

**Peace on Earth?**  
**Christmas Mixtape series**  
**by Chris Famisaran**

Pastor asked me to start off the service. The message today, with a few thoughts about the state of the world. Some of the things that we see in the news. And you know, Christmas should be a time of joy and happiness. And yet, the world seems to be filled with uncertainty and conflict.

As I looked through the headlines, I remembered why I quit watching the news. Some time ago, it seemed like it became the bad news. All we get is bad news out of it. But here's some of the things that are in the news right now that you may have seen.

For example, we have the Russian invasion of Ukraine. We're almost two years into this war. Can anybody tell me who's winning? The Ukrainians claim that tens of thousands of civilians have been killed, millions have displaced and are homeless. Some experts estimate that the Russians lose 3,000 soldiers per mile of territory gained and that they have lost a total of 87 percent of their fighting force. Almost 90 percent. Who's winning?

More recently, we have the attack of Hamas on Israel and Israel's response. And again, I asked the question, who's winning? Because it doesn't seem like anyone is winning. By some estimates, there are 13 major conflicts going on in the world right now, from civil wars to military coups, the full-out wars.

There are 32 conflicts going on if you count smaller battles, drug lords, warlords fighting. The Geneva Academy claims to be monitoring 110 armed conflicts worldwide. Wars and rumors of wars.

And every time I check the news, it seems like there's a hurricane, a tornado, a mudslide, a landslide, an earthquake, a flood, something, somewhere that's devastated some community. And if that's not on the news, then we have good old climate change to fall back onto. And some people say climate change is manmade. It'll be the end of us. And others say it's all natural. The climate change is as we go. Who do you believe? Who do you believe?

We're getting ready for the presidential campaigns going into an election year, and I'm sure that this is the year that the Republicans and the Democrats will get along famously and heap accolades on each other and praises. Probably not. And they each say the other one is wrong and they are right. And who is it? Who's right and who's wrong? Maybe they're both a little bit right and both a little bit wrong. I don't know. But in any case, whatever happened with treating each other with respect?

Drugs are everywhere. There's a fentanyl crisis in many places. This week in the news, five Virginia elementary school students had to be taken to the hospital and treated because they ingested fentanyl-laced gummy bears. Who is putting fentanyl in gummy bears and feeding it to elementary students? And let's find them and make them stop.

The Spanish police seized 7.5 tons, tons of cocaine hidden in frozen tuna this week. And the UN just announced that Myanmar overtakes Afghanistan as the world's top opium producer. Great.

Crime is out of control. Congress is going to weigh in on retail theft and organized crime. Oh great, that's going to help. Some of the scariest words in the English language are, "Hi, I'm from the government and I'm here to help." Target is going to close three San Francisco Bay Area stores because of retail theft, and six other stores are closing in New York, Portland, and Seattle. A new poll finds that a majority of Portland voters say they would consider leaving if they could as crime, homelessness, and other concerns persist.

Inflation is rising and going up and up and up. One headline this week claimed that the American dream costs more than most people will make in their entire life. And some people have to choose between food, medicine, or the electric bill.

And we haven't even covered all the society issues of gender and sex that are going on. Everyone seems to have a strong opinion about whether a male can call himself a female and enter female sports. And at times it just seems like life is not fair. One group seems to get things for free that another group works so very hard for. Recently we were talking about forgiving student loans, but some people worked very hard to pay off their student loans. And it just seems like life isn't fair.

And it seems like all of the news is bleak and negative. And not only is it negative, but oftentimes the stories conflict. One says A, and the other one says B, and you don't even know who to believe. One could easily come to the conclusion that somewhere there's a group of people who want the general public to be at odds with each other. And I don't mean to start the sermon off on a negative tone. All of these things make it seem like life is bleak. And let's be honest, sometimes it is. Life in this world is challenging.

But is there hope? Does Jesus' birth give us any hope? Does the Bible provide any respite and even give us confidence? Pastor, bring us some hope.

I got a decompress from that. Let's pray. Father in heaven, Lord, as we look to the scriptures, as we look at a couple hymns, leading guidance in Jesus' name, amen.

