



紛亂中的喜訊

Good News amidst Chaos

黃心朗牧師 著
Rev. SAM WONG

Translated by Deacon Phillip Pang

張曉恩 設計
Designed by Abbie Cheung

將臨期靈修小品
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Preface

Every year on December 25th, Christmas is like calling the world to refocus their hope back on Christ the Savior being born. So, the world could find eternal rest among the gains and losses of the year. Here comes the Christmas of 2020, and for this year, it seems that there is more loss than gain, more disaster than blessings. COVID has ravaged the world and the economy is facing serious setbacks. The disasters seen in the news may be within reach all of a sudden. In such a year and such a world, when we come to Christmas, can we still see Christmas as the “tidings of great joy”? Can you still believe that “on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests”? Perhaps we can see it in another way and ask: In such a year and such a world, what is the real “tidings of great joy” besides Jesus Christ? Who else can truly give peace other than Jesus Himself?

During the Advent period before Christmas this year, let us receive this enduring “tiding of great joy” through the four themes of hope, peace, joy, and love amidst the chaos of the world.

引言

每年於12月25日的聖誕節，就好像召喚世人在一年的營役後仰望降世拯救的基督，以至能在一年間的得失禍福中尋著永恆不變的安歇。來到2020的聖誕節，今年所見的總好像失多於得、禍多於福。新冠病毒肆虐全球、經濟面臨嚴重倒退。新聞裡看見的災禍可能轉瞬間便近在咫尺。在這樣的一年和這樣的世界中，當我們來到聖誕節之時，能否仍然看聖誕為「大喜的信息」？能否仍然相信「在地上平安歸與神所喜悅的人」？或許我們可以換轉一個角度去問：在這樣的一年和這樣的世界中，除了耶穌基督以外還有甚麼是真正「大喜的信息」？除了耶穌基督以外還有誰能真正賜予平安？

今年聖誕前的將臨期，就讓我們在世上的紛擾中，重新透過盼望、平安、喜樂、與仁愛的四個主題，去領受這歷久不衰的大喜信息。

The year 2020 is also a year of hope because the worse a current situation gets, the more it forces people to cast their hope for a better tomorrow. If tomorrow's situation doesn't improve; then we can hope for a better next month; or even a better next year. At the beginning of the epidemic, it was said that a vaccine could be available by the fall. However, now we are in winter, this hope and expectation has been postponed to next year.

The year 2020 revealed one truth which is that some things require waiting. In this digital “real-time” culture, people are increasingly resistant to waiting patiently. If people become too obsessive with instant gratification, they will gradually lose patience, compassion, and kindness. In the New Testament, the term “hope” (elpizo) and “patience” (hupomeno) are two important words closely related. Hope for the future can produce patience. The word, “hupomeno”, includes the meaning of waiting patiently and enduring hardship. But if there is no “elpizo”, patience becomes meaningless and in vain. Hope gives meaning to patience; it gives it purpose, even motivation. Romans 12:12 links the two words together: “Be joyful in hope (elpizo), patient (hupomeno) in affliction, faithful in prayer.”

The birth of Jesus Christ is the most complete and the only salvation for a lost and chaotic world. The Holy Child born in the manger is the Christ who would die on the cross for the world's redemption; he is also the same Jesus who was resurrected three days later, and the same Savior who will come again to make all things anew. The salvation plan of Jesus Christ has been already finished in the past and will be completely fulfilled when He returns. In this way, those who believe in Jesus need to reveal the virtue of patience based on what was finished the past and the hope for what is to come. Such patience is a testimony that God's people need to live out in the world. If those who belong to the Lord cannot live out hope and patience, people in the world will only look for hope in the wrong places. As Christmas is approaching in 2020, may God the Father strengthen our hope and the Holy Spirit strengthen our patience.

2020年是令人盼望的一年，因為現況越差，便逼使人寄望「明天會更好」。若明天不能更好，那便寄望下個月、甚至下一年吧。在疫情初期，有說疫苗可於秋季研發成功。可是到了冬季，這寄望已被調校至下年。

2020說出了一個真相，就是有些事情是必須耐心等待的。在這個電子數碼的「即時」文化中，人越來越對耐心等待感到抗拒。人若過分要求「隨傳隨到」的滿足，便會逐漸失去耐性、憐憫、和恩慈。在新約聖經中，盼望 (elpizo) 與忍耐 (hupomeno) 是息息相關的兩個重要詞語。對將來的盼望，能生出現在的忍耐。Hupomeno一詞，是包括耐心等待、忍受艱難的意思。但若沒有盼望 elpizo，忍耐便只會是沒有意義和枉然。盼望讓等候變得有價值、有目的、甚至有動力。羅馬書十二12節，便把這兩個字連結起來：「在指望(elpizo) 中要喜樂，在患難中要忍耐 (hupomeno)，禱告要恆切」。

