

- Throughout the 4 weeks of Advent we've waited attentively for the fulfillment of a prophecy made long ago: that a Messiah would be born to us, bringing light to our world darkened by sin; a prophecy signaled by the peculiar fact of the Messiah being born of a virgin.
- As the prophet Isaiah tells us (tonight): *the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who lived in a land of gloom, a light has shone.* (Isaiah 9:1).
- Isaiah tells us further: *For a child is born to us, a son is given to us; upon His shoulder dominion rests; they name Him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father Forever, the Prince of Peace.* (Isaiah 9:5).
- This magnificent promise that is repeated for us in the Sacred Liturgies of Advent and Christmas, and that has been immortalized even in popular culture through musical works such as Handel's *Messiah*, is the very hope of humanity.
- Born in the darkness of original sin because of the fall in the Garden so long ago, man has warred against God ever since through his sinfulness, setting up an enmity with God that, of his own power, man is incapable of pacifying or resolving.
- Chained like slaves with concupiscence because of the original sin of our first parents, each of us must struggle with a disordered propensity to sin. And every time we give in to our sinful passions, we make war with Him Who made us and Who desires to save us.
- Yet, this war that we each wage against God is not something that God wants. God loves us. He has created us for Himself, and He desires to be at peace with us, and especially to grant us an eternal peace with Him in the beatitude of Heaven.
- And even though it was man who picked this fight against God, in His divine magnanimity and unfathomable charity, God deems to overlook our willful temerity. And this He does by sending us His only begotten Son.
- God the Son, Jesus Christ, became man to save us from our sins, to save us from ourselves! And that, my friends, is the ultimate meaning behind Christmas. It's why we celebrate the birth of our infant Lord with such great fervor.
- Christ comes to us on this beautiful feast as on a rescue mission, a mission to rescue us from our sins. He came at the fullness of time as a tiny baby, born miraculously of a Virgin, to be the pure and spotless sacrificial lamb: the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.
- On the cross He took our place. Having never committed a sin Himself, He willingly became the victim for our sins. Completely innocent, Christ Jesus took on the guilt of us all.
- And at the end of time, He will come again – victorious over sin and death. Jesus will come with mercy and justice, leading His chosen ones into the glorious light of Heaven.
- This is why we put so much energy into preparing for this magnificent feast. It's the ultimate reason why we decorate our homes, prepare sumptuous meals, and give gifts. For in Christmas we are given the means for finding true and lasting peace.
- As St. Augustine reminds us: "You would have suffered eternal death, had Christ not been born in time. Never would you have been freed from sinful flesh, had He not taken on Himself the likeness of sinful flesh. You would have suffered everlasting unhappiness, had it not been for this mercy."
- And so we rejoice: *For a child is born to us, a son is given to us; upon His shoulder dominion rests; They name Him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father Forever, the Prince of Peace.* Truly, Jesus is the "Prince of Peace."

- From a theological standpoint, when we call Jesus the Prince of Peace, we mean that He's the divine sovereign, Who alone brings the fullness of harmony and reconciliation to our world.
- Yet to be sure, the peace that our Lord brings is not the mere absence of war amongst the nations of this world. It's a peace between God and humanity. And it's a peace between each man and his conscience.
- Through His life of sacrifice, through His suffering, death, and resurrection, Christ has made a lasting peace between God and man possible! He has obliterated sin and death such that we can be fully united with the Godhead even for all eternity.
- Jesus alone creates that true, lasting, spiritual wholeness and harmony with God and within oneself that we all long for in the depths of our souls.
- In fact, the peace that our gentle and infant prince promises is not just an eternal peace that we will enjoy after death, but even an inner peace that we can experience here and now amidst the troubles and travails of this world.
- When we turn to our Lord in faith, especially in our times of struggle, darkness, and pain, Christ offers a peace that is beyond all human understanding, a peace that helps us maintain tranquility through the storms of life.
- And this is a gift better than any bling or baubles, any mammon the world can offer.
- But for us to experience this inner peace now, we must accept the terms of surrender this mighty prince demands. The terms are this: we must renounce our own will in lieu of His will. Yet, in truth it is only in God's will that we will ever find true peace.
- If we have sinned, we must acknowledge our sins and confess them, and we must take His hand in faith, allowing Him to lead us where He will.
- We must bear hope in our hearts for the kingdom this prince promises to His faithful followers, and we must love Him above all else and our neighbors as ourselves.
- Brothers and sisters, there is so much in this world that can rob us of peace: concerns over money and worldly goods, unchecked ambitions and desires, fears about health and well-being, difficult relationships, the injustices of others. Left on our own, we usually go to war.
- Yet, if we are willing to humble ourselves and be like the poor shepherds who came with hat in hand to adore this newborn king born in a cave, we can – through His grace – experience a peace – even amidst our trials and crosses – that nothing in this world can ever give.
- Ask yourselves: where am I lacking peace? In what ways am I at war with God or with myself? Am I living in a way that contradicts God's laws, or do I reject His will?
- If so, put down your weapons and surrender by repenting of your disobedience and sinfulness. Then trust in God's grace and ask the Prince of Peace to come to you. He never ignores who truly desire His peace.
- For those of us who labor and are burdened, let us take on the light and easy yoke of our Savior, trusting that in submitting to His humble rule, we will find peace in this life and in the next.
- And let us all pray that the mighty Prince of Peace may rule in our world, rule in our homes, and rule in our hearts this Christmas.
- A blessed Christmas to you all!