

The Newsletter of Yellowstone Theological Institute | Winter 2020-2021

Soaking up God's shalom this Christmas season

Grant Us Peace

DR. JAY SMITH

"Grant us peace" is a phrase used in the "Agnus Dei" (Lamb of God) section of the Roman Catholic Mass. When I hear the phrase, "Dona Nobis Pacem," my musical mind goes to the Mass written by Leon-

ard Bernstein. The composer had the choir practically shout *Dona Nobis Pacem!* while the orchestra was playing in a very resolute—yet practically frantic—manner. The idea was that culture was out-of-control and that people demanded peace, although they were not receiving any. No peace, although the world was crying out for peace.

In 2020 we desperately need "peace." We affirm with the New Testament church that in the Messiah, peace is available to anyone. Of course, Jesus stated that His coming would also bring

"division." Jesus is a two-edged sword. As individuals, and as communities walking in Christ, we know that being a "witness" (μάρτυρ, "martyr") can often create conflict. This conflict is not necessarily a physical conflict; rather, it is a conflict of being, a conviction within a person that resists the transformative love of God in Christ. As in the case with the Pharisees, Sadducees, and the Sanhedrin, this conflict of being may result in outward violence and bloodshed. This witness "unto death" is what we would call martyrdom. Martyrdom is always an act of love.

► SEE **GRANT US PEACE** PAGE 3



Peace Through
Proper Orientation
PAGE 4

Peace Through
the Practice of Silence
PAGE 8

Bringing Peace to the Church
PAGES 10

From the President

Chaos, Crisis ... and Progress!

...and the world keeps changing. Although the President has not conceded the election to—what would seem to be—the President-Elect, we know that 2021 will usher in a very different political, economic, cultural, and ecclesial climate than what we have experienced before.

Much to the chagrin of many, we will not be going "back" to the world of 2015, or 2020 for that matter. Nope. Change is the one constant. Our world has changed in the last four years. It has become less congenial, and more combative; less cooperative, and more individual; less truthful, and more skeptical. Yet the world that has changed, will change some more.

The power of peaceful influencers must not be overlooked. This is the power of the true gospel, where God, neighbor, and enemy are loved alike. Yes, it seems odd to say this—considering what we have been through, and especially since our culture now sees Christians as worthless, hypocritical, and *foolish* power "seekers." It will take some soul searching and repentance on our part to recover the heart of the good news for a world-gone-wild. But anything is possible with God—just try Him. He will change each of us, and others, through His love.

We don't need a "mulligan" for 2020, although some would like this "do-over." We must learn from the past, live in the present, and lean towards the future.

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING AHEAD

YTI has thrived this past year. We now have twice as many students, applicants, and inquiries as we had our first year. Our capital campaign has been securing new donor-partners at a healthy

pace. Our architects and engineers are moving ahead with our plans for the north 40 acres of our property, and we are pressing forward with a joint-venture development agreement with the south 40 acres. I have begun searches for a full-time theologian and a full-time biblical studies professor. I am incredibly pleased with our progress, considering the chaotic political culture and the COVID-19 crisis.

I am not sure whether you will receive this issue of *Inscribed* before the first of the new year, but know that all of you are close to the hearts of our faculty and staff members. We pray for you constantly, and pray that we are as much a blessing to you as you are to us. I look forward to seeing each of you *soon*.

Blessings!

Dr. Jay Smith, President Bridger Professor of Theology & Ethics



Yellowstone Theological Institute
P.O. Box 1347, Bozeman, MT 59771
406-404-1600 | yellowstonetheology.org

Jay T. Smith, President

Matthew C. Green, Editor & Designer

Kathryn Green, Assistant Editor

Remember, peace cannot be reduced simply to "the absence of conflict." That's only half of the picture. Peace is the presence of what God desires.

► GRANT US PEACE FROM PAGE 1

Nevertheless, as believers, we can stop, adore, and soak up the "shalom"—the peace—of His presence. We can then allow that peace to flow from us into the lives around us. Peace, at its very heart, is the "sense of the presence of God." Peace is experienced through the interaction of faith and grace, in the sensations of hope and love.

