

The Peace of Vulnerability

(Psalm 96; Isaiah 9:2–7; Luke 2:1–20)

Many popular ideas about Christmas are shaped by our culture of materialism and consumerism. Christmas is often reduced to giving and receiving gifts. We buy gifts. We unwrap gifts. And for a moment, it feels joyful and exciting. There are parties, decorations, music, and celebrations everywhere.

All of this can be enjoyable. Yet if we are honest, we also know this is not the heart of Christmas—especially for us as followers of Jesus. When the wrapping paper is gone and the excitement fades, we are left with deeper questions about meaning, peace, and hope.

Tonight, the Scriptures invite us to look beyond the surface and enter the deeper mystery of Christmas. Our Old Testament reading from Isaiah is one of the most important texts associated with Christmas. Christians have long read this passage as pointing toward Jesus. Isaiah speaks of a child who will be born, a child who represents hope for the future. A child always carries promise—new possibilities, fresh beginnings, and a different way of living.

This child, Isaiah says, will carry authority and power. He is called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. This sounds like a powerful ruler, a messiah who will save the people. In the history of Israel, a saviour often meant someone like Moses, who led the people out of slavery, or David, who protected them from their enemies.

So we must ask an honest question: does the baby Jesus match the child Isaiah describes? Does a poor and vulnerable baby, born in a stable, really look like the mighty figure Isaiah foretells? In Isaiah's time, many people expected a political and military messiah—someone who would defeat Israel's enemies through force and power. God's enemies were understood as human enemies, and salvation was imagined through victory, control, and domination.

But the Christmas story tells us something very different. We often understand power as the ability to control others, to protect ourselves, or to secure our future. Yet in the manger, God turns all our ideas of power upside down. While the world expected a mighty ruler who would conquer through violence, God chose another way. God chose to come into the world through vulnerability.

The power revealed in the manger is not the power of domination, but the power of love that does not need to defend itself. Jesus is not our saviour because he escapes human weakness, but because he fully enters into it. In him, we see that true divine strength is found in fragile love and fearless compassion.

This message matters deeply because we live in a world full of risk, fear, and uncertainty. We worry about our safety, our health, our future, and the people we love. We long for peace, stability, and reassurance.

The world tells us that peace comes through greater control—more power, more security, more money. Yet deep down, we know this does not truly satisfy. No amount of control can protect us from loss. No amount of money can remove our fear. No system can guarantee peace.

So, how are we supposed to live as Christians?

The Christian way, revealed in Jesus, begins by leading us out of our comfort zones. To receive the truth of the incarnation—God becoming human—we must loosen our grip on control and security. Christmas invites us to trust a different path to peace.

The story of Jesus' birth makes this unmistakably clear. Jesus is born into poverty, under Roman occupation. His family lives on the margins of society. They travel to Bethlehem because of an imperial census, not by choice. Later, they flee as refugees into Egypt because King Herod feels threatened by rumours of a rival king.

Jesus enters the world not in safety, but in danger. He is born in a stable, with nothing but the care of his parents and the witness of poor shepherds. Even his family situation is vulnerable. Mary and Joseph are not yet formally married, and the story of divine conception would have been difficult for anyone to accept. They are exposed to suspicion, gossip, and shame.

Why, we might ask, would God choose this way? Why would the Holy Spirit come to peasants, to nobodies, to shepherds—people with no power or status?

If we stay with the story long enough, we discover a key that opens the door to its meaning. That key is a radically different understanding of peace. Not peace based on power or control, but peace rooted in vulnerability.

Vulnerability is not something we usually welcome. It reminds us that we are fragile, exposed, and dependent. To be vulnerable is to admit that we can be hurt, that life is uncertain, and that we need one another.

Yet this is the truth of the human condition. Jesus enters the world in vulnerability because vulnerability is where human life truly is. Even today, our world is filled with people who are vulnerable—those without security, money, or power. If we truly want to celebrate Jesus as the Son of God, we must be willing to follow him into those places where vulnerability is real and visible.

Each of us knows vulnerability in different ways. We are born, we grow, we flourish for a time, and we decline. We need food, love, care, and community. We are dependent on others, whether we like it or not.

Some experience vulnerability more sharply—through illness, grief, disability, loneliness, broken relationships, spiritual emptiness, or poverty. Others live with relative security, yet even then, it can be a fragile bubble, easily shattered.

Many of us resist the word “vulnerability” because we associate it with weakness. We are taught to overcome it, hide it, or deny it. Yet vulnerability is not something we can eliminate. It stays with us throughout our lives.

The message of Jesus’ vulnerable life is not that we must escape vulnerability, but that we must learn to live with it differently. We are not called to deny our fragility or pretend we are unshakable. We are invited to meet God precisely there.

Paradoxically, it is the vulnerability of the Christ child that reveals God’s deepest love. God comes close to us not because we are strong, but because we are weak. Not because we are secure, but because we are exposed.

When we accept our vulnerability, we begin to see others more clearly. Our hearts soften. Compassion grows. We learn to care especially for those whose vulnerability is most visible.

We all live within the tender web of God’s life—a life marked by gentleness, openness, and love. When we admit who we truly are, we discover the peace God offers. We walk through the door Christ opens and follow him into the stables of the world—and into the stable of our own hearts.

There, we discover joy that does not depend on possessions, and peace that does not rely on control. We learn that fulfillment comes not from what we accumulate, but from how deeply we love.

We all need some sense of security. But none of us can ever eliminate vulnerability entirely. Freedom comes when we stop trying. When we accept our limits, we find resilience. When we let go, we discover strength we did not know we had. This is the richest kind of love—the love revealed in the manger.

So may we meet Jesus in his vulnerability this Christmas. May we discover the good news of great joy for all people—not by escaping our fragility, but by embracing it. And may God meet us there, so that Christ’s peace may dwell within us, even in our imperfect, uncertain, and fragile lives. Amen.