耶穌的降生，是紛亂的世界最徹底和唯一的救贖。在馬槽裡出生的聖嬰，便是在十字架上捨身救贖的基督、亦是三天後復活的耶穌、並且是將要再來更新整個世界的救主。耶穌基督的救贖計劃，在過去已成就了、並將會於祂再來時徹底完成。這樣於過去的落實和對將來的盼望，要在信主的人生命中，顯出忍耐的美德。這樣的忍耐，是神的子民需要向世界活出的見證。若屬主的人都活不出盼望和忍耐，世界的人便只會向錯誤的地方尋找盼望了。於2020的聖誕將臨期，願神鞏固我們的盼望，並由聖靈強化我們的忍耐。



2020 has been a year of unrest. On the street, it only takes a stranger to walk a little closer, or the hearing of a cough from behind, for our anxiety index to soar. Under the plague of the epidemic, everything and anyone seems to pose a threat to oneself. The sense of peace appears to be both familiar but remote.

For the Jewish people to which Jesus belonged, peace (shalom) is the most commonly used and the best word of blessing. This peace (shalom) refers to the completeness of life. Ironically, the Jewish people has always been people of unrest. Their history is full of blood, tears, persecution, and even slavery. Although they have a history woven with blood and tears, they insist on blessing each other with shalom, as if any external encounter cannot take away their inner peace.

When the Lord Jesus was born, it was also an era of unrest in politics and people's livelihood. But on the night when the Lord Jesus was born, the angels brought good news to the shepherds, saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." On that day, the real shalom descended on the world. The life of the Lord Jesus redefined peace. He also said: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." (John 14:27).

How can Jesus who himself suffered and persecuted to death grant us peace? Because his peace is not like the world's. His peace is unlike the kind of superstition that asks God to protect the house, nor the kind of ignorance that believes that if one believes in Jesus, one won't be infected by COVID. The peace that comes from the Lord Jesus is the peace that results from insisting that "not my will, but yours (Heavenly Father) be done." Peace is the strength behind the persistence in accomplishing the will of the Father. Constantly worrying and planning about how to protect oneself is not the real peace that Jesus was referring to. On the contrary, it is the kind that believes "no sword, persecution, hardship can separate us from the love of Christ." Only this kind of peace will truly free us from worries and fears.

2020是不安的一年。在街上的時候只要有陌生人行近一點、或聽到背後傳來咳嗽聲，便讓人的不安指數迅速飆升。在疫情的困擾下，任何事與任何人都彷彿對自己構成威脅。平安，好像是既熟悉又遙遠的狀態。

對於耶穌所屬的猶太民族，平安 (shalom) 是最常用和最美好的祝福語。這平安(shalom) 是指生命的完整狀況。可是，猶太民族卻是一個經常處於不安的民族。他們的歷史充滿了血淚、逼迫、甚至奴役。雖然有著血淚編織成的歷史，他們還是堅持彼此祝福 shalom，彷彿任何外在的遭遇都不能奪取他們內心的平安。

主耶穌降生之時，亦屬於政治與民生都不安的時代。但在主耶穌降生的當夜，天使卻向牧人報喜訊，說「在至高之處榮耀歸與神！在地上平安歸與他所喜悅的人。」在當天，真正的shalom降臨在人間。在主耶穌的一生中，祂重新定義了平安，並說：「我所賜的，不像世人所賜的。你們心裡不要憂愁，也不要膽怯。」(約十四27)

一個經歷受苦、受害的耶穌，如何賜平安給我們？原來祂的平安，不是世人所賜的平安。祂的平安，不是求神庇佑家宅平安的那種迷信，亦不是信耶穌就不會受病毒感染的那種無知。主耶穌的平安，是堅持「不要按我的意思，只按你（天父）的意思」的平安。平安，是堅持完成天父旨意的力量。真正的平安，不是終日掛念如何保障自己的那種，而是「深信刀劍傷病都不能隔絕基督的愛」那種。這種平安，才會真正使我們不用憂愁，也不用膽怯。

I once read a saying, “It is difficult for people who like to pay attention to current affairs to be happy.” This saying is all the more true in 2020. There is a saying in English that is “No news is good news”. According to the logic of this saying, most of the news you see will be bad news.

However, one of the most important term in Christianity is the word, “Gospel” which means “good news”. This word appeared in the first sentence of the angel’s message to the shepherds when Christ was born: “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. “ (Luke 3:10). This is not just good news, but good news of great joy. The conclusion drawn from the truth of the Bible is actually that “no news is bad news”, and even sad news.