Remember, peace cannot be reduced simply to "the absence of conflict." That's only half of the picture. Peace is the *presence of what God desires*. When we say "peace be with you," or my

Jewish friends say "shalom," we are asking that your life not only be free from conflict and violence, but also be filled with the very fullness of what God desires for you. Which desires do you need, or pick—grace? faith? hope? love? Wait, how about all of these things, because the peace of God is comprehensive. It is the state that is achieved when God is present in our lives. I desire and I need that peace. I need the peace of God, resonating through the presence of the Holy Spirit to fill my life and heart. I think you need that peace as well.

This Christmas, this New Year, just STOP... and pray. Not just for political goals or agen-

das, and not simply for the material necessities of life. Rather, pray for God's peace to cover you and flow into your heart. Rest in Him, and allow that peace to shape everything you do in 2021.

JAY SMITH (*Ph.D.*, *Trinity College University of Bristol*) is President and Bridger Professor of Theology and Ethics at YTI. His research interests center on contemporary ecclesiology, imagination, and theology, as well as theological responses to contemporary cultural issues.

MASTER OF ARTS IN CHRISTIAN STUDIES

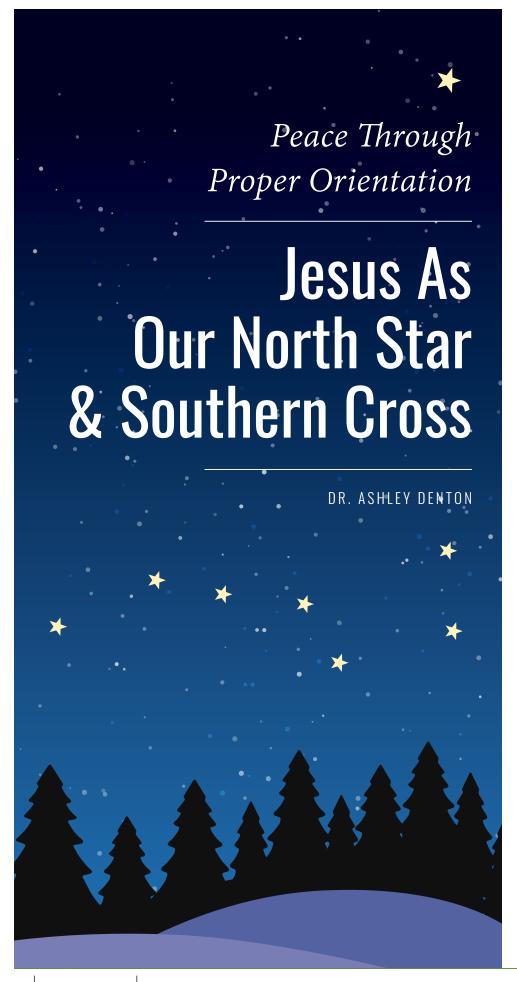


A Master's Program Designed Around Your Objectives

YTI is excited to announce a new M.A. concentration in Christian Studies!

The Christian Studies concentration provides maximum flexibility in designing a personalized master's program. Along with core courses covering the Old and New Testaments, Theology, and Spirituality, students have the option to select four (4) electives from Biblical Studies, Theology, World Religions and Culture, Spirituality, Leadership, Arts, and Adventure courses. The concentration allows for an educational experience tailored to the student's own interests and ministry objectives.

LEARN MORE ABOUT YTI'S MASTER'S PROGRAMS AT YTHI.ORG



Paul's opening to his second letter to the church at Thessalonica could not be more relevant today as people reach and strive for peace, but often do not find it. Peace is a gift from God which is not meant to be elusive. Paul makes this point abundantly clear: "Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you" (2 Thess. 3:16).

The Christmas season has always been a celebration of the arrival of the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ. In 2020, as we intersect the timeless purpose and even sentimental experience of the Christmas season, many of us struggle with nagging cultural anxieties. We hope for good health for ourselves and our loved ones, we pray for the success of our local businesses, we plead to the Lord for help for those who are disenfranchised in our communities due to the global coronavirus pandemic.

No one is sticking their heads in the sand about the real effect of the pandemic this year. Yet, as a shepherd, I don't want you to allow the darkness of fear and anxiety to take center stage in your thoughts. Instead, I long for you to turn your attention away from the anxiety and fears that swirl about like ocean waves and look up to find Peace, through a proper orientation to Jesus Christ.

How do I propose you make this shift? I want you to read further to find out.

