

Christmas Day December 25, 2020

John 1:1-14

Sing a new song to the Lord, who has done marvelous things!

We have a number of songs sung for us this Christmas morning. John's gospel begins with a hymn to the pre-existent, eternal and incarnate Word of God that is Jesus. In Psalm 98 we have the song of the earth to the victory of God, where even the hills ring out with joy, the seas roar, and the rivers clap their hands for the Lord has come. Isaiah's encouragement for the remnants of Israel to sing, sing for joy because their God is the one who brought them out of slavery in Egypt and who will save them now from their exile in Babylon.

These songs continue even after this day, when Jesus is presented in the Temple- Simeon, righteous and devout, sees the child and breaks into song, "Lord, now you let your servant go in peace, your word has been fulfilled... my own eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the sight of every people. A light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people, Israel."

Song is a universal need for us as humans. As one of my musical theatre professors used to tell us, you break into song when the emotion is so great that just speaking it will not do.

The birth of Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, is one of those occasions.

In many ways, Israel in exile, Simeon, all creation, ourselves, do not sing for this child and what he is now, a babe in the arms of his mother- cooing, giggling, eating and pooping like all children do.

We sing, for what this child means in our future.

Christmas does not mean anything for us without Easter. Without the resurrection of this child grown into a man- he becomes just another prophet, just another great moral teacher.

But we join the angels, Simeon, and all creation in singing this day because we know who this is and what he means for us.

The Christian church, by the time John wrote his gospel, has spent a lot of time pondering who Jesus is and what that means. And from the beginning of his gospel, John tells us that this one who is born on Christmas is the visible sign of God's love for us come down, "for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son." This is the Word that is the light God spoke into being in the midst of the darkness of the uncreated universe. The one that brought order out of chaos. "Then God spoke, 'Let there be light'".

This light has come to shine in the darkness of our world and to give us a future and a hope. This light is the visible promise that God is with us. That God does reign in this world. That God's promises are good. That God's kingdom has come on earth as in heaven.

And when we immerse ourselves in this, we cannot help but sing in response. To cry, "Joy to the World, the Lord is come!" To ponder, "What Child is This?" To celebrate- "Love has Come, a Light in the Darkness."

All of us have a soundtrack to our lives. I was born in 1970, but my soundtrack is the 80's. Songs I sang during those pre-teen and teen years. I wore out three tapes of the *Say Anything* soundtrack because those songs gave expression to the cries and apprehensions of my own soul.

What is the soundtrack of your life? What songs come easily to your mind, if not your lips, to give voice to the deepest joys and pains of your life? What music stirs your determination, brings emotional release and healing?

The 80's is mine, but I was also raised in the church. There every Sunday, and the music of our hymnals was also the soundtrack of my life. This music has shaped the vocabulary and content of my faith.

“A Mighty Fortress is our God”, to strengthen me in times of trouble.

“We are Marching in the Light of God”, proclaims joy and is also pretty good to work out to.

Our hymn of the day, “I Wonder as I Wander...”

We spent time this Advent waiting, watching, wondering about this child who was coming. And while my voice will join yours in shouts of praise and thanksgiving, I must admit that it is this hymn and ones like it that help guide me to deeper faith. They invite me into the story of Christmas and to wonder...

What did Mary ponder in her heart once the shepherds left? We know that this ordinary young woman, holding her firstborn son, not even married yet, has a reserve of strength. She has faced the angel of God without fear. She has accepted the burden of this privilege of bearing God's creative and redeeming Word into the world. But now it is real, snuffling and gurgling in her arms. Already, strangers have come to pay him homage as something even more extraordinary than any newborn child already is.

I wonder, what did Mary ponder in her heart? What did she see for herself, her child, the world in that moment?

I wonder, what did Joseph think about all of this? Even when the angel comes to him instead of Mary in the Gospel of Matthew, Joseph remains silent in scripture. Was that just the kind of man he was? Not saying much, but always doing what was right? Knowing that his relationship with Jesus would be something less than the bond he had with his mother?

I wonder, what does it mean that Jesus is the light of the world? I know he didn't glow like a Rudolph's nose. Maybe he had what we would call a sunny disposition, but was it as simple as that? What about Jesus, who he was, how he lived, what he taught, is light? I wonder if it isn't so much light and dark as we think of it with what we see. Perhaps it is more a feeling. When I am feeling pressed down by the world and all that is going on. When my mind just keeps laying one thing after another onto me that I cannot affect or control. That feels like darkness. To have those burdens removed makes me feel, light. Is Jesus the light of the world that no darkness can overcome because he removes those burdens from us? Because in him there is always hope?

Perhaps that is part of what Mary pondered, what she saw. Perhaps in some way, every newborn child is a light to the world. A visible sign of the hope two people have for the future. And in Jesus, this is just magnified to the nth degree. For Jesus is a visible sign of God's hope for the future of this world God created.

Hope, despite all that seeks to weigh us down, to burden us with things we cannot affect or control. The hope God has in us, his beloved creations. Hope God has for us- for life fuller and more abundant than we have right now.

My friends in Christ, whatever the song you sing this morning, whether it be one of joyful exuberance, or one a bit more pensive and thoughtful, we sing because

words just cannot convey the depth of our joy, our hope, our faith, that with the birth of the child Jesus, a new light has entered the world and the darkness will never overcome it.

Thanks be to God.