Good news will naturally bring about great joy. The birth of Jesus Christ is a joyous message for all peoples. This statement is easy to understand in 2020. The new corona virus threatens everyone in the world. Even some may not be infected, but no one is unaffected socially and economically. If a specific vaccine suddenly appears, I believe it will definitely be news of great joy. However, the gospel of Christ is good news of even greater joy because what the salvation through Christ resolved is not a virus that affects only some people, it is rather the unavoidable death that everyone would face one day. The reason why Christ is good news is because “whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Believers are not immortal, but to believers, death no longer equates to perishing, but a turning point in the transformation into eternal life. This is not like a vaccine that only prevent epidemics, rather it transforms death from a state of destruction into eternal glory. If people don’t know the news (no news), then it is truly sad news.

我曾看過一句說話，就是「喜歡留意時事的人是很難快樂的」。這句說話在2020年恐怕是真實不過了。英文有句說話是 No news is good news (沒有消息便是好消息)。以這句說話的邏輯來說，看到的新聞 (news) 便大多會是壞消息(bad news)了。

可是，基督教其中最重要的一個字Gospel (福音)，其意思卻是好消息 good news。這詞出現於基督降生時，天使向牧人報信時的第一句說話：「不要懼怕！我報給你們大喜的信息，是關乎萬民的」(路三10)。這不只是好消息 good news，而是大喜的信息 good news of great joy。從聖經真理所得出的結論，原來 no news is bad news，甚至是 sad (悲哀) news。

好消息所帶來的，自然會是喜樂了。耶穌基督的降生是關乎萬民的大喜信息，這說法在2020年是很容易理解。新冠病毒令全球所有人受到威脅，即使沒有染病也不免在生活上或經濟上受到牽連。若突然間出現了一特效疫苗，相信絕對會是大喜的信息。然而基督的福音之所以是更大的喜訊，是因為基督救贖所能克服的，並非部份人受到感染的病，而是人人也逃不過的死亡。基督之所以是喜訊，是因為凡信祂的不至滅亡，反得永生。信主的人不是不會死，但這死亡已不再等同滅亡，而是令我們轉化成永生的轉捩點。這不像疫苗般只能防疫，而是將死亡從毀滅的狀況轉化成永恆的榮耀。若人不知道這消息 (no news)，那便是真正正的 sad news 了。



In 2020, the term love has been greatly challenged. Anti-epidemic measures such as social distancing and safety bubbles have greatly increased the estrangement and alienation between people. In addition, epidemic prevention measures make it easy for people to focus on their own needs and neglect others, causing many people to panic—buy daily necessities in order to protect themselves. The feelings of “lacking” and “unrest” promote self-centered thinking, and more seriously offset our due virtue of love and charity.

Another impact on love is that when living in anxiety every day, people will naturally doubt God’s love. The author of Psalms often complains to God under this kind of tension: “How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? (Psalm 13:1) However, love is not about good fortune and avoiding evil, rather it is the willingness to sacrifice, even to the point of laying down one’s life for others.

Christmas is proof that God, the King of kings, is willing to sacrifice for others. The Lord Jesus “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (Philippians 2:6–8) Christmas is the starting point for the Lord Jesus’ path to the cross. When he was born in the manger, he was determined to take the steps toward the torture on the cross for the world. The love that God showed at Christmas is the kind of great love that is willing to enter human suffering. Through this sacrificial love, the Lord Jesus made suffering only an obstacle rather than an end in the journey of life. After crossing the obstacle, the end will be the crown of glory.

If God’s love is only manifested by people seeking good fortune and avoiding evil, then when suffering comes, they will separate themselves and deny this love. Only when this love is manifested via sacrifice and self-denial will we be “convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38–39)

在2020這一年，仁愛這詞受到很大的挑戰。社交距離、安全氣泡等防疫措施，大大增加了人與人的隔閡與疏離。再加上防疫意識容易讓人專注在自身的需要上，導致很多人為了自保而不惜搶購日用品。「缺乏」與「不安」的感覺，鼓吹著自我中心的思維，更嚴重地抵消著我們應有的仁愛表現。

對於仁愛的另一個衝擊，是當每天都活在憂慮的情況下，自然會讓人懷疑神的愛。詩篇中的詩人，便經常在這種張力下向神申訴：「耶和華啊，你忘記我要到幾時呢？要到永遠嗎？你掩面不顧我要到幾時呢？」(詩十三1) 可是，仁愛的定義，並非在乎於讓人趨吉避凶，而是願意為人犧牲、甚至捨命。

