



CHRISTMAS PRESENCE

WEEK 2: *Peace in the Midst of Chaos*

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Christmas Presence! This sermon series discusses God's presence as His greatest present to us. We focus on family dysfunction, busyness, and the commercialization of Christmas. Each weekend we will focus on a significant Biblical character in the birth story. We hope you receive encouragement to let the presence of God fill your lives and be the driving factor in how they experience the Christmas season this year.

PEACE IN THE MIDST OF CHAOS

Chaos is the idea that you can't control what is happening. It can seem random, with no pattern to it, or the outcome of some "bull-headed" choice - one of those "what was I thinking" moments. At other times it has nothing to do with you, but you find yourself in the storm of other people's lives. There are times when chaos brings out the worst in us, overflowing out of anxiety and even cowardice. And then there are times when we respond with bravery as a person of supernatural peace; a sort of non-anxious presence in an anxious world. Then there are times when we are leaning into the Bible, letting it speak to us, and doing what it tells us. Even if we've read the same passages a thousand times, the Word of God (*rhema*¹) is alive and speaks into our lives today in the here and now.

DISCUSS/JOURNAL:

Jesus modeled a peace (read **Matthew 8:24**) that he gave to us in **John 14:27**. Describe your definition of peace and the definition/model of peace lived out by Jesus. How are they different?

Is supernatural peace the absence of chaos? What is the difference between peace and lack of passion?

Describe/think about times when you were close to God, in his Word, and listening for His voice. What difference did it make in your life? Contrast this to a time in your life when you were doing the opposite. Do you find yourself a person of peace and bravery or anxiety and cowardice?

MARY'S TIP #1: RECEIVE YOUR IDENTITY

Luke 1.28 (NIV) 8 The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

How did Mary get to be God's favorite? Was she just exceptionally holy, really good, or from a prestigious family? Nope. What we learn from the original Greek script is that "favored" is from the root word *charitoo*, which means that she was *made* acceptable. Her favored status was given to her out of grace, not out of anything she earned or deserved. There is only one other person mentioned in the Bible that has this same status – **you** (read **Ephesians 1:6**). As a believer and receiver of the Blood of Christ you have been reborn into God's family and by His grace; you have *charitoo* status. If God says you are highly favored, this must mean that anything said about you that doesn't align with what God said is a lie.

DISCUSS/JOURNAL:

We learned last week that the people of Mary's time would possibly have killed her, and most definitely would have labeled her as dishonorable, a sinner, and worthless. What happens when we do not feel worthy? Why was it so important to establish Mary's identity?

When crisis hits, why is it so important to remember who you are? Why do the labels we put on ourselves and each other matter (read **James 4:4**)?

Remember the childhood adage "sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me"? Is being passive and going numb or "bravado" the same thing as supernatural peace?

MARY'S TIP #2: RECEIVE THE PROMISES OF GOD

Luke 1.29-33 (ESV) ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Mary's response to the news was honest fear, "...she was *greatly* troubled..." What did Mary receive in response, except for affirmation of her identity, the promise of **Isaiah 7:14**, and the promise of **Isaiah 9:6-7**. Let's back up the timeline starting with the promises of God from Mary's perspective:

- If God says that I will give conceive as a virgin, I don't know how this will happen but it will.
- And if God says that I will give birth, then that probably means I won't get stoned.
- And If God says that my son will reign forever, then that probably means that he will be cared for.

DISCUSS/JOURNAL:

What has you “greatly troubled”? What are God’s promises to you? You can use a concordance in the back of a Bible to search for scripture that speak to key words such as peace, joy, provision, etc. Can you back up the time line from God’s promise to your situation?

Do you get stuck on the “how” part? What is our assurance of how the miraculous occurs (read **Luke 1: 35**)?

What purpose do the promises of God have in your life?

MARY’S TIP #3: TRUST AND EXPECT

Luke 1.35-38 (NKJV) 35 And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. 36 Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. 37 For with God nothing will be impossible.” 38 Then Mary said, “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

I’ve received my promises... now what? How do I trust and expect God to show up? This tip is perhaps the most encouraging, and at the same time - the hardest to follow. If anything is possible with God, then why does my child still suffer? If anything is possible for God, then why is my marriage still struggling? If nothing is impossible for God, then why am I still swimming in debt? Even when the daily walk isn’t what we expected we trust God and expect him to keep his promises. This is the already here and not yet come nature of the Kingdom of God. We still lean into, hope for, and pray for the impossible.

DISCUSS/JOURNAL:

Discuss the meaning of “the Kingdom of God is already here and not yet fulfilled”. How does this help you to trust and expect fulfillment of God’s promises? Does this move you from a place of anxiety to a place of bravery?

Mary was able to witness the power of the Holy Spirit in her cousin Elizabeth. Do you have people in your lives that are modern day examples of God’s power? People who live in the fulfillment of his promises? As you think about their story, what does it do for you? Cory said that our stance or posture in the face of chaos could determine the trajectory of our journey. What does this mean?

Even though we don’t know how things will happen, how can we contend for the Kingdom to increase in us and around us? To be an authentic people who carry and reveal truth to a chaotic world?

ACTIVATION

Mary was encouraged by the Word of God and by hanging out with someone who was currently experiencing the fulfillment of God's promises. Find either, find both that will help you increase trust and expectancy and to be that non-anxious presence in our anxious world.

ENCOURAGEMENT

Labels matter, identity matter. Fill in the blank with your name, the name of someone who needs affirmation of their identity. Speak it over yourself, your loved ones.

_____ the BRAVE.

Cory shared with us the testimony of his wife, of how she broke the generational inheritance of alcoholism, depression, and anxiety. The blessing upon their children and their children's children fulfilled because she leaned into God, held onto his promises, and didn't give up hope. We pray that you will receive this testimony as your own identity. We pray that you confidently know that you are that tenacious person of faith that will be that blessing to your family for generations to come. May the God of **Hebrews 11:6** bless you greatly.

PROVIDE US WITH FEEDBACK

We are excited about the potential these studies have to help each of us process the weekend message at a deeper level, and to see God change our lives in significant ways. In order to make these guides as helpful as possible, we would love to hear which elements are most helpful, which are least helpful, as well as any other comments, questions or suggestions. Feel free to send your feedback directly to Jon Holmberg at jonholmberg@gmail.com.

Has God been prompting you to lean out over your skies a bit? Have you had a desire to write, but not sure how to start to scratch that kind of itch? This may be your chance. We are currently looking to expand our team of writers. If you have experience, or no experience, writing studies or devotionals... it's not a big deal – Let God guide your fingers. If you would like to investigate this a bit more please contact me at jonholmberg@gmail.com.

REFERENCES

1. <http://biblehub.com/greek/4487.htm>
2. <http://biblehub.com/interlinear/luke/1-28.htm>
3. <http://biblehub.com/interlinear/ephesians/1-6.htm>