

Sleep in Heavenly Peace!

A sermon based on Luke 2:1-20

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Just one more sleep!” Have you ever heard that phrase before? It was only recently (in the last couple of years) that I’ve heard it being used more and more. But if you’re not around kids, it might mean nothing to you. But it’s a way parents help their kids count down the days until something exciting happens. Sometimes, kids just can’t contain themselves, this helps to reel in the excitement, give them something to look forward to!

“Just one more sleep.” Now, if we were to use that phrase for parents, it would take on a whole new meaning, wouldn’t it? Especially for parents who are expecting, either the night before the child is born or even the night of, it would be “one more sleep until we’re not getting any more sleep for a while, so let’s enjoy the peace and quiet of one more night.” You know, maybe that was an advantage of adopting, we knew the day Mara was going to be born, so we could relax (somewhat) and get a peaceful night’s rest (again, somewhat)!

Do you ever wonder if either Mary or Joseph got that before the birth of Jesus? I would say the days leading up to the birth were anything but peaceful. Probably not very sleep-filled, either. I mean, a pregnant woman, mere days away from giving birth, being forced to travel long distances...on a donkey, no less. And, I don’t know if it was Joseph’s forgetfulness in the midst of all the baby preparations, or if it’s just not how things worked back then, but I can’t imagine how not having overnight reservations once they got to town and then having to frantically search for a place, any place that would take two weary road travelers (with one more on the way)...I can’t imagine how that would have filled either parent with peace and calm.

And add to that, fairly soon after they reached Bethlehem, “the time came for the baby to be born.” So you had the pangs of childbirth for Mary and the certain stress for Joseph as he stood by her side, you had that adding to the excitement. And then the baby was born, and the two parents, wearied by everything, who probably wanted nothing more than to just get some rest (understandably) but then had some unexpected (yet I’m sure welcomed) visitors in the shepherds, eager to see the Savior who had been born to them.

Would you blame them if neither Mary nor Joseph got a single second of sleep that night? Actually, I’m sure you parents could sympathize with them!

And...on the other end of the spectrum was baby Jesus. Now, we don’t know for sure what that night must have been like for anyone involved (beyond what Scripture tells us), but our experiences would probably lead us to this conclusion...whereas Mary and Joseph were likely frantic, frazzled, stressed, wiped out, exhausted, Jesus, besides the occasional cries for food or because of a dirty diaper, Jesus probably slept and probably slept pretty well his first night here.

Have you ever watched a baby sleep before? What did you think? Maybe, “They look so peaceful.” It’s a trait most kids (and not just babies) have down pretty well. You know, they get so ramped up, excited for what’s coming. They could be bouncing off the walls, but once you get them to bed and they fall asleep, they’re out. They’re at peace. I don’t think there’re too many kids who lie in bed at night,

awake, thinking, "How can I get more money to buy that toy I really want," or, "What can I say or do so my friends won't get mad at me," or, "How can I be a better child for Mom and Dad?" No, sleep is calm and peaceful for them.

How about for you? "Really, sleep in peace? Tomorrow is Christmas, presents aren't even wrapped, and you know the kids are going to be up earlier than usual, eager to see what Santa got for them."

And it's not just at Christmas, either, is it? You ever have those nights where either you just can't fall asleep, or you wake up in the middle of the night and can't fall back asleep because there's just too much on your mind? I've been there...what is it for you? Finances? Work troubles? Stressed relationships?

Sleep's hard enough to come by some nights, but sleeping in peace? Maybe you are wondering, how can I have peace when my loved one is gone this Christmas, when everyone else seems so busy, and I'm all alone? Or maybe you have different concerns and are wondering, how can I have peace with the continual threat of terror, the world seemingly on the brink of another World War, and constant bickering between the leaders of our country?

Then there are the deeper spiritual issues. How can I have peace when my conscience is continually bringing up bad feelings over the things I've said and done? How can I have peace when feelings of anger so often simmer in my heart? How can I have peace when I know that I have so often failed to put God first and to love others above myself? It might be safe to say not just our nights or our sleep, but our lives, are filled with more turmoil and stress from sin than peace.

So, how can we have peace, the same peace the angel chorus sang about, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men"? Join me on a journey to the manger, and you'll see. Look to that newborn baby, wrapped so tightly, gently laid to rest in the manger...so calm, so peaceful.

Have you ever wondered what Jesus had running through his head that first night? I mean this is God, having just become man, having come for the sole purpose of saving you and me from sin. Did he have thoughts of being hated by Pharisees, unsuccessful attempts to stone him to death, the stress of having to explain over and over again who he was, the pains of his path to Calvary – the mockery, the blows, the nails, the cross, death. Kind of puts our worries and issues into perspective, but do you wonder if those thoughts were on baby Jesus' mind that first Christmas night?

The song says, "Sleep in heavenly peace." If that wasn't what was in Jesus' head his first night here, that had to be what kept him going throughout his life here and earth, and what motivated everything he did here...peace from heaven, peace between God and man, peace of sins forgiven, peace only Jesus could bring. Everything else, the stress, being hated, the physical pain, it was all a means to the end. It was the way to our peace...our heavenly peace.

Now, what does that even mean, heavenly peace? Perhaps you know the story. Christmas Eve, 1914, in the heat of World War I, all along the Western Front several truces were called. For just a few days, the British and Germans, enemies, ceased fire, ventured into no man's land, exchanged food, souvenirs, and in some places, even prisoners of war. They had joint burial ceremonies, sang Christmas carols, some even played football together, an awesome picture of peace.

But maybe what you don't know is what happened in following years. Christmas Eve rolled around, and fewer and fewer of these truces were called. Higher up officials were prohibiting this kind of fraternization. The peace was short-lived.

Every Christmas, however, without fail, God fraternizes with us. He comes down from his throne in heaven to earth to become a man, to bring us peace. It doesn't just last for a few days. It doesn't just come at Christmas. No, friends, it's the peace of heaven. It's peace between God and man, peace of our sins (everything we've done wrong) forgiven through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. It's our peace every day.

The saying goes, "NO Jesus...NO Peace. KNOW Jesus...KNOW Peace." There is no peace without Jesus. There is no peace apart from knowing Jesus in faith. Friends, thank God we have that.

Knowing that...helps me sleep easier at night. I hope it does for you, too. Don't let the stress and worries, the struggles and hardships of the past year weigh you down. This Christmas, you with your troubles, gladly approach the manger. Leave them at the foot of the cross, where Jesus has taken care of them. And sleep in heavenly peace.

Friends, it's just one more sleep away, isn't it. So close to it being Christmas once again. I wouldn't blame you if you can hardly sleep tonight, and hopefully it's not just because of the presents under the tree. Hopefully you're just as excited about tomorrow, eagerly anticipating God's present in the manger....Christ our Savior...our King.

If, or even if you're not finding it hard to fall asleep tonight, here's my encouragement: Take this worship folder home with you this evening, and right before you go to bed, take a few minutes to once again read through Luke 2. Hear once again the good news of Jesus' birth. That good news is for you..for here...for eternity. So, you too, sleep in heavenly peace. Amen.