LOOKING UP TO THE STARS... AND TO GOD

This Advent season I want you to gaze upward at a clear night sky for a few minutes to let the pin-pricked veil of darkness above lead you to awe and worship of Jesus. By the light of a backyard fire or campfire, open the pages of your Bible and read the words of an ancient young wilderness wanderer. A shepherd, David, who became king of Israel and was in the genealogical line of Jesus wrote these words. They still mean as much for you now as they did to him in the desert:

O LORD, our Lord,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.
Out of the mouth of babies and infants,
you have established strength because of your foes,
to still the enemy and the avenger.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,

what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? (Psalm 8:1-4)

The Prince of Peace is not only mindful of you this Christmas season, but He is jealous for you: "Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us?" (James 4:5). God is not jealous in the way that we are. He is jealous in that He wants your whole heart. He wants an exclusive relationship with you. He knows objectively and factually as the Creator of the universe that *a relationship with Him* is the best most abundant source of peace and joy that you can ever experience. So how do we get there? Look upward.

STARS SHOW US THE BEAUTY AND PURPOSE FOR JESUS' EARTH-VISIT

Growing up in a tiny mountain village in Colorado, I became enamored at an early age with the North Star. I remember being shown how to find the North Star: With your finger pointing at the sky, first locate the two bright stars the furthest away from the handle that form the end of the bowl. Then run your finger upward along an imaginary line connecting those two pointer stars. After traveling up the sky about five times the distance between the pointer stars, *Voila!* your finger will land on one of the sky's greatest treasures, the North Star! For millennia people in the northern hemisphere have used the North Star to figure out where they were and where they were going.

Years ago, when my family was preparing to move to New Zealand, having been enamored with the North Star in the northern hemisphere, I was excited to see the Southern Cross constellation for the first time, which is the North Star's equivalent Down Under. If you live in the southern hemisphere you cannot see the North Star. Instead, with a stroke of brilliance to provide all people with a fixed point of reference in the sky, our Creator provided another constellation called the Southern Cross. It's a beautiful crown of jewels arranged perfectly in the shape of a cross. For navigation, you just find the longer bar in the cross and follow that pattern with your finger going downward in the heavens above. Voila! this points you to the Southern Pole in the sky. I'll never forget sitting in a hot tub with our Kiwi friends on the first night after we arrived. It was a perfectly clear night for them to point out the Southern Cross. Our eyes weren't trained to see it yet, so we needed someone to show us. But when we saw it, we were in utter awe of both its beauty and its utility to orient us.

Similar to that cold, clear night in New Zealand when we got tethered to a fixed point in the sky to keep us oriented, Christmas is also a season to be re-oriented to a fixed point in history. Christmas is a reference point through which we can be freshly enamored with Jesus' beauty and purpose for visiting earth; to orient and reconcile us back to God, and to establish a real and lasting peace in our soul, regardless of the circumstances.

THE CHRISTMAS STAR— A GUIDE FOR ALL GENERATIONS

We learn from the Psalm above that David drew much of his understanding of how God guides us by looking at Creation. We can do the same. Stars are one example. Just as the North Star and the Southern Cross are fixed points of reference to get you oriented on your journey, the beautiful and bright star of the Christmas story a couple thousand years ago marked the arrival of the Prince of Peace, who would forever be the person upon which all history would hinge.

What a wilderness journey story we have in the Christmas narrative! When Jesus was born, a special star appeared in the sky and became a point of orientation for the wise men. Interpret-

► SEE NORTH STAR PAGE 6





► NORTH STAR FROM PAGE 5

ing the meaning of the star as coinciding with the arrival of a great King, they set out on a journey to worship this long-anticipated King who would be the one to finally bring lasting Peace (see Isaiah 9:6-7). This wasn't a kind of temporary peace which militaries or governments can achieve; this King, Jesus, would win for humanity an eternal peace. It was worth it to these wise men, however long and arduous the journey to come face to face with this King. And the same is true today. Do you believe that Jesus is the source of lasting peace? If so, then are you willing to put your full weight down on that belief and set out on an adventurous journey to worship Him?

