

Luke 2

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place in the guest room.

Now in that same region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying

"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them, and Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told them.

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

After getting Lucy down for a nap last weekend, I rounded the corner in my house, from the kitchen into the TV room, to see on the TV, Denzel Washington playing in the snow.

My wife had put on the 1996 movie, *The Preacher's Wife*, starring Denzel Washington, Justin Pierre Edmunds, Courtney Vance, Justin Piere Edmunds, Gregory Hines, Lionel Ritchie and Whitney Houston.

Somewhere in our conversation about the movie that is fun, and uplifting, and for pastors of churches that are doing our best to hang on and remain a faithful witness in a community and keep a church going that is going through hard times, somewhere in that conversation Essie noted to me:

“It just doesn’t feel like Christmas is complete without hearing Whitney Houston sing *Joy to the World*.”

I wonder what songs make it feel like Christmas to you...

My dad mentioned *Once in Royal David's City*, and the spirit must have been working, because it was chosen for this service before that remark was made.

What song makes it feel like Christmas, to you?

[open for answers]

I asked a facebook group I am in, a group of PCUSA folk, and here are some of the answers:

O Holy Night was a popular answer,

Several people said O, Come O Come, Emmanuel

If you go back to last week's service you can hear a great version of both of those songs.

One more sleep till christmas from a muppets christmas carol,

The soundtrack to Home Alone

Last Christmas by WHAM, and All I want for Christmas is You by Mariah Carey (which I am sure there are stories about)

Carol of the Bells

The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came

Lo, How a Rose 'er Blooming

O Magnum Mysterium

Judy Garland's "Have yourself a Merry little Christmas".

The First Nowell

Silent Night by candlelight, (if that is the song you need to hear this year, make sure you worship with us at 5:00 PM)

Ode to Joy to The World, by The Piano Guys

Perhaps you would love to hear and see the nutcracker to round out their leadup to christmas morning

One of my favorites is O Come all ye Faithful

When we sing, or hear, these songs we rejoice at the story they tell, be they hymns, pop songs, movies, ballets, or perhaps the story we read in scripture

This Advent we have been wondering and musing on the question:

How does a weary world rejoice?

We acknowledged our own weariness, our grief and exhaustion at everything the world throws at us

We Found joy in connection; through the story of Elizabeth and Mary and other stories that spark our mutual

We allowed ourselves to be amazed; and I know I was amazed at the music here last week, both cello and the Christmas Cantata by our choir.

And this week we sing stories of hope;

Those songs that we mentioned, the stories, that we read in the bible, or see on the screen, be it Whitney Houston or the Renfros singing O Holy Night, or Sarah Macklin playing O Come, O Come Emmanuel on the cello...

Or perhaps the sound of a congregation singing Once in Royal David's city.

they are stories of Hope, actions of hope, like lighting candles

because in some way they remind us of the reality of Christmas, the reality of a god who would be born among us in our humanity, with all of the joy and wonder, all of the pain and weariness being human brings

IN our scripture passage for today we read an ultimate story of hope; a baby born in a specific time and place

while Quirinius was governor of Syria, in Bethlehem, the city of David

We tell a story Of angels that appear to shepherds working the third shift, and singing

“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

We read again the story of shepherds who found a newborn baby and his mother.

That begins a story that will turn the world on its head

On this Christmas eve, as we wait for the world to turn, for the birth we read about, and for our purple paraments of preparation to be flipped to the triumphant and celebratory white

I would like to turn our attention back to the hymn we sang to open this service.

The Canticle of the Turning is one of my favorite hymns, and was named by another person as the song that makes it feel like Christmas to them as well.

The tune is the Star of the County Down, an Irish folk tune used in Both Northern Ireland, and in the Republic of Ireland; a place that has a history of religious and political violence, and now with words that set a vision of peace

Because this song tells the story that Mary first sang in the presence of her cousin Elizabeth.

A song that Debbie read for us in our first scripture reading

A song we often simply refer to as the magnificat.

Beth Herrinton-Hodge wrote of the hymn both the canticle of the turning, and the magnificat

“More than a song predicting what was to come, the Magnificat praises God for what has been done in Jesus. The world has been turned from darkness to light, from despair to hope. The promises of God, the mercies of God, are from ever-lasting to ever-lasting. As surely as God empowered Mary to bear a helpless, dependent baby who would turn the world around, so too does God continue to turn the world toward peace, hope, joy, and love. God’s revolution against the status quo continues. The child Mary delivered continues to change us and change the world.”

So this Christmas, let us live into an ever turning and transforming world.

Let our hearts sing this story

So that the feeling and spirit of christmas remind us that we are called to lift up the lowly, to let Justice burn brightly, and to wipe away tears of those who are weary

Because of the deep and unending love that is shown by an infinite God born as an infant to be immanuel, God with Us.

let that feeling of Christmas, that story both of birth, life, death and resurrection, remind us to rejoice

rejoice, in hope, in peace, in joy, in love, and in the birth of our savior to an unwed mothers and may all our souls magnify the lord:

As we continue to sing, and tell stories of hope, let us affirm our faith together:

**We believe
that hope can change the world.**

**We believe
that God uses ordinary people,
like an unwed teenage mother,
for extraordinary good.**

**And we believe
that each of these ordinary people
can make a difference.**

We know that grief, fear, and suffering abound.

We know that suffering quells joy and makes it harder to hope.

But we choose hope anyway.

**In the face of hardship,
we hope together.**

We hope with God.

We hope for a better world.

This is our song.

We believe; help our unbelief.

In Christ's name we pray, amen.