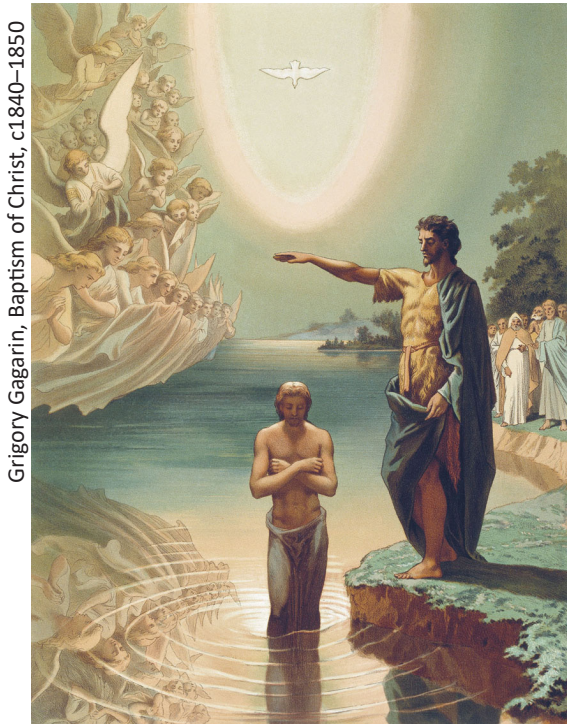


Study 4 - Prince of Peace



Grigory Gagarin, Baptism of Christ, c.1840-1850

Say or sing together:

*Our glad hosannas, Prince of Peace,
your welcome shall proclaim,
and heaven's eternal arches ring,
with your beloved name.*

Icebreaker:

What is the most important part of the Christmas celebrations for you as an individual or within your close family?

'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 Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.' (Isaiah 9:6)

Prince of Peace

Isaiah 9:6 is a familiar verse in Advent, with Isaiah's prophecy seen as fulfilled in the birth, life, and mission of Jesus. A verse containing several names, or titles by which this child will become known. There are many others within Scripture, including Son of God, Son of David, Son of Man, Man of Sorrows, Immanuel, Messiah (or Christ). As the Christ, Christians see Jesus fulfilling the words and expectations of many of the Old Testament prophets found within the regular Advent readings. Jesus later acknowledged this name whilst talking to the woman at the well.

*'The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."
Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he."' (John 4:25,26)*

Jesus preferred to be known as the Son of Man, which points to his servanthood and humanity, as well as reflecting Daniel's vision where, 'I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him.' (Daniel 7:13-14)

As Prince of Peace, Jesus directs thoughts and actions toward a restoration of relationships between God and humanity, and between individuals, through his teaching and the supreme example of a life focussed on love, forgiveness, humility, and compassion.

Questions:

- Q) Why might Jesus have been reluctant to assume the name of Messiah early in his ministry?
- Q) Why does Jesus need so many titles, and which one means the most to you?

Peace through the coming of Jesus Christ

(Read Zechariah 9:9-10; Luke 2:10-14; Ephesians 2:17-18)

Zechariah's words might be familiar to us, but they follow a prophesy of warfare, of destruction and death, which may align with the campaigns of Alexander the Great and ends with the words 'Never again will an oppressor overrun my people...'

Now his thoughts turn to promise, blessing and rejoicing for the coming of the messianic, Davidic King, whose qualities he describes. The King will be righteous, saving, humble, and peaceful (the image of him riding into Jerusalem on a colt, the foal of a donkey, rather than a war-horse).

It recalls the moment that Jesus made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem with the people acknowledging him as Messiah, although soon afterwards rejecting him, and calling for his crucifixion. In verse 10, we see the establishment of God's kingdom, bearing little resemblance to that of Alexander, which was founded on bloodshed. The messianic King will establish a universal kingdom of peace.