As the star of Bethlehem rose, these wise men from the East curiously followed the star to find the King to which it pointed. These men were astronomers and must have been aware of the prophecy in Numbers 24:17 which says: "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel." When they saw the star, they were amazed that in their lifetime they would see the prophecy fulfilled! It is interesting to note that in 4 B.C. Saturn and Jupiter crossed paths and made a great light in the sky. And in 7 B.C. Chinese astronomers also recorded a great star in the sky.

Whether or not such wonders in the sky were what these men followed to Bethlehem, what encourages me about the wise men (recorded in Mathew 2:1-12) is their whole-hearted commitment to find and worship the Prince of Peace to whom the star pointed. It is estimated that these men traveled 600-2,400 miles to go up to Bethlehem. This would have taken between 100-400 days on camels! This is a picture to me of what true worship looks like. They were not half-hearted in their worship. They committed their whole lives to this journey to find the newborn King.

FINDING TRUE DIRECTION IN IESUS

How about you? What does whole-hearted worship of Jesus, your Prince of Peace, look like for

you right now? What might be holding you back from the kind of extravagant worship these ancient wise men modeled for us?

This is the journey upon which we have all been invited. We have this opportunity to lay our lives down, to bow down in worship—giving Jesus our whole hearts. Humble worship opens the eyes of our heart and brings us stability and peace just like when a disoriented wilderness traveler experiences peace when he locates the North Star or Southern Cross and knows that he is now halfway home, because he knows the Way.

May you be encouraged this Christmas season by looking up in the night to ponder that fixed point in the sky, the North Star or the Southern Cross. May it be a constant reminder to you to look to Jesus for true direction as you bow and worship Him with your whole heart and mind. May that same awe of seeing your First Love, Jesus, so clearly fill your heart with peace this Christmas.



ASHLEY DENTON (D.Min., Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary) is Professor of Outdoor Leadership & World Mission at Yellowstone Theological Institute. His ministry encourages and equips future leaders with the skills to introduce younger generations to Jesus Christ through combining youth ministry and outdoor adventure. He is author of Christian Outdoor Leadership: Theology, Theory, and Practice.

UPCOMING CLASSES

Winter Term 2021

Week-Long Intensives - Bozeman

- JAN New Testament 1: Gospels to Early Church BIB 534
- 4-8 9am-4pm | Rev. Brett Desper
- JAN Entrepreneurial Leadership LED 532
- 11-15 9am-4pm | Dr. Derry Long
- FEB Spiritual Formation SPR 531
- 1-5 9am-4pm | Rev. Brett Desper
- FEB Leading Through Conflict LED 533
- **8-12** 9am-4pm | Dr. Derry Long
- FEB Worship & the Arts ART 534
- **8-12** 9am-4pm | Rev. Tracie Jernigan
- FEB Basics of Mission: Local, Regional, & Global MIN 537
- **22-26** 9am-4pm | Dr. Ashley Denton
- MAR Introduction to Pastoral Care MIN 531
- 1-5 9am-4pm | Rev. Jim Keena
- MAR New Testament 2: Romans to Revelation BIB 535
- 8-12 9am-4pm | Dr. Bill Fowler

Evening Classes - Bozeman

- TUES Basics of Mission: Local, Regional, & Global MIN 537
- **6-9p January 5–March 9, 2021** | Dr. Ashley Denton
- TUES Advanced Biblical Studies: Gospel of John BIB 630
- **6-9p** January 5–March 9, 2021 | Dr. Bill Fowler
- TUES Introduction to Preaching & Teaching COM 531
- **6-9p January 12–March 16, 2021** | Rev. Jim Keena
- WED Spiritual Formation SPR 531
- **6-9p** January 6–March 10, 2021 | Rev. Brett Desper

Bellingham, WA Classes

- JAN Old Testament 2: The Prophets & Poetry BIB 533
- **11-15** 9am-4pm | Dr. Nathan Chambers
- FEB Spiritual Practice SPR 530
- **15-19** 9am-4pm | Rev. Brett Desper

REGISTER ONLINE @ YTHI.ORG

DISTANCE LEARNING available live online via Zoom ALL CLASSES may be audited or taken for academic credit