Growing up, I'm sure you heard this song. You better watch out. You better not cry. You better not pout. I'm telling you why. Guess who's coming to town. He's making a list. He's checking it twice. He's gonna find out who's naughty or nice. Guess who's coming to town. Santa Claus.

And as you read this, it sounds kind of disturbing. Somebody's keeping a list of all the things you're doing. He sees you when you're sleeping, kind of creepy. Sees you when you're awake. He knows if you've been bad or good, so be good for goodness sake. You better watch out. You better not cry. You better not pout. I'm telling you why. The Santa Claus is coming to town.

I love that God is not a tyrant, but one of love. Amen. By the way, thank you, Ben. We're gonna change it up a little today. Instead of me, I'm not singing today. But we're gonna have a little background music. So thank you, Ben.

Now, we've sung many songs as kids, especially Christmas time. And especially this one kind of, it did not hit me until this year that I realized, you know, you think, oh, Santa Claus is coming down, ha, ha, ha. But if you think about the words of what it truly is trying to say is that somebody's watching, it sounds very legalistic. Somebody's keeping track of your life. And yet when we look at God, we find that God is not one to bring anxiety as maybe some would experience when they know that they're being tracked. That God is bringing comfort. God is bringing joy. God is bringing peace. And God desires to give good gifts. We're in a season of gifts. And one of those gifts is the gift of peace.

Can we find peace on earth? Can we find peace on earth? Jesus famously says, peace, I leave with you peace. I give you. I don't give to you as the world gives. Don't let your hearts be what? Trouble. Let's go to the book of Matthew. Book of Matthew chapter 2. I'm just going to say it right now. We're going to go a little over. I'm not going to be mean and keep you forever, but we're going to go a little over. So Matthew chapter 2 verses 1 through 12 and later on we'll briefly look at Luke 2 verses 8 through 15. But Matthew 2 verses 1 through 12. We all there? Okay.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem and Judea during the time of King Herod, Magi from the East came to Jerusalem. Who are the Magi? They come from the East. They're not Jews. They are Gentiles, but they have heard that the Messiah is coming more than likely because of works, Jewish works that have been passed down. They said that when we saw a star when it arose and we have come to worship him and they assume that he would be born in Jerusalem. And when they show up, the king of that area, King Herod, heard about it and he was what? He was disturbed and all of Jerusalem with him. Why is it, I hadn't caught this. Why was Herod disturbed? But then when it says all of Jerusalem, believers, should they not want to know where the Messiah is going to be born? You know a little history though about Herod, not the greatest guy. In fact, he'd recently at this point had murdered his wife and two kids. And to hear another king, another person who was going to allegedly take over cause paranoia, inherit. And the general public is like, no, get him out of here. We're already dealing with enough on our plate. And yet we called them all together, the chief priest and the teachers of the law. He asked them, where is this Messiah to be born? So you have the leadership of. of Israel of all of the Jews there as well in Bethlehem they were applied for this is what the prophet is written They knew this already But you But you Bethlehem and the land of Judah are being no means least among the rulers of Judah for out of you will come a ruler Who will shepherd my people? So he calls the Magi Secretly he finds out exactly the time the star had appeared and he goes and sends them off rather confidently Go find out where he is but intent in his heart was such that he wanted to get rid of this baby boy So he sends them off and the star that they had seen when it arose and went ahead of them Until it stopped over the place that the child was when they saw the star They were

overjoyed and on coming to the house that saw the child with Mary They bowed their heads they worshiped and they saw him open the treasures and presented him gifts of gold, frankincense, and Myrrh, gold, frankincense and myrrh. and Then they're warned not to go back to Herod so they went back to their country a different route

And so we sang this to hymn earlier the First Noel. Was to certain poor shepherds and feels where they lay taken account into Luke's account And fields where they lay keeping their sheep on the cold winter's night was so deep But then it goes noel, noel, nowl born is the king of who? Israel It points out they just looked up and saw a star shining in the east beyond them far into the earth It gave great light and so they continued day and night the Magi were following this light Has God not done this before where he should use light to lead God's people? We find it where in the book of Exodus. By that light of that same star three men technically we don't know how many wise men there were but you For this sake, they came from a country far to the earth it gave great light and they followed it wherever it went. And they drew nigh to the Northwest over Bethlehem and took its rest. And there both it did stop and stay right over the place where Jesus lay. And they entered into this house with wise, three wise men, fully reverent, humbly, Gentiles humbly worshiping the Lord. And there they gave him their presence, Gold, Myrrh, and Frankincense.

