

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Christmas starts earlier every year. Not Christmas itself, which is still December 25, and not Advent, which begins four weeks before Christmas. Those dates are fixed, but the buildup to Christmas has been starting earlier year after year. Stores compete to be the first to put up Christmas colors and have Christmas sales. Your co-worker in the next cubicle has been playing Christmas songs for many weeks now.

We start early because we have a long way to go. Christmas can be a pursuit and search to achieve so many goals. Your personal goals might be to get the shopping done early or to have all the cards sent before December 10. Those are good goals, but for our Advent midweek services, we’re going to have a bigger goal for these coming weeks. This Advent, we’re going to focus on how we seek peace and how we define the peace we’re seeking. Christmas peace can be thought of as a five-point star. Each point is a direction or pursuit that seeks one dimension of peace. Left to ourselves, that pursuit would never end. But the good news is that God meets us, stops our endless chase, and gives us a new understanding of His gift of peace. That peace always comes through the birth of Jesus, the Word who became flesh, stepped into our world, and fulfills our desire for peace.

So, let’s start by drawing out the first point in our star of peace. Let’s make the top point of the star a very common way to seek peace: possessions.

As a child, did you ever have a single gift in mind for Christmas? Was it the year when all you wanted was that one doll, that one remote-controlled car, that video game, or that new bicycle? If that came, it was more than enough. Any other gift could wait, unopened, as long as you got *the* gift.

So often, we seek peace through possessions. The more possessions, the better. For many, this is the most obvious pursuit during these weeks leading up to Christmas. Getting ready for Christmas can mean getting more and newer stuff than we already have. The promise of “getting” is that Christmas will be right if we have all the right things. That can include all the gifts we can imagine or enough decorations to stock our own Christmas store. After all, if one gift is good, five will be better and ten may finally be enough.

Picture this as the top of the star and one of the lines that makes this uppermost point. When will this line ever stop? How far and how high does it need to go for us to find peace? We've already found that out, even as children. Yesterday's toys lay broken and forgotten. Tomorrow's toys won't last any longer.

Before we go any further in this pursuit, God stops us and says, "*Enough!*" To counter our pursuit of peace by gathering more and more, God instructs us with words of contentment as He inspired Paul: "***But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content***" (1 Timothy 6:6–8).

God is a watchful Father who sees us dashing off, gathering more and more, building up speed as we drive ahead. But He knows the dangers in our journey and snatches us up, saying, "*Enough!*" God is like a father watching his children slide down a snowy hill. They shoot down the hill on their plastic sleds, and it's all wonderful. But at the bottom of the hill is a pond that hasn't quite frozen yet. What's a father to do but play goalie and catch each child before they reach the edge of the pond? His message is the same as our heavenly Father's: "*I know you want to go on and on, but you have no idea of the danger. Let's stop right here.*" So, our heavenly Father stops us out of love and His knowledge of the dangers before us. The words of Paul fit perfectly: "***But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction***" (1 Timothy 6:9).

You see, God the Father catches us firmly before we plunge into ruin. But besides catching us, our heavenly Father also provides. He has already given us the food and clothing we need and many other things that fill our homes and garages. He could say, "*There, you have what you need, so be content.*" But beyond that, He gives us His Son, leading us by the light of the star.

Imagine the pursuit of peace the Magi completed. They saw the star from a great distance. By God's gift, they understood what that star meant. The Messiah promised in the Old Testament was born! They had discovered a true treasure open in the heavens. Imagine their excitement each night as they waited for the stars to appear. That one star appeared again and again, guiding their journey. They pursued the star and brought their treasures with them. But they didn't travel to add more gold to their packs. They knew their treasure would be the promised Messiah.

That's the star that guides us every Advent. That star still shines, and its bright points call us to look up for our treasure. Our greatest treasure and richest gain are not saved on "the cloud" or some server. Our treasure is fixed in the message of the Christmas star. Planets wander through the sky, and clouds come and go, but stars are fixed in place. Our peace comes from the certainty of that star that pointed to the One who is God's lasting treasure.

Follow the joyful path of the Magi, who saw the star and were more than content, knowing that the King had been born. The peace of God comes as He meets us and says, "***Follow Me.***" The Magi followed a silent star, but we can hear the words of the Savior Himself. They only saw the star as they traveled, but we have Jesus' words every day. Joyful, we join all who have heard His invitation and have followed His star. The star of peace begins our journey with the promise of more than simply adding to our list of presents. Pursuing only the latest and the largest is an endless journey. But God stops us as a wise Father, snatches us up, and says, "*Enough!*"

So, look up and see a lasting star and treasure! The star of the Messiah's birth is always before us and waiting for us to see. The Messiah's star is already in our skies, and the gift of His birth is more than enough to fill our Advent and Christmas. Our peace is found in the One who has already come and made us His own. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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