Spring Term 2021

Week-Long Intensives – Bozeman

- MAR Christian Spiritual Theology SPR 533
- 15-19 9am-4pm | Rev. Brett Desper
- APR Basic Church Care & Conflict Management MIN 532
- **5-9** 9am-4pm | Rev. Jim Keena
- APR New Testament 2: Romans to Revelation BIB 535
- **12-16** 9am-4pm | Dr. Derry Long
- APR Advanced Biblical Studies: Genesis BIB 630
- **12-16** 9am-4pm | Dr. Nathan Chambers
- APR Foundations for Adventure Ministry ADV 532
- 19-23 9am-4pm | Dr. Ashley Denton
- APR Discernment & Decision-Making SPR 534
- **26-30** 9am-4pm | Rev. Brett Desper
- APR Worship Leadership MIN 535
- 26-30 9am-4pm | Rev. Tracie Jernigan
- MAY Evangelism MIN 536
- **3-7** 9am-4pm | Dr. Derry Long
- MAY People of God: Sacramental, Pastoral, & Missional THEO 534
- **10-14** 9am-4pm | Dr. Jay Smith
- MAY Clergy Self-Care MIN 538
- **17-21** 9am-4pm | Rev. Jim Keena
- MAY Advanced Biblical Studies: Gospel of John BIB 630
- **17-21** 9am-4pm | Dr. Bill Fowler

Evening Classes – Bozeman

- MON Foundations for Adventure Ministry ADV 532
- **6-9p** March 15–May 24, 2021 | Dr. Ashley Denton
- WED Basic Church Care & Conflict Management MIN 532
- **6-9p** March 17–May 26, 2021 | Rev. Jim Keena
- THU Discernment & Decision-Making SPR 534
- **6-9p** March 18–May 27, 2021 | Rev. Brett Desper

Bellingham, WA Classes

- APR Intro. to Preaching & Teaching: Text to Hearer COM 531
- **19-23** 9am-4pm | Rev. Jim Keena
- MAY People of God: Sacramental, Pastoral, Missional THEO 534
- **3-7** 9am-4pm | Dr. Jay Smith

Intentional silence in our noisy world can bring an experience of God's peace

The Peace of Silence

REV. BRETT DESPER

We live in a world that is quickly becoming more contentious every day. Many of us desperately need some peace in our lives and a touch-stone of some sort to help us keep our bearings. Spiritual practices can help with this problem, and I have singled out one in particular that I think will be most helpful as we celebrate Christmas.

Before I talk about that spiritual practice, though, I think it will be helpful to first define peace in order to better understand the topic. To most of us, peace means an absence of conflict, of war, or even of tension in our lives. However, the Old Testament idea of peace includes a lot more than that.

The primary word for peace in the Old Testament is the Hebrew shalom. According to the Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, shalom carries connotations of "completeness, soundness, welfare, peace." The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary states that shalom conveys the notion of "wholeness, health, and completeness" in all the forms and variations of the word. It is not simply the absence of conflict, tension, war, etc., but a positive presence in one's life. When you wish somebody peace, you wish them the resources needed (both physically and spiritually) to live a complete life free from need.

Given all that is packed into this biblical term for "peace," I can think of many spiritual practices that would help us experience more *shalom* in our lives. However, for the purpose of this short piece, I will center on silence.

NOISE AMIDST DEAFENING "SILENCE"

With the current encouragement to stay at home and limit our social interactions with other people, it might seem odd to pick silence as a discipline to help bring peace. For many that I have talked to, the silence in their current living conditions seems deafening. They miss the interaction with friends, family, and coworkers that permeated their days pre-COVID.

However, I think silence is one thing that many of us desperately need in order to have more *shalom* in our lives. It only takes a cursory glance at most people's Facebook feeds or the news today to see that there are a lot of different voices shouting for our attention and agreement. Both the political left and the right are possibly more combative than ever; the news about the pandemic and arguments over what should be done about it also takes up a large amount of bandwidth on social media as well as on the news. In the midst of the holiday season, preparations for Christmas can also bring a lot more stress in each of our lives.

Immersed in all this "noise," it can be very easy to miss the peace that God's presence can bring. Practicing some time of silence and stillness can help us regain what we have lost. I would like to suggest some steps that I have found helpful in the practice of this discipline.

PREPARATION

1) Turn off your phone, computer, iPad, etc. These are frequently huge distractions for me. Every time the phone buzzes with a text message or a phone call, my natural response is to look at it to see if it is important. I imagine it is the same for you.



