



Poland Presbyterian Church

At the Green since 1802

2 Poland Manor
Poland, Ohio 44514
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**A Christmas Eve
December 24, 2015**

**Sermon by Brent J. Eelman
10:00 p.m. Service**

"Still, Still.."

Psalm 46

¹ God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.

² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;

³ though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.

⁵ God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;
God will help it when the morning dawns.

⁶ The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.

⁷ The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.

⁸ Come, behold the works of the LORD;
see what desolations he has brought on the earth.

⁹ He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.

¹⁰ **"Be still, and know that I am God!**

I am exalted among the nations,
I am exalted in the earth."

¹¹ The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.

It is Christmas Eve. For weeks we have been building up to this moment. Our lives have been filled with preparations for Christmas. There were the parties and social occasions. There were the Christmas concerts and shows to prepare. Students at colleges and universities across the country hustle to complete papers and finish exams so that they could enjoy the holiday with friends and family.... And then there is the shopping. For four weeks we have been fighting with the traffic on 224 in Boardman, hunting for parking places, racking our brains to find the perfect gift for a friend, a loved one... The speakers in the stores have been blasting away at our ears, trying to put us in that Christmas mood, (which is really a purchasing mood) with new renditions of Rudolf the Red-nosed Reindeer and Frosty the Snowman.

It is Christmas eve, and suddenly all the busy-ness and rush of the last month culminates in this evening and the celebration tomorrow.

It's Christmas Eve, the last store has closed, the roads will not be too busy now. It is time to take a deep breath, sigh, and experience the richness of this moment.

One of the very special gifts of Christmas is silence.

Our lives are filled with a cacophony of noise. Sounds, from pagers to cellular phones, from microwave ovens to portable stereos, from honking horns to screeching tires... noise fills our lives. One of the gifts of this evening... is silence.

At the end of this service our voices will join in singing, "Silent Night": A simple tune with uncomplicated words that seems to touch something primal in each of us during this holiday season.

It touches the longing we each and all have for a moment of rest,
a moment of quiet,
a moment of assurance
when we can stop our striving,
give up our battles and wars,
let go of grudge and hatred,
and experience once again the solemn and quiet hope that is ours in the child
born in a manger to Mary and Joseph.

It is a hunger, a longing for peace... and so the words, "sleep in heavenly peace..." roll off our tongues gilded with hope. For a moment, voices are blended. They are the voices of the faithful and devout, but also seekers and searchers. They are the voices of the pious but also the cynics and agnostics... voices all longing for this same peace... this same stillness.

The world of the 21st century is filled with the noise of terror and war. We can no longer deny nor ignore the brutality of life... and perhaps that is why this moment seems all the more sacred. We are here, because a child, born in stillness and quiet, in the anonymity of a stable entered this world over 2000 years ago. This child, Jesus, came with the promise of "peace on earth," and it is that promise that our worship affirms.

It is a night of miracles. It always has been! The Christmas stories and legends tell of miracles that witness to something greater than us. In 1914, Frank Richards, a young British soldier on the Western Front in World War I wrote about an amazing event that occurred on Christmas eve. Within sight of the German front line, he wrote: "We stuck up a board with 'Merry Christmas' on it. The enemy stuck up a similar one.

"Two of our men threw their equipment off and jumped on the parapet with their hands above their heads as two of the Germans did the same, Our two going to meet them. They shook hands and then

we all got out of the trench and so did the Germans.” He went on to explain that some of the German soldiers spoke perfect English. One, who had worked in Brighton before the war, said how fed up he was that they were at war and he would be glad when it was all over. His British counterpart agreed.

The German officers appear to have taken the lead role in this Christmas celebration. They provided refreshments for their soldiers and for the British. They gave each other small gifts from chocolate bars and tobacco to tins of processed beef. Along the front that day, soldiers from both sides joined in soccer matches, and men who had been shooting at each other, just the day before, were sharing food and showing each other family pictures.

As evening fell, they sat around campfires and together sang choruses of Christmas carols. The favorite being Silent Night, the Germans singing “Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht!” The British recognizing the melody, joined in with “Silent Night, Holy Night”: a night of miracles! At midnight it ended, and at 8:30 on December 26th, three shots pierced the air and the battle continued again.

It is easy these days to be a cynic. It takes no imagination at all to be cynical about life and the human prospect. But it takes a great deal of courage and hope to believe that if peace, heavenly peace, can be a reality on one silent night, perhaps it can pierce the reality of our world forever. The Good News of this evening is that the child, Jesus, born in a manger in Bethlehem comes as the “Prince of Peace.” In the words of the poet, Ann Weems:

The Christmas spirit
Is that hope
Which tenaciously clings
To the hearts of faithful
And announces
In the face
Of any Herod the world can produce
And all the inn doors slammed in our faces
And all the dark nights of our souls
That with God
All things still are possible,
That even now
Unto us
A Child is born!*

The Psalmist wrote in the ancient Hebrew... *Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.. The Lord of hosts is with us.*

The Lord of Hosts is with us..... be still..... be still.. and experience His presence and peace. Amen

*Ann Weems, *Kneeling in Jerusalem*: 1987.