

December 29: Christmas Sunday

Message: Song of Joy

Scripture: Colossians 1:15-20

Text: “[Anna] approached at that very moment and began to praise God and to speak about Jesus to everyone who was looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.” -Luke 2:38

Memory Verse: “God reconciled the world to Himself through Christ, by not counting people’s sins against them.” -2 Corinthians 5:19

Incorporated Carol: *O Holy Night*

Blurb: So many classic Christmas songs highlight the joy of spending time with loved ones. Being together is a key part of Christmas. Actually, according to the Bible, this is true! This Sunday we’ll learn how Jesus came to reconcile people back to God and restore people to one another. Jesus came at Christmas so we could have those precious relationships!

Opening Song: *Emmanuel* -Sanctify

Welcome: -David

Memory Verse: -David

“God reconciled the world to Himself through Christ, by not counting people’s sins against them.” -2 Corinthians 5:19

Worship Music Set: -Sanctify

Go Tell It on the Mountain

Reckless Love

O Holy Night

Worship Prayer -Andrew

Offering: -Andrew

Children’s Moment: Christmas Camp Recap -Andrew

Prayers: -Andrew

Bumper: Songs of Christmas

Message: Songs of Christmas: Song of Trust

PP#1: Songs of Christmas: Song of Joy

“[Anna] approached at that very moment and began to praise God and to speak about Jesus to everyone who was looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.” -Luke 2:38

Songs of Christmas. This Christmas we’ve heard Christmas songs of hope, of faith, of peace, of salvation, and of trust. The story of Christmas is too wonderful just for words, for us to understand it just with our minds. It permeates our whole beings, seeps deeply into our hearts, and comes out in how we live our lives every day. And so, Christmas must also be expressed in song, in the language of the heart. We have hope fulfilled! We now have faith that restores us, peace that grounds us, salvation that carries us into eternity, and trust that anchors us when we face the worst that life throws at us. Doesn’t that make your heart sing? It all rings out as the Christmas song of joy! “Joy to the world, the Lord is come!” “Rejoice! Rejoice, Immanuel has come to thee O Israel!” “Noel!” “Good Christian Friends, Rejoice!”

When Jesus’ parents brought the baby Jesus to the Temple for dedication, Simeon prophesied, and then a temple grandma, a prophet named Anna, Luke 2:38, “She approached at that very moment and began to praise God and to speak about Jesus to everyone who was looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.”

PP#2: Cover image of a celebrity singing O Holy Night, such as Celine Dion.

Last week we had an amazing worship experience when our guest violinist, Shawn, sang so powerfully what is sometimes called the king of the carols *O Holy Night*. She did an amazing job of bringing us into true worship of Christmas. We sang it together this morning. It is one of the most enduring songs of Christmas over the last 100 years, with covers still being released regularly. It was written in France in 1847 for the dedication of the renovated organ of a little parish church near Avignon, southern France, on Christmas. The priest asked a friend and poet to write the poem, and then asked a well-known composer to write the tune. The song was first sung in the church by a famous opera singer that year, to an enthralled congregation!

It was circulated among other churches in the years following, and soon church leaders started asking about it. So, the priest had to admit that the poet friend he had asked to write the carol...was a staunch atheist...and the composer a Jew! Church leaders banned the carol immediately.

Yet the song continued, covertly, and continued to be shared. In 1855 the American abolitionist John Sullivan Dwight translated it into English, highlighting the words of the second verse, “Truly He taught us to love one another; His law is love and His gospel is peace. Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother; And in His name all oppression shall cease.” The carol did not do well in the South up through the Civil War, as you might guess.

Then, on Christmas Eve in 1871, when the French were fighting the Germans in the Franco-Prussian War, a French soldier suddenly stood up from his trench, unarmed, turned toward the Germans and broke out singing *O Holy Night*. The shocked Germans all stopped shooting, and when the song was over, one of their soldiers stood up and sang back a carol by Martin Luther. The impromptu cease-fire held throughout Christmas Day. The famous Christmas cease-fire was started by this carol!

Then, on Christmas Eve 1906, Canadian inventor Reginald Fessenden stunned sailors across the Atlantic when for the first time a human voice came out of their wireless machines, which up until then had only transmitted morse code. Fessenden first read from the Bible and then picked up his violin and played *O Holy Night*. This song became the first song ever played on radio!

In the tense political climate of the 1930s the carol began its rise to prominence, and it endures to this day. And rightfully so, I might add, as this is one of my favorite carols of all time, too!

The author, although very discouraged by the church in his day and therefore an anti-clerical atheist, was still captured by the meaning of Christmas that came in Jesus. He was able to express what he hoped was true in Jesus, even though he didn't see it evidenced in the church

PP#3: O holy night! The stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of our dear Savior's birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
Till He appear'd and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.

Christmas is about the birth of Jesus, our Savior. The world long struggled in sin and waywardness. But then, Jesus came and restored people to their rightful identity. Hope! Joy! A song of joy!

PP#4: Led by the light of Faith serenely beaming,
With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand.
So led by light of a star sweetly gleaming,
Here come the wise men from the Orient land.
The King of Kings lay thus in lowly manger;
In all our trials born to be our friend.