- 2) Have a pad of paper and a pen nearby. Most people find that their mind is constantly moving to tasks they need to do and a myriad of other things. This is a normal experience. Jot down things that you need to get to afterward and commit to letting them go until after your time of silence.
- 3) Give yourself some time and find a place. Set aside some time that you know you can have alone and find a place where you are not likely to be interrupted. The space can be anywhere that you do not find disquieting and that does not remind you of things you have to accomplish. The main idea is to spend some time consciously in God's presence without all the distractions.

PRACTICE

- 1) Spend some time quieting yourself. Make an effort to relax your muscles and let the static and tensions of the day die down. Ask God to help you put the distractions of the day out of your mind. Consciously choose to acknowledge God's presence with you.
- 2) Ask the Holy Spirit to direct your thoughts and prayers. Spend some time praying for forgiveness, choosing to forgive those who have offended you, interceding for those who are poor or needy, making supplication for your own needs, giving thanks for all that God has done for you, etc.
- 3) Read a small portion of Scripture (perhaps a Psalm or one of the parables) and meditate on it. What is the message that it offers for you personally? Ask questions of the passage. Jot down insights or questions you have.
- 4) Spend some time in stillness afterward. Listen for any promptings from the Spirit, but primarily just allow the quiet and stillness to renew you.





BRETT DESPER (D.Min. in process, Portland Seminary, George Fox University) is Lecturer in Discipleship and Spirituality at YTI. An ordained minister, Brett brings 20 years of experience in education and leadership.

FINDING CONNECTION WITH GOD

To be sure, this is not going to be an easy practice for many of us. We are too used to having information of some type constantly in front of us or our cell phones in our hands to readily see whatever has been happening in the last five minutes. However, these voices can easily drown out the simple and quiet voice of God speaking to each of us. As with any of the spiritual disciplines, this practice takes some practice to ingrain in our lives. However, it will help us gain some peace and a deeper sense of connection with God.

If you would like to read a little more about the practice of silence (and stillness), I would recommend RZIM's web page *How to Practice the Spiritual Discipline of Silence*, Ruth Haley Barton's book *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, and Father John Breck's article "On Silence and Stillness" (available on the Orthodox Church in America's web site). All of these have influenced this article to some degree. There are numerous other websites and books that have been written on this subject, but I have found these three to be very helpful.

I wish you all grace and peace.



How the birth of Jesus sets us on the path to God's peace

Bringing Peace to the Church

REV. JIM KEENA

Our divided nation needs a united church.

It's no understatement to say that 2020 has been a contentious year. A heated national election and a global pandemic have joined in splitting our country.

Sadly, what's true of our nation is true in many churches. A recent survey by Lifeway Research revealed the number one "pressure point" for pastors is maintaining unity amidst complaints and conflict. A significant point of contention among many parishioners is how the church should respond to the coronavirus.

As we enter the Christmas season, how can we foster "peace on earth" and in our churches? An overarching theme of the Christmas story is that Jesus brings peace. At His birth, the angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests" (Luke 2:14). So, how do we bring the peace that Jesus brought to the world into our churches?

UNMASKING THE PROBLEM

A unique feature of this contentious period is there's a visible symbol of the divide. Rev. Aaron Vriesman writes, "Wearing masks has revealed the cracks in our faith. In the COVID era, I have noticed Christians be deeply divided about a matter that just one year ago would have seemed very trivial: wearing masks."

Of all things, masks have become symbolically significant. For some, wearing a mask represents a desire to stop the spread of the contagious virus. It is a tangible expression of loving one's neighbor and protecting their health. For others, not wearing a mask is a symbolic resistance to a perceived overreach of governmental authorities. It is

an act of loving the church enough to protect her right to worship God in Christian community.

But the root problem isn't about wearing masks. The Bible unmasks the hidden face of our conflict, "Where do you think all these appalling wars and quarrels come from? ... They come about because you want your own way, and fight for it deep inside yourselves" (James 4:1, *The Message*). When we don't get our own way, it typically stirs either anger or anxiety, or a blend of both.

Frequently anger flares because of perceived injustice. Some protest, "It's not fair I'm being forced to socially distance or mask up!" Such individuals are fearful of losing their rights. For others, anxiety is often stoked by feeling endangered. So, some complain, "How could they risk my health by refusing to follow social distancing protocol? Don't they know I have a compromised immune system?" In this case, they are fearful of losing their health.

