

Father God, we come to You, very humble and officiative people. We understand everything that this season entails. We understand the emotional intensity of it. We understand the spiritual intensity of it. And Lord, in this church and in our lives, we pray that all that we do this season points toward You. There are layers upon layers upon layers of what we call Christmas, but at the core is the incarnation of God. Help us to stay focused on You, to preach You, to teach You, so that we may know You better and in so doing, know who we are. Lord we ask You, Jesus, to take Your place as the pastor and the teacher of this church and of Your church universal this day. In Your precious name we pray, Amen. The lighting of the peace candle will be conducted today because it is the second Sunday of the month by Kids For Our King. 'Twas the very first Christmas, there in the major, a Christ child was born and couldn't help but stranger, shepherd saw angel, Christ met a star. He came to see Jesus. They came after Him and He was special. God's very own Son, He came to the earth to love Him. He grew up in time, the same is the Lord, to be worshipped each day to be loved and adored. So now at Christmas we all take the light. Come, come, come and carry us. In the gifts that God gave us that first Christmas night, in the gifts we receive and the ones that we give, let us never forget the Christmas. The Christ child, the Christ child, He was. Very sort of. Okay, we're reading Isaiah 9, 6-7. For a child is born unto us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders and he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor, David, for all eternity. The passionate commitment of the Lord of Heaven's armies will make this happen. And now if we could all bow our heads in prayer. God of Heaven, at the first Christmas your angel announced, "Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." Thank you for the peace your son Jesus promised, not as the world gives, but willing, deep, lasting and abiding peace. Thank you that since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. May the Lord of peace himself give us peace at all times. Grant that as far as it depends on us, we may live at peace with everyone, making every effort to do what leads to peace. So let the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus and the peace of Christ rule in our hearts now and forevermore. Amen. May the peace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the peace that surpasses all understanding abide in you. It is a wonderful greeting, it is a wonderful send off, it is a wonderful thing to say to each other any time of the year. Paul has these dramatic openings and these dramatic closings to his letters. May the grace of God, may the love of God and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ abide in you. Amen. I've chosen to explore Christian peace this morning through the epistle to Colossae. Colossians 1 opens up with Paul speaking about who he is and we probably will touch upon that a little bit. But then it goes on to explain how that congregation is who they are. The interesting thing about the entire letter is Paul never made it to that church. Paul never really planted that church. Paul just heard about that church and he heard about how well they were doing, how faithful they were and he wrote to encourage them. They have heard of him and so when the letter came to them it was very encouraging to them. There are some corrections in it and that sort of thing. But it's a very interesting letter in that he heard about this gathering of Christ's followers who did it sort of on their own with the leadership provided by the Lord through individuals I am sure. But they were doing it the way I think he wishes the church in court could do it. Because he refers to Colossae as the church that have great faith. They have a cornerstone of faith from which their identity comes forth. They have a cornerstone of faith in Jesus Christ and the good news that they heard and believed that leads to everything that they are as individuals and as a congregation. And this is what Paul is going to grasp on and I think that he's very happy to write this letter because he searches for this. He doesn't always want to write letters saying you're doing it all wrong. And even when there are letters that need to be written saying you're doing it all wrong or you're doing this wrong, he's always trying to be encouraging. He's always trying to tell them that if you want to know how to do it right, remember the gospel that you heard and you believed. And so he opens up with great praise for this church because they cling to the gospel, the good news that they heard

