



## ENTER God's presence

*Consider the blameless, observe the upright;  
a future awaits those who seek peace.  
But all sinners will be destroyed;  
there will be no future for the wicked.  
The salvation of the righteous comes from the Lord;  
he is their stronghold in time of trouble.  
The Lord helps them and delivers them;  
he delivers them from the wicked and saves them,  
because they take refuge in him.*

- Psalm 37:37-40

Father God, sometimes peace is hard to find in the chaos of life. Grant us peace now as we come together and gather around your Word. Help us to lay aside the things in life that are causing us stress and concern and give us clarity and focus as we place ourselves at your feet to hear from you now, in Jesus name, Amen.



## SHARE life together

1. Where have you seen God's peace at work in your life this last week?
2. Share how you went with your living purposefully from last time?
3. How would you define the word 'peace'? What does peace mean to you?
4. Do you generally experience peace during the Christmas season, or something else? Explain.

Life is full of mysteries that puzzle us. Like...

- Why do cows always face north or south while eating?
- Why do we press harder on the remote when the batteries are dead?
- Why does bladder control become so much harder that closer you get to the toilet?
- How far west can you travel before you are travelling east?
- Can you daydream at night-time?
- Why does your nose run and your feet smell?
- Why can't you change the volume of the voice in your head? (you just tried didn't you!!)

We live in a world where things often don't make sense. And they are the easy ones...what about these. Why do bad things keep happening to me? Why can't I just get it together? Why

Week beginning:  
Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2021

Worship series  
**WHEN GOD COMES TO TOWN:**  
When PEACE comes to town.  
(#2 in series)



## VERSE for the week

**"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").**

Matthew 1:23



## REMEMBER this week

**When you let go of what you know and can explain, you make room in your heart for God to write his story of peace which is filled with promise.**

does nobody love me, want me? They are the questions that keep us up at night, that play over and over in our minds, that trouble us and cause us unrest. For we know what we believe and we believe what we know. Today God invites you to live with the questions rather than find answers. To quit analysing or trying to understand and explain or make sense of things and to simply make room for the impossible, the unexplainable, the mysterious. And maybe...when we open our eyes again we discover the morning of new openness and opportunity to be part of what God is doing in this world. When PEACE comes to town, there is a renewed perspective, acceptance and courage. We'll explore that today.



**LISTEN** attentively

### Read Matthew 1:18-25

C.S. Lewis once wrote, "God cannot give us happiness and peace apart from himself because it is not there. There is no such thing." The Hebrew word which is most often rendered as 'peace' in English, is the word '*shalom*'. It is derived from another word '*shalam*' which is used frequently in the Exodus 21-22 to describe the idea of restitution or redemption – compensation or making things right in a legal sense. So the idea of '*shalom*' has with it the idea of restoration or wholeness. It also captures the idea of wellness and wellbeing but in a more wholistic sense than just physical health. We do not find these things apart from God.

5. ***What do you hear this scripture saying to you right now?***
6. ***What benefit could there be from adopting a 'shalom' idea of peace rather than simply an 'absence of conflict' understanding of peace?***

Stop and consider for a moment what the news of Mary's pregnancy would have meant for Joseph. Before God revealed his part in the proceedings, Joseph was confronted with a situation filled with turmoil and conflict, certainly a situation without much prospect for peace. The Jewish law in a situation like this allowed for Joseph to put Mary on trial before the local Jewish elders for judgement and most likely sentenced to stoning. This is how the law sought to repay or restore to Joseph what had been lost by Mary's perceived 'unfaithfulness' to him.

7. ***Look again at verses 19-21***
  - a. ***Joseph is described as a righteous man. How does his 'righteousness' influence his behaviour or approach to the situation?***
  - b. ***Whose well-being does Joseph seem to be most concerned about in this passage?***
  - c. ***What part of the angel's message do you think shifts Joseph's thinking about this situation?***



**GROW** deeper

Throughout scripture God makes numerous promises. Some he delivers on almost immediately; others, like the promise of a saviour, took generations to be fulfilled. But throughout scripture, together with God's promises, are invitations. God invited Adam and Eve to partner with him in tending the garden and ruling the earth, he invited Abraham to become the start of God's chosen people. He invited the people of Israel to be his people through which he would draw the whole world to himself. And here, as God's angelic messenger reveals God's plan to Joseph, God issues another invitation. He invites Joseph to see and participate in what he is about to do. If Joseph had continued down the path he had chosen, peace would have been difficult to find. But in surrender to God's plan and accepting the path God had set, Joseph finds a peace which makes no sense to the rest of the world.

8. ***If the 'Shalom' kind of peace is about wellness, wholeness and completeness, where can we find that kind of peace as Christians?***
9. ***God continues to invite each of us into a partnership with him. A partnership in which he helps us to discover more completely who he is and who he has made us to be. Where do you experience the least amount of peace in your life? Are you working with God in that space or are you trying to do it all yourself? Explain.***



## LIVE purposefully

Peace is what we feel when everything is correctly ordered and in its proper place. When things are out of order, that is when we encounter distress and anxiety and usually encounter conflict, either within ourselves or with others. Like Joseph, the situation around us might give us every reason to panic, but God invites us to trust him and his purpose and to experience the peace that comes from being in a right relationship with him.

- 10. What are the areas of unrest or fear and conflict in your life at the moment? How might you encounter more of God's peace in those parts of your life?**
- 11. What things are you seeing or experiencing in the world around you that reveal a lack of peace? How might you bring the Peace of Christ to bear in those situations?**
- 12. Have a think about the relationships in your life. Are any of them 'unpeaceful'? How might you restore peace to those relationships this Christmas?**



## PRAY intentionally

- Praise God for his gift of peace, delivered to us in the birth of Jesus.
- Ask Holy Spirit to help you see God present and at work in the world around you and to take up his invitation to partner with him in the work of redeeming all people.
- Ask the Father to give you someone (or two or three) to pray for, asking the Father to draw them to him. (John 6:44,45)
- Pray for all those newly elected to public office in local councils across NSW. Ask God to give them wisdom and compassion in their roles as civic leaders.
- Pray for those for whom Christmas is usually not a time of peace. May they experience the hope and peace of the Gospel this Christmas.
- Check the prayer list in LifeWay News and pray accordingly.
- Thank God for all the gifts he has given you to share and to minister to others with love.
- Anything else that comes to mind!



## BLESS one another

You might like to address one person in your group and make the sign of the cross in the air as you say...

**[Name], the peace of Christ has taken up residence in your life. Amen.**