

Sunday 8th December 2024; Advent 2. Benefice Holy Communion, Gilling.

As we light our second candle today, we are reminded that each of the five Advent candles represents something different and varies from tradition to tradition. All, however, represent an important element in the coming of Christ and our expectation of him. The three purple candles (Hope, Peace, Joy), a pink candle (Love), and a white candle (Christ) represent the five elements of the Christmas story.

We come today to the second Sunday of Advent associated with the second candle on the Advent wreath signifying Peace. It is also known as the 'Bethlehem Candle'. It is also associated traditionally with John the Baptist following on from the prophets, particularly Isaiah. In today's Gospel Luke introduces us to John the Baptist, a wild man in animal skins proclaiming in the wilderness a baptism for the forgiveness of sins. With John's voice Luke then sets the stage for the dramatic entrance of the "one who is more powerful".

One of the hallmarks of the Christmas story is when the angels appear to the shepherds and proclaim, "Peace on earth," in Luke. Jesus brings us peace in several ways.

At the end of every service a blessing is said which says, "May the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of His son Jesus Christ..."

So, what does the gift of peace of God bring us? First, he gives us inner peace. Because of the saving power of Jesus on the Cross, we have a chance to receive salvation and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This grants us an inner peace, beyond our understanding but none the less present in our hearts. Not only do we have the peace that comes

from our assurance of salvation, but we also have the peace of mind knowing God will heal this broken world and will come again.

Second, we have peace with others. We put aside our differences especially with other believers because we belong to the same family. We have the same purpose: to let others know about the peace of God. We are here with the purpose of proclaiming God's love to the world, and it begins with one another; putting away hurting, exclusion, rejection, criticism and bullying which sadly goes on far more often than revealing God's love, especially within churches. We forget we all have the same purpose: to let others know and demonstrate in our actions the peace of Christ.

The Hebrew word for peace: *Shalom*, goes far beyond not fighting with others or peace as we know it., but its meaning is about how things are meant to be: as they are in Heaven. The peace of God should allow us to look at others through heaven's eyes and help guide the world to see God's here and not-yet here kingdom. In a scary and violent world, the peace of God grants us a tranquillity you cannot find anywhere else and offers a light to others who do not yet know that peace.

In the service of baptism, we present the candidate with a candle with these words, "You have received the light of Christ; walk in this light all the days of your life. Shine as a light in the world to the glory of God the Father."

Our second candle today then reminds us that we too should be candles in a dark world bringing light to others, revealing the peace of God which transcends and transforms our circumstances and the brings light to the world.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