Now, the first Noel can be translated as the first Christmas. And this song has its origins in the Middle Ages. Primarily, the singing was done by the priests and the church, but outside the people would sing in their homes, and they would base their songs on biblical stories. And sometimes these words, they would make them up right on the spot. It was much less formal.

So they based this hymn on the story of the Magi. And no, well, it can be translated also as news. It's French. But yet it also, some also indicate that it's the sound of the echo in the last two symbols, syllables of Emmanuel, the prophetic name of a child named Jesus. Others also, if you look into the root word of, it could also be traced to earlier versions of Nassau or Natalus, also known as birthday.

And who wrote the first Noel? William Sandy wrote it many, many years ago. He was a lawyer, but he was remembered more for his carols and singing. This first

Noel, it describes the birth of Jesus. And especially I love this song because it points out as it shows the story of the Magi where there's a star. As you can see, there's also a star above me today. There's in ways a star sailors for thousands of years use stars to navigate the seas when there were no landmarks. And much like the Magi, God led them by a light.

Light. When you see light, does it give you strength? Does it give you hope? Gives you courage? How many of you were scared of the dark and your parents had to get those little, little lights that you had to plug into the wall just so you could feel a little more safe. Amen. I had one when I was a kid. Not afraid to admit it. Light gives us hope. Light gives us courage. Light can give us strength and give us peace.

I'm just going to kind of, I'm sorry, I wish I could have more time, but the next song I want to briefly talk about as well is Hark the Herald Angel. which was written about 1739. Charles Wesley, noted theologian, wrote the lyrics. And part of Felix Mendelssohn and Cummings contributed to the music. It was originally called A Hymn for Christmas Day. And later on, I think it was in 1758, George Whitefield changed it to what is now known as Hark the Herald Angel Sing.

So as we sing as well, I'm gonna read this. If you wanna look in the hymnals as well, page 122, page 122, it starts off with Glory to Who? the newborn king. Peace on earth and mercy mild. God and sinners reconcile. I love that line because it talks about, for instance, essentially it's reminding us we're a new creation. God is reconciling the world and God is also called to be a part of that reconciliation.

Joyful all ye nations rise, not just one section of the world, but all of the world. Rise, join in a triumph of disguise as the angels are singing with angelic host proclaim, Christ is born in Bethlehem. Remember the first sermon I spoke in this series, Bethlehem. Was it a great town? No, it was a little town. God can use small things for great things. Hark the herald angels sing glory to the new born king.

Christ by heaven, highest heaven adored. Christ the everlasting Lord, late in time behold him come, offspring of a virgin's womb, veiled in the flesh to Godhead's health, hail the incarnate deity. Pleased with us and fleshed well, Jesus our Emmanuel, Jesus God has come in the flesh to earth, amen. Hark the herald angels sing glory to the new born king.

Hail the heaven born prince of peace, hail the son of righteousness, light and life to all he brings, risen with healing in his wings, while he lay his glory by, born that we know more may die, born to us, born to raise us up from the earth, born to give us second what? Birth. Hark the herald angels sing glory to the new born king.

If you look to Luke chapter 2, verses 8 through 15, the angels are singing this wonderful, beautiful song. And who are they singing to? Who are they first reaching out to? Shepherds. And if we remember correctly, the shepherds, they weren't great men. In fact, their profession was looked down upon. They were despised because sometimes they would take their sheep and graze on other people's land and they'd would get up something, take your sheep somewhere else.