The one thing both sides share is they aren't getting their "own way." To some degree, both sides resist surrendering their rights to the other. If that's the core problem, what's the solution?

THE CHRISTMAS SOLUTION

At the heart of the Christmas story is the Christ child who was born to "guide our feet into the path of peace" (Luke 1:79b). There are three types of peace to which Jesus guides us: peace *with* God, the peace *of* God, and peace *with others*. These three kinds of peace are different but interrelated. So, how does the birth of Jesus set us on a path to peace?

PEACE WITH GOD

First, Jesus was born so that we could be at **peace with God**. The human dilemma is that our sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:2, Ephe-



sians 4:18). Our separation from God is because we want to be our own gods (Genesis 3:5). In contrast, Christmas is the story of reconciliation; God became man to bring mankind to God.

So, how do we make peace with God? By turning from our insurrection against God and placing faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul explains, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). That is how we receive peace with God. As a Christmas carol proclaims, "Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled."

PEACE OF GOD

Second, Jesus was born so that we could experience the **peace of God**. The peace of God is different from—but dependent upon—peace with God. While they are distinct, they are never separate, because a result of being reconciled to God is experiencing the peace of God. As Paul wrote, "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7).

So how do we experience the peace of God during this year, of all years? How should we respond when we experience an upsurge of anxiety and anger? Tim Keller answers, "The root of peace is confidence and trust in God's wise and good control of your life." There are two ways to express this confidence and trust: talking to God and talking to ourselves.

When debilitated with anxiety, the Apostle Paul says, talk to God! "Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns" (Philippians 4:6, *The Message*). But we should also talk to ourselves. Pop culture tells us to listen to our hearts. There's a measure of wisdom in that advice. But it's also wise to talk to our hearts, especially when they are filled with anxiety. It is wise to remind the subjective feelings of our hearts of the objective truth of the gospel. When filled with fear, it's prime time to "preach the gospel to ourselves!"

Recently a family member was infected with the coronavirus. Then, one by one, the adults in our family displayed symptoms and tested positive. Eventually, my wife Kim became ill. Days later, testing revealed we both had contracted the virus. One evening, be-



JIM KEENA (D.Min. in process, Western Seminary) is Professor of Pastoral Theology and Church Relations at Yellowstone Theological Institute. He has extensive experience in pastoral ministry in Bozeman and beyond.

fore going to sleep, I became anxious about our health. The anxiety increased when my heart and mind joined to play an internal game of "What ifs?" It's when worst-case scenarios become extrapolated into "worser-case" scenarios (pardon my grammar)!

As this one-upmanship intensified, I stopped listening to my heart and began preaching the gospel to my heart. I reminded myself that because of Jesus, I am a child of God, who is at peace with God (Romans 5:1) and that I can place my "confidence and trust in God's wise and good control" of our lives. At that point, I began to experience the peace of God that "transcends all understanding." And the peace of God began to "guard my heart and mind." And then I went to sleep!

PEACE WITH OTHERS

So how can we foster peace? The answer is in the third type of peace that Jesus brings: **peace with others**. Our reconciliation, being at peace with God, is foundational to being at peace with others. Ideally, because we are at peace with God, we experience God's peace, which creates peace with others.

Admittedly, that's not always the case. At times it is hard to practice. Paul writes, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). It takes effort to be at peace with others, but it's worth it. Ultimately, when Christians are at peace with one another, the gospel is validated, and God is glorified (John 17:20–23).

That's how we bring the peace of Jesus to earth, our churches, and our hearts.



SUPPORT LIFE-CHANGING EDUCATION

"YTI is a great opportunity to engage in theological learning. For me, its flexibility means I can complete the classes and assignments around my normal job. I'd encourage anyone who is thinking about seminary to consider doing YTI, especially because of their flexibility, affordability, and high class teaching. You get a great experience and great teaching in a way that suits your schedule."

— YTI MASTER'S STUDENT

Make your tax-deductible year-end gift to YTI by December 31 and continue to make this life-changing biblical and theological education possible!

YTHI.ORG/GIVING





KELOKA SEKAICE KEGOESLED

P.O. Box 1347
Bozeman, MT 59771

Theological Institute

LELLOWSTONE