



Peace ON EARTH

SERIES OVERVIEW

As we enter another Christmas season, on the heels of a hectic and chaotic year, it feels appropriate to focus in on the peace which was brought about by the coming of Jesus into our world. Although the holidays are often exactly the opposite of peaceful, we want to create a space where the people of Grace Church can simply breathe. If we can experience the peace of Christ this December, we may very well learn how to spread that peace into the world around us.

WEEK 1 - PEACE IN MY HEART

OVERVIEW

In the well-known Christmas story, angels visited shepherds watching over their flocks in a field near Bethlehem on the night Jesus was born. Part of their message included the declaration, "Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased." What did they mean by this? What did the birth of a baby have to do with peace? In this message, we will begin a four-week exploration of this question, beginning within our own hearts and moving outward to our families, our communities, and our world.

In Philippians 4, the Apostle Paul encourages his readers not to worry about anything. Instead, he describes the "peace which exceeds anything we can understand." It's a peace we experience within us as we live in Christ Jesus, even when facing anxiety and pain. This peace, made possible because of the incarnation of Christ, has little to do with all our problems being fixed. However, it has *everything* to do with the nearness of God in the midst of our turmoil. The birth of Jesus was the beginning of a new era in humanity – one in which God is with us.

The Lord is near.
Philippians 4:5 (NRSV)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Read Philippians 4:4-9 (NLT) or (NRSV) (click to read online).

1. How is peace, shalom, defined throughout scripture?
2. Do you find it difficult always be full of joy in the Lord? Why or why not?
3. Barry explains that Paul is saying to the Philippians that in order to experience joy, freedom from worry, and peace in their hearts, they should remember that the Lord is coming soon. Does it even seem possible to not worry about anything? Does it help to know that the Lord is coming soon (near)?
4. Read Zephaniah 1:7 (NLT) and Psalms 145:18 (NRSV). What meaning of "near" stands out to you? The Lord is coming soon, or the Lord is close by? Which meaning relates to the Christmas story?
5. How could remembering that "the Lord is near" as a breath prayer help bring Biblical peace to your heart this season?