But it's amazing that God sent the angels to go and proclaim that the king of the world has been born to shepherds. And not only did they just take this message, they went, they saw the king, and they shared it with the rest of the world. God again can use the unlikeliest of heroes. God can not only use them, but he can also use us. God equips the evangelists. But more importantly, the message was shared that Jesus has been born and come into the world. Glory to the newborn king. A new time and a new age has come to pass. And the king of the world is at work in everyone's heart. Amen. Are you going to allow the Holy Spirit to lead and guide you? When the Holy Spirit enters your life, you can find. Peace.

Now, we also did sing earlier, "Silent Night, Holy Night." Imagine this scene: Mary, caring for Jesus, Joseph, they're all sitting there resting. And people come and visit them, bearing gifts and also seeing who Jesus is. To worship, to adore, to affirm what they have seen with their own eyes. Christ the Savior is born. Christ the Savior is born. Silent Night, Holy Night.

In a world, as Bill basically shared, our world at times is bleak, is it not? It's sometimes keeps us up at night. And maybe not just the world, but maybe the challenges that you're experiencing in your own life. Some of you perhaps having trouble sleeping or just going throughout the day. I'm reminded of a Silent Night, Holy Night. Take time in the next couple of weeks just to ponder what Christ has done in your life and just to find some silence. Set aside some time to be able to

reflect on what God has done in your life and will do in your life because we have a future and a hope.

Again, as I pointed out, I love the stars. They bring me peace because I know that beyond the stars is a creator. I recently read a story where they took a picture just into the galaxies. And within that small little snippet was millions of more stars, millions of more galaxies. And it shows how truly finite and small we are. And someone would think, oh, I'm just, I'm smaller than an Earth. No, we have a God who loves us, who has reached out further than we could ever imagine to create this place and create us.

I take confidence that the God of the universe, though we are so small, created and shaped us and loves us that much, that King can bring us peace. The sky is filled with many patterns that we can look up to and see God's creativity and amazement, some of those stars we practically use, as I said, like the North Star, to find our direction.

And while we live in a world that is fraught with pain, conflict, and violence, at least as was portrayed on TV, and yes, I know it is happening, I'm reminded again of the story of the Magi where God used a starting reference, a light, to lead them to the Savior. And we too, as well, Jesus is our star, our shining example of how we can live life. Within the scriptures, we can find stories of hope, of peace, of courage, but also of love and grace and redemption.

As we start to better understand who Jesus is as the light of the world, we can find peace, courage, and love. So, may Jesus, in this Christmas time, be your light and follow him with, to find a path and direction in life that you may find strength, peace, courage, but most importantly, love.

So as we land the plane, what robs you of your peace? What are you feeling your minds with? What are you listening to? Because we are what we eat. And I don't just say that physically. But what are you feeding your minds? And not to say that we should just ignore all of the bad stuff, because we need to be realistic about what we're dealing with, right? We know there's a world out there we have to be mindful, but if we just completely stick our heads in the sand, is that going to do us any good? No. But it doesn't mean that we have to totally focus our lives on the bad stuff, our whole lives. Amen?

So, may you fill your minds and your hearts and your bodies with good stuff, and be mindful, and ask the Lord to lead and guide you, that you may find peace. And this week, for your challenge, go and share some good news. Whether it's Jesus, or you got a promotion, you passed your spelling test, whatever it may be, God is at work. So, share that with others, share good news that they also may have peace.

Gracious Lord, I thank you and praise you for who you are. Lord, in this challenging difficult at times bleak time, help us Lord, as you've called us to be able to participate in the reconciliation of the world. Give us wisdom and strength and courage as we serve as ambassadors. But Lord, even as we serve Lord, fill our hearts. For those who are weary and just on their last thread, Lord, we pray for restoration. We pray for healing, whether it's physically, spiritually, mentally, emotionally. Lord, for those who are struggling, we ask that you please provide the means, because we know that you are a good and faithful God.

And Lord, where sometimes maybe it appears you are distant. We know that you are not far. Help us, Lord, be patient for your calling. And until then, Lord, keep us safe until we meet again next time. In Jesus' name, everybody said. Amen.

Grace and peace.