

Daring Christmas

☆ Who prophesied, “Peace!” ? (vv.5,6)

☆ “Amen!” to the Christ of Christmas (vv.7-9)

In the name of Jesus, God’s eternal Son from heaven, dear rejoicing believers:

Do you know why some people don’t believe in Santa Claus? Because their parents told them stories when they were little, but then they found out something different as adults. You know why some people don’t believe in the Christ of Christmas? Because they don’t believe in Easter when the Bible says Jesus rose from the dead. They learned with sparkling eyes as children, but then some university professor told them the “swoon theory,” that Jesus just fainted for a while, then woke up in the grave. Personally, I wish they would demonstrate that for us. Show us how a man can be beaten bloody for hours on end, deprived of food and water, then be nailed to a cross and finally have his side pierced by a spear with blood and water gushing out – and not die! Maybe one of them would like to volunteer.

We’re seeing Christmas through Jeremiah’s eyes again this morning. I don’t know what else to call this but **Daring Christmas**. With all the talk in our world still today about “peace on earth,” our first question is whether Christmas exists at all. It all comes down to this:

☆ Who prophesied, “Peace!” ? (vv.5,6)

As I told you last evening, this is another text I’ve passed over twenty years, not knowing where it would fit. The last place I would have dreamed for this text too was Christmas morning. This is the “weeping prophet.” Poor Jeremiah’s eyes were constantly filled with tears. Over twenty years he preached to a dead audience. Nearly twenty more years of torturous ministry remained. How could Jeremiah see Christmas 600 years in advance especially against such a popular preacher like Hananiah?

Jeremiah’s name most likely means, “Jehovah casts away.” Not too Christmas-like is it? But Hananiah means, “The LORD is gracious.” Now there’s a name we like. And the message matched the man. Jeremiah had just told the people that God said all the rest of the temple articles and more exiles would be carried off to Babylon. But Hananiah gave the counter-report: *“This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: ‘I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two years I will bring back to this place all the articles of the LORD’s house that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon removed from here and took to Babylon. I will also bring back to this place Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah and all the other exiles from Judah who went to Babylon,’ declares the LORD, ‘for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.’”* (28:2-4 NIV) Now that’s more like Christmas, isn’t it?

If you’re from Missouri and someone tells you something, you say, “Show me!” If you’re from Minnesota, you say, “You betcha!” If you’re an ancient Hebrew prophet like Jeremiah, you come with a **Daring Christmas** proposal: *Then the prophet Jeremiah replied to the prophet Hananiah before the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the LORD. He said, “Amen! May the LORD do so! May the LORD fulfill the words you have prophesied by bringing the articles of the LORD’s house and all the exiles back to this place from Babylon.”* Two years is all it would take.

Christmas has become a **Daring** time for Christians. In the Czech Republic communists eradicated nearly everything about this holy day but the old tradition that a baby named Jesus brings presents for the children. They don’t know who He is, but Christian missionaries dare to share that Jesus is the Son of God, born to give the greatest gift of life everlasting.

In my email Christians are fighting back with Santa Claus. One story has Santa at the door in tears. “Teach the children the true meaning of Christmas,” he says as he pulls things out of his bag. “See how the fir tree is always green like eternal life and the way it points toward heaven? Here’s an angel to

remind us of the heavenly messengers with glad tidings of great joy for the shepherds. See the star that led the wise men to Jesus? The candle shines as Jesus is God's Light to chase away the darkness. The holly thorns remind us of Jesus' crown of thorns and red berries for the blood He shed to wash our sins away. See the candy cane like the staff of Jesus the Good Shepherd who brings us back to God's flock. This bell symbolizes guidance and return to God. See how the wreath pictures God's never ending love? "

Can all this Christmas cheer be true even when everything seems so dark and dismal in our world? Could we find God's peace even if things get worse in America? **Who prophesied, "Peace!"?** That was God promising the Prince of Peace. 100 years before Jeremiah, the LORD spoke through Isaiah: *"Unto us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."* (Isaiah 9:6) The war is over between us and God because He sent Jesus to take our sins away and give God's peace in our hearts.

Personally, and I'm sure Jeremiah would agree with this, I much prefer the real story of Saint Nicholas. He knew **Who prophesied, "Peace!"** And old Saint Nick was always ready to say,

☆ **"Amen!" to the Christ of Christmas (vv.7-9)**

He was just a little orphan child whose parents died, leaving lots of money. But they had taught little Nicholas **the Christ of Christmas**. During his life in the third century he used his entire inheritance to care for the poor, for sailors, for anyone who needed help. As a preacher Nicholas proclaimed that Jesus is God's Son and the Savior of the world. But Christmas was no more popular with Roman government than it was when Jeremiah preached to his fellow Jews. Nicholas was thrown in prison by the Roman Emperor Diocletian along with many other pastors. But when he was released, he kept saying, **"Amen!" to the Christ of Christmas** by throwing bags of money through the open windows of poor people or putting coins in their shoes. Christ is a gift from God. Nicholas wanted everyone to know.

Saying **"Amen!" to the Christ of Christmas** means **Daring Christmas** the way Jeremiah put it to Hananiah: *"From early times the prophets who preceded you and me have prophesied war, disaster and plague against many countries and great kingdoms. But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the Lord only if his prediction comes true."* Hananiah said two years and everything would be right again; Jeremiah gave him two months. For preaching lies in the LORD's name, *"Hananiah the prophet died."* (28:17)

Sure enough, all Jeremiah's prophecies came true because they came from God. **Daring Christmas**, God the Holy Spirit had said through His weeping prophet: *"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness."* (23:5f NIV) And when you say, **"Amen!" to the Christ of Christmas**, God says that righteousness is yours by faith.

But could we be **Daring Christmas** in a land far from home? Through Jeremiah God predicted Christmas even for His exiles in Babylon. *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord...."* (29:11-14 NIV) You want to be **Daring Christmas** in your life? Then wherever you live take God's advice to those exiles. Use the resources God provides in home and family. Pray for our country *"because if it prospers, you too will prosper."* Trust the LORD's gracious promise to prosper you in His wisdom and grace, with Christ's righteousness and peace. Keep worshiping God and seek Him as the Source of all good and blessing.

Dry your tears, Jeremiah. It's Christmas with Christ the Lord! Amen.