and they believed. And this creates for them an identity that other churches can follow. And the letter is interesting because it talks about Paul's identity as a preacher of the gospel, it talks about their identity as individual Christians and as a church and it speaks about how this is all possible because it talks a lot about Christ's identity, who is Jesus. And oftentimes as a church, and again, I'm not thinking that it's this one because it's not, but oftentimes churches shall we say, leave that piece of the equation out. We maybe read a book on how to do church or we see something and we want to copy it or we think we're a church so we had better do this ministry or that outreach because that's what churches do. But in essence, the church, as I say and constantly say, is not created by Christ to serve people. The church is created by Christ to share the gospel. The church is created by Christ to serve Christ. He will serve the people through the church. And that little twist makes all of the difference. The people here seem to have it in the correct order. They know who Christ is and therefore they know who they are because they have laid their lives down for them and put their faith in them. There is no greater peace that a human being will know than to be at peace with their Creator. Last week we talked about we're born rebels. We're born enemies of God. That's what scripture says. We're born enemies of God. And while we're still enemies of God, he chose to sacrifice himself incarnate for us. So thus there is no greater peace that a human being will ever know than to have peace with God, not be in rebellion anymore, not be an enemy of God anymore. And in so doing, you grow this and have this wonderful community of believers of all ages, all races, all ethnicities, all over the world who have one thing in common and that is their identity in Christ. This brings great peace. We're going to read this right now and then we're going to reflect again on not only how Paul is describing the Christ, but on how this impacts we as believers. Again, he opens talking about who he is, he opens with his greetings, he opens with who he is and how he has an apostle who has seen and spoken to the Lord Jesus Christ and all of that stuff. And in verse 15 he begins talking about who they are by describing who they believe in. That's the link here. That's the link. Who they are by describing who they believe in. And that is directly applicable to you today. Who are you? You want to know who you are, your identity, your foundational identity, then know who Christ is. When you know who Christ is and you know who you are, you are at peace with God. You're not living a life of rebellion. You're not living a life as an enemy. So here he goes right into this. Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation. That first line is Christmas. That first line indicates that although God is spirit, worship Him in spirit and in truth, He became incarnate. And throughout the Gospels, Jesus Himself said, "If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father." And throughout, we learn that if we want a glimpse of God, what we can consider, we read from the Word who Jesus is, what Jesus looked like, the images that we have of Him, who knows. But we are reading the words of individuals who saw Him walk the face of the planet and know that they caught a glimpse of God because Jesus is God in the flesh. That first line is incredibly, incredibly important because it talks about, right out of John 1, "In the beginning, before anything was created," God says, "I am." Pre-existent. All things created through Jesus Christ. He is God eternal. Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. And so this is very impactful. We as Christians know, we not just believe, we know Christ walked the earth. We know that He was born of the flesh, conceived by the Holy Spirit. We know that He began His ministry. We know all about His ministry. We know about His sacrifice. We all of that. We catch a glimpse of God because God made it possible. "For through Him, God created everything in the heavenly realms and on the earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see, such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world." We could get into that because the church, again, neglects the fact that there is the spiritual that is created and there is the physical that is created, even though human beings, as the very special creation of God, are both. We often talk about that. The beasts of the field are not spiritual in nature. They are physical in nature, with these innate qualities that God has given them to go about their lives and do what they do. You are spiritual in nature, with your consciousness, your creativity, your sense of humor, all of the things that make you a human being. You are spiritual in nature, in this physical. There's a difference. And we must pay attention, as we are spiritual beings, to the spiritual realm. He