Humility and peace are at the heart of the angel's message to the shepherds in Luke, regarding the impending birth of Jesus. Here is indeed good news, but wrapped in cloths, and in a manger, vulnerable, his future left to the angels to share in songs of praise. Here, in this baby, is the Saviour, the Messiah, and Prince of Peace.

Zechariah talked of Zion's King bringing peace to the nations, the angels sang of a blessing of peace, and Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians tell them, and us, that Jesus is our peace, for he has broken down the barriers that divide us. 'He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.' (Ephesians 2:17,18)

Questions:

- Q) How do you understand the word 'peace' in a Christian life and fellowship?
- Q) Paul talks of the Gentiles feeling like they were foreigners regarding acceptance by God and the Jews. Are there people today who might feel the same way about God and the Church?

Peace through Jesus' ministry & teaching

(Read John 14:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Acts 10:34-38)

Jesus had several conversations with his disciples, explaining that his time with them was short, and this no doubt was a stressful time for them all, as the disciples realised Jesus was expecting great things from them, and ultimately all believers.

However, Jesus was not abandoning them, as the Holy Spirit would become their guide and source of wisdom, and Jesus promises them a peace about all this, which in this context is a real confidence in God and their place in his plans, far more than the world can offer with that same word.

With a similar theme of confidence in God, Mark includes what appears to be an eyewitness account of Jesus calming the storm (so many little details included). He was writing to believers in Rome, and a story like this would offer that same peace that Jesus talked in John's message, and a confidence that God would be with them even if they also sailed into the storms of persecution and trial.

In Acts we read a part of Peter's sermon to Cornelius's house, as he realises finally



Rembrandt, Christ in the Storm on the Lake of Galilee, 1633

that God has no favourites, and his love and grace is for the entire world, which is 'the good news of peace through Jesus Christ' demonstrated through his words and actions.

Questions:

- Q) Confidence in God. Is that a natural feeling with you, even when times are tough, and are there Bible verses or previous experiences you cling to which help?
- Q) What differences do you perceive between the value of someone in God's kingdom, and in the part of the world you live in?

Quotes:

'To perceive Christmas through its wrappings becomes more difficult with every year.'
(E. B. White)

'Faith is salted and peppered through everything at Christmas. And I love at least one night by the Christmas tree to sing and feel the quiet holiness of that time that's set apart to celebrate love, friendship, and God's gift of the Christ child.' (Amy Grant)

Peace through Jesus' death and resurrection

(Read John 20:19-23; Ephesians 2:11-16; Romans 1:1-7)

There was seemingly very little peace with the group of disciples, and others, huddled together behind closed doors after the crucifixion. Even when Jesus appeared, they may have feared his anger and frustration at the way they abandoned him at the time of his arrest. But no, they get the normal Hebrew greeting of 'Peace be with you!', which here is more than just saying 'Hi!' because to these disciples, Jesus sums up what is at the heart of his ministry.

Jesus' gift to the world is Peace. He calms their fears as he proves that this is no ghost standing before them, and empowers them with the Spirit to continue his work of forgiveness of sins, and the restoration and renewal of lives both physically and spiritually.

Paul reminds his readers of the enormous change there has been in their lives through their response to Jesus Christ, the sacrificial offering of his blood on the cross, the breaking down of barriers, loosening of chains, and restoring relationships between people of all nations with their God and each other. One people. One 'new humanity' as he calls it.

Holding on to an awareness of what they were and what they have become will enrich their faith, obedience, and worship. Christ is our peace, Paul tells them, not only in what he said, but in the life he led.

Questions:

Q) We have used a 'traditional' Advent hymn to lead us through these studies, but do you have a favourite hymn or worship song with Advent or Christmas as its theme, and what makes it special for you?

Q) Where or when do you sense peace within the Advent/Christmas story?

Q) How might your church share this peace more openly within the community in which you meet?

Pause for prayer:

Pray for those areas of the world where peace is desperately needed at this time.