

*"If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten we belong to each other."*

**Rev. Adrienne Meier**  
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**St. Thomas Lutheran Church, Bloomington, Indiana**

### **A Song of Hope For What Is Yet to Come, Luke 2:13-14**

#### ***Luke 2:13-14***

*And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"*

The great Roman slogan was "Peace and Security." It was what they sold to get the people they conquered to surrender. It was probably, also, their "fake it till ya make it" scheme. It was their *de facto* permission to crush anyone - any movement - that threatened their own peace and security. Of course, they were only concerned about the peace and security of Rome and its interest, whatever the cost to other human beings. It is a charge leveled against colonial superpowers across time. Mother Teresa, from her vantage point in post-colonial India, once said, "If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten we belong to each other." How interesting then, the song of the angels is a parody of Rome's motto, everything Rome said, but in reverse. The power of Rome enforced a false peace. The peace among God's people is the soul of the glory of God.

Our family unwraps an Advent or Christmas-themed picture book every day in Advent. Some really get us thinking about the meaning of Advent waiting and preparation. Some are just fun. Olivia's Christmas story is my favorite. Olivia is a piglet who is a real character - dramatic, hilarious. At one point in the book, the family gathers to sing Christmas carols, and, it says, Olivia really lets go for the chorus. The picture shows Olivia, held tilted back, and more than half the page devoted to the word *Gloooooooria*. I am sure children's choir directors can relate to the power of a simple chorus to effectively drown out the rest of the song! What a word, *gloria*, that's the Latin. The Greek is *doxa*, a word about fame and honor due to extraordinary performance. The great catalogers of biblical Greek, Doctors Bauer, Danker, Ardent, and Gingrich, note that in the Greco-Roman world, such fame and honor are enhanced not by strength and might, but by concern for others. One of the greatest mysteries of God is God's concern for us. The Psalmists hit the nail on the head when they write, "What are human beings that you are mindful of them?" And yet, God cares so deeply about the salvation of humanity that God takes on our form and our lot.

The poet Denise Levertov wrote a poem called "On the Mystery of the Incarnation." I promise all the poems I'm quoting recently is a phase - maybe. But this poem is so powerfully to the point. It is called "On the Mystery of the Incarnation." It reads:

*It's when we face for a moment  
the worst our kind can do, and shudder to know  
the taint in our own selves, that awe  
cracks the mind's shell and enters the heart:  
not to a flower, not to a dolphin,  
to no innocent form  
but to this creature vainly sure  
it and no other is god-like, God  
(out of compassion for our ugly  
failure to evolve) entrusts,  
as guest, as brother,  
the Word.*

How amazing that the peace of the whole world came not in its conquering, as Rome sought to do, but in the birth of a child. The angels chose not hallelujah, but gloria. Not just praise, but honor on the basis of concern for others.

Bishop Oscar Romero lived during a time when warring factions in San Salvador promised peace through bloodshed, each side promising a security that would come when their opponents lay in ruin. Romero regularly called this bluff. He worked for real peace; he worked for the security of the poor through social justice and an end to poverty. His calls for peace eventually cost him his life. He said,

*Peace is not the product of terror or fear.  
Peace is not the silence of cemeteries.  
Peace is not the silent result of violent repression.  
Peace is the generous, tranquil contribution of all to the good of all.  
Peace is dynamism.  
Peace is generosity.  
It is right and it is duty.*

One thing the gospels never record is what happens next to the people who encounter Jesus. One can only hope that their brief and profound encounter with the divine was so life changing that they took on the right and duty to work for peace. That they sought their own glory not through fear and violence, not even through the other vices of human life, but through the concern of others, and that to the glory of God. May our own brief and profound encounter with the divine this season so change us, too.

Amen.