existed before anything else and He holds all creation together. Christ is also the head of the church, which is His body. He is the beginning, supreme over all who rise from the dead. So He is first in everything. First in the church. We pray that every Sunday morning, Lord Jesus, take your rightful place as the pastor of this church. You created it. Let us serve you through it. And if that means, of course, serving all the others that we serve, all of that, but let us serve you through it. Let us discern your will as a congregation, as individuals, as families, and let us do that. I was just writing the year-end reviews, for a little example. I was writing the year-end review and then looking forward into 2025. So I'm in the process of writing all of that up. And I talk about the NARFX. What a great idea. It's not going anywhere. Nobody's using it. I contend that it is a great idea, but it's probably not being used very well because it's my idea and not His. And that's okay. That is kind of through a process of discerning. And many of you have done this. You've done things in your life that you thought, "Okay, Lord, am I being led here?" And you go and the fruit is dead on the vine. And you're like, "Oh, you need to accept that. That was your idea, not His." Let's try again, so to speak. And ministry is in the church. Oftentimes, again, like I said, you think, "Well, we need to do this because we're a church." We talked about, we were pounding in youth ministry, youth ministry, youth ministry. But the Lord had a completely different idea. That was our idea, and it's a good idea. And Ryan and Olivia and everybody, they structured and purpose and all of those things. But that's not what the Lord had in mind. You see what He has in mind. And we've talked about that. So you need to understand that your will will be done from the simplest things to the largest things. And being able to accept that and not continuing to press into the flesh, not continuing to press into your own thoughts, ideas of the way things should be done is an ego thing that you need to back down from and say, "No, Lord, not my will, but mine. I don't know why that happens, but it's not." And again, I contend it's because it was my idea, not His. He said, "No, I don't know that. I don't know the mind of the Lord." He is first in everything. He is speaking to the congregation at Colossae saying, "He, Jesus Christ, is first in everything." He talks about the spiritual realm. He talks about the first of the resurrected. He talks about the Creator and the Sustainer of all. He talks about Christ being pre-existent. Talk about being first in everything. And He is commending them because they believe this. This is why He's happy when He's writing this letter and He's affirming what He knows they believe. Because He's heard back so many good things about how these people put Christ first. You want to know how to do communion, correct chorus? Put Christ first. You want to know how to do marriage? You want to know how to do Christian wedding ceremonies? You want to know how to put Christ first? Let Him teach. Let you learn from Him. Let you be reflected in you. Put Him first in all things. Because whether you like it or not, whether you do or not, He is first in all things. It's really a matter of you understanding that and as you submit your life to Christ, submitting to that family. God in all His fullness was pleased to live in Christ and through Him God reconciled everything to Himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross. There it is. The reconciliation of all things. I have a wonderful book beside my bed called The Reconciliation of All Things. We forget that all creation is growing in this time as it eagerly awaits the return of Christ. We know that the Kingdom of God has broken into the world through the Church. The Church was the great mystery that God even withheld from the angels as to how He was going to get this good news to spread throughout the world. We know that we, our spirits, are reconciled with Christ. And that, as Paul teaches in other letters, we are no longer addicted or slaves to our sin and the power of sin. It is broken. Turning to the Lord and walking in His power, the power of His will, breaks your addiction to sin. We know that death and the fear of death is broken in us. But we also know that the time of full reconciliation, Revelation 21, hasn't come yet. We know that just as our spirits are reconciled and we are no longer enemies with the Lord, we are at peace with Him, our bodies are still flawed, susceptible to damage and disease and age. We know that as we are reconciled to Him and covered by His righteousness, we are not righteous yet. And I still have those thoughts and those grumbings like I spoke of last week and all the different things that go on inside my head that are not righteous. But I know that I have been reconciled. And although and even when I'm thinking this or doing that, I know that the Lord has given me a different

pathway to redeem me from even that latest behavior. Dear Lord, I'm sorry. Forgive me for what I have done. Forgive me for what I was thinking. Forgive me. Lord, I am Yours and I want to be Yours and I want to walk in Your way. Please help me in my faith. That is the reconciliation that we have now. That's the hope of Your salvation, of which we spoke last week. You walk in it, even though you are a broken vessel. You walk in your salvation. You walk in hope. You walk in peace because you are no longer an enemy of God's. Your best possible life, as the modern language says, is only when you are a child of God, indwelt by His Holy Spirit. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross. Next week, we will look at Revelation 21 and we will see what that means as we express joy in the age to come. When all things physical, spiritual, all things on earth will be made new again. There won't be diseases in trees that claim trees or crops or that sort of thing. Creation will be fully redeemed. Human beings will be fully redeemed. And we will dwell in the house of the Lord in our resurrected bodies, glorified bodies forever. That is our hope. That hope is derived from the peace that we have, knowing who Jesus is. Verse 21 goes on to say, "This includes you who were once far away from God. You were His enemies," as talked about before, "separated from Him by your evil thoughts and actions. Yet now He has reconciled you to Himself through the death of Christ in His physical body. As a result, He has brought you into His own presence and you are holy and blameless as you stand before Him without a single fault." This is who we are as Christians covered by the blood of Christ. [Laughter] That was like the moment of discernment by the way. He's like, "Okay." Oh, I love it so much. Everybody's running around and the parents and the kids and the babes and the... I love it so much. And that's what it's all about. That's what it's all about. These kids are going to know Christ. They're going to be living Colossians 1. Stay with them. Teach them. Teach them how to learn the Word, how to hear the Word, teach the Word at home. Let them come to church, be in church, learn how to be in church, all of those things. It's desperately important. I've always said, even before I was a Christian, if good people don't make more good people, then we truly are a loss. Well, if Christians don't make more Christians... Now that being the will of God, I understand, but we are mandated to do this. And I just love it. We need to understand a couple of things here from verse 22 as I go on. "He has reconciled you to Himself through the death of Christ in His physical body." You will hear this time of year and during Easter season, "Well, how can He be God if God dies?" The question being, do you believe that God is eternal? Yes. Do you believe that God can be killed? No. Then how do you explain Jesus dying on earth? Well, there it is. Escaping the very fundamental tenet of Christian belief that Jesus Christ is fully human and fully divine. And it teaches us right here that through the death of His physical body, God did not die, but He sacrificed the physical body that He was incarnate for Him. And through that willing sacrifice, you are brought into His presence as you are now. You once were enemies, you once were rebels, but through your faith by Christ alone, you are brought into His presence covered by the blood of Jesus, hoping in peace now with your Creator, and hoping for the day when you do not have to hope anymore. Hoping for the day He comes again. And Paul says, you don't have to hope for things that you already have, but you have to hope for things that you don't have. So I can't wait for the day that I'm hopeless, when He's back with us, and I am with Him, and I'm no longer hoping for the day of His return. I long for the day to be hopeless and to be faithless, because I will be dwelling in the house of the Lord with the Lord. You must continue to believe this truth and stand firmly in it. Don't drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the good news. The good news has been preached all over the world, and I Paul, have been appointed as God's servant to proclaim it. Paul knows who these folks are. Spiritual discernment, however, he knows that these folks believe the good news. They, he is reinforcing to them who Jesus is, in whom they have their faith and their hope, and through His actions they have been made one with God, in the presence of God, covered by the righteousness of the sacrifice, and he implores them to continue to believe this truth, because it is fundamental to anything and everything that you do, and it is fundamental as to who you are. Each and every one of you is an individual, to be sure, but as my brothers and sisters, each and every one of us share fundamental commonalities of a spiritual nature. That's why we say brother and sister. That's why we could go anywhere at any

time and have a conversation, because we are united by the power of God's Holy Spirit. We are at peace with the Lord, we are at peace with one another, and we walk in the hope of our salvation. Final thing. Whenever I see all of that out there, and the political situation, the social situation, the racial situation, and I see people, the transgender situation, and I see people who are just so lost, I see people who are living as enemies of God, who are being taught and reinforced, not this, as Paul is doing, but being taught and reinforced that government is your religion, that money is your religion, your identity, we need to hide this stuff, because your identity is not here. You can pick your identity. What would you like to be? Everything that is the exact opposite of what I preach is being preached to you and your children and your grandchildren every day of the year. You don't think it's important to break through the church on Sunday? You don't think it's important to counteract everything that they hear unless Satan preaches the exact opposite of who they are, who they should be. Disciples of the living God, identity in Christ, your identity is who Christ says you are. Find that out. You will not be disappointed.