. The gift of a baby born in a stable or maybe a cave, a gift greater than we could ever earn or deserve. The babe who will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace... and Jesus.

And peace. The kind of peace that can be found when you slip into a worship space for just a minute...

It's that coming-to-terms-with-life kind of peace we feel when we think about birth and death, weddings, funerals, baptisms and all those other things that take place in the course of someone's life, both worldly and spiritually.

In the midst of all the chaos that can be our lives as we approach Christmas, pause and ask yourself this: Is there room in your heart for the Prince of Peace?

Blessings,

*Patty Nance, Pastor*

*Heppner United Methodist Church*