聖誕，就是尊貴的神願意為人犧牲的明證。主耶穌「他本有神的形像，不以自己與神同等為強奪的；反倒虛己，取了奴僕的形像，成為人的樣式；既有人的樣子，就自己卑微，存心順服，以至於死，且死在十字架上。」(腓二6–8) 聖誕就是主耶穌踏上十字架路上的起步點。當祂在馬槽出生之時，就已決心為世人一步一步走上十字架這酷刑上。神在聖誕所展現的愛，是一種願意進入人的苦難中的大愛。主耶穌透過這犧牲的愛，讓苦難只能成為人生旅程的障礙而非終點。跨過障礙後，終點必定是榮耀的冠冕。

若神的愛只是靠讓人趨吉避凶來彰顯，那麼當苦難臨到時便自然把這愛隔絕和否定。唯有這愛是以犧牲捨己來彰顯之時，便讓我們知道「無論是死，是生，是天使，是掌權的，是有能的，是現在的事，是將來的事，是高處的，是低處的，是別的受造之物，都不能叫我們與神的愛隔絕；這愛是在我們的主基督耶穌裡的。」(羅八38–39)



Ancient Rome believed that after December 25, daylight hours would become longer and longer. Although their calculations deviated by three days, the meaning was obviously the arrival of light. Christmas represents the coming of light, because the Old Testament book of Isaiah prophesied: “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned....For to 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 9:2,6) Light can shine on people in darkness because a baby is born for us.

The English word “Welcome” comes from Old English “wil-come”. It means wish you come. We welcome the Light of Christmas because we wish that light can come to a dark world. The famous Christmas hymn, Silent Night, often mentions the expectation of the coming of light. The first verse says: “Silent night, holy night; all is calm, all is bright”; the second verse says: “Shepherds quake at the sight!”; the third verse is almost completely saying, “Son of God, oh, love’s pure light; radiant beams from Thy holy face; with the dawn of redeeming grace”.

Humans originally deserves darkness. Humans are not worthy of light and peace. However, for humans living in darkness, God said: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,” Pay attention to the reason this baby was born, “for us.” And this baby is given to us by God. The word “give” does not mean “award” or “reward”, but grace. This baby came to the world for our sake. Baby Jesus came to the world and lived a life that glorified God. So that the glory will be “to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

There is a wish in the lyrics of Silent Night, saying “sleep in heavenly peace”. If a peaceful night’s sleep is a kind of grace from heaven, then wouldn’t our eternal peace be even a kind of greater and transcending grace? May Christmas remind us to welcome the arrival of the “Light” and to walk in the light like the Lord Jesus all His life, so that the glory will be “to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

古羅馬認為十二月二十五這日之後，日光時間便會越來越長。雖然他們的計算偏差了三天，但意思上則明顯地喻意光的到臨。聖誕節是代表光的到臨，因為舊約聖經以賽亞書預言說：「在黑暗中行走的百姓看見了大光；住在死蔭之地的人有光照耀他們..... 因有一嬰孩為我們而生；有一子賜給我們。」(賽九2,6) 光能照耀在黑暗中的人，是因為有一嬰孩為我們出生。

歡迎光臨的英文Welcome 是從古英語wil-come而來的。其意思是wish you come 渴望你到臨。我們welcome聖誕之光到臨，因為我們wish光可以來到黑暗的世界。著名的聖誕聖詩平安夜(Silent Night)，就經常提及對光來臨的期盼。詩歌的第一節說：「萬暗中，光華射」；第二節說：「牧羊人，在曠野，忽然看見了天上光華，」；第三節更加全段都說：「平安夜，聖善夜，神子愛，光皎潔，救贖宏恩的黎明來到，聖容發出來榮光普照」。

人本來就只是配得黑暗，人本來就是不配得光明和平安的。對於活在黑暗中的人，神竟然說：「因有一嬰孩為我們而生；有一子賜給我們.....」留意這個嬰孩出生的原因，是「為我們」。而且這個嬰孩，是神賜給我們的。賜這個字並不代表獎勵或報酬，而是代表恩典。這個嬰孩來到世上，就是為了我們的原故。嬰孩耶穌來到世界上，活了一個榮耀神的生命。令到在至高之處榮耀歸與神，而在地上平安便能夠歸於神所喜悅的人身上。

平安夜的歌詞有一句祝願的話，說「靜享天賜安眠」。如果一夜的平安熟睡都會是一種天賜的恩典，試問我們要得著永恆的平安，是否更宏大更超越的恩典呢？但願聖誕提醒我們，要歡迎「光」臨，一生要像主耶穌這樣行在光明之中，以至「在至高之處榮耀歸與神！在地上平安歸與他所喜悅的人！」



歡迎「光」臨
Welcome