The second verse is often skipped. We are called by faith to come and worship this baby. And then, we see the wise men come in. But look at the verse's last line, "In all our trials born to be our friend." Jesus comes to us, where we are, in all our mess and problems, and becomes our friend, our helper, with us, Emmanuel, lifting us out of it all.

PP#5: He knows our need, to our weaknesses no stranger,
Behold your King! Before Him lowly bend!
Behold your King, Before Him lowly bend!

Look at the refrain for the second verse: "He knows our need, to our weakness no stranger." He comes to us in our need, and takes on our weakness, our human frailty. He becomes one of us in order to save us. "Behold your King! Before Him lowly bend!"

PP#6: Truly He taught us to love one another;
His law is love and His gospel is peace.
Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother;
And in His name all oppression shall cease.
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,
Let all within us praise His holy name.

And then, the controversial third verse. We hear it in the context of American slavery. But try to recover its original narrative. Jesus comes to restore us to God, and in doing that, He then

restores us to each other. He teaches us how to truly love each other - “His law is love and His Gospel is peace!” He breaks the chains of bondage and calls us to love each other as family. Jesus-followers must stop oppression! How we treat each other is a direct result for how He treated us.

This song of Christmas conveys the good news that Jesus is born, but then, as a song of joy, it expresses *why* we have joy: Jesus restores us to right relationship with God and also with one another. Christmas changes everything! This isn’t just a sentiment. This is a dangerous song!

PP#7: *Image of Epaphras visiting Paul in prison.*

And we see this dangerous, radical message in the original songs of Christmas, the ones in the Bible. Today I want us to look at what actually is a Christmas song in Paul’s letter to the Colossians. Turn to Colossians 1. Paul is writing to the Christians in Colosse, in present day Turkey. He didn’t found that church, but a friend from Colosse, Epaphras, had visited Paul in prison and told him all about it. He told Paul all of the good things about this church, but he also shared some of his concerns. The Christians there were getting confused and believing wrong things about Jesus. So Paul grabs a scribe and fires off a letter. Paul immediately launches into the person and identity of Jesus, born at Christmas as our Savior. He gives one of the best descriptions of who this God-born-as-a-human savior is, anywhere in the Bible. And to do that, he incorporates what seems to be an early Christian hymn about Jesus. It is something that Paul learned, and put into his letter. Now, Paul is the earliest of the authors of the New Testament, and he is drawing on something that predates his writing. So, this hymn about Jesus is earlier than the written accounts of Jesus’ birth. And it expresses how Jesus came to restore people to right relationship with God and with one another. Paul includes it in his letter because it was crucial that those Christians understand just how radical it is to follow Jesus! It is a Christmas song, telling why Jesus came. It is a song of joy!

PP#8: Colossians Hymn of Christ’s Supremacy

1:15-17: Christ is Lord (Supreme) over Creation (all things)

1:18-20: Christ is Lord (Supreme) over Re-creation (Church)

Take a look at Colossians 1, starting in 15. Most Bibles now put a heading there, something like, “A Hymn of Christ,” or “The Supremacy of Christ.” This poem is made up of two couplets. The first is verses 15-17, and it is about how Jesus came as Lord over creation. The second is verses 18-20, and it is about how Jesus came as Lord over the re-creating of fallen creation. Paul calls this redemption, and Jesus is therefore the Head of a new body, called the Church. This hymn is full of Old Testament images, mostly from Genesis, Exodus, Psalms and Proverbs.

PP#9: Colossians 1:15-20 (CEB)

15 The Son is the image of the invisible God,
the one who is first over all creation,
16 Because all things were created by Him:
both in the heavens and on the earth,
the things that are visible and the things that are invisible.
Whether they are thrones or powers,
or rulers or authorities,
all things were created through Him and for Him.
17 He existed before all things,
and all things are held together in Him.

The very first line reveals this is a hymn about Christmas. When Jesus was born as a baby, the spiritual person of the Son of God took on a human body. In the face of this physical person Jesus, the invisible God could now be seen. In Him we see God's full image!

Verse 15, "The Son is the image of the invisible God, the one who is first over all creation, Because all things were created by Him: both in the heavens and on the earth, the things that are visible and the things that are invisible."

Jesus is the first *over* creation. Be careful: He's not the first born *of* creation. Jesus is God, and although He takes on a human body, He is the Creator, not of the created. This is very important! He has a body that is of creation, and Jesus becomes fully human. But He is of God, and fully divine.

This baby, born in Bethlehem, with a human body, is the Creator Himself! He is the Word, the Word of God which spoke all things into creation. And we're not just talking physical created things. All created things, visible and invisible.

And not just *things*, either: even powers and authorities. Lets keep going, "Whether they are thrones or powers, or rulers or authorities, all things were created through Him and for Him. He existed before all things, and all things are held together in Him."

Jesus is Lord over creation. He pre-existed before all created things, and He was the one who created them all. So, back in Genesis 1, the creation story, it says that God created by speaking. "And God said, 'Let there be light, and there was light.'" The *words* of God is Jesus, the Word of God! Jesus is Lord over all things, King of Kings and Lord of Lords! And in His physical face, we see the very image of God Himself!

That is important for us, you see, because God also made people in His image. We are made in the image of God. We have corrupted that image, broken it. But God now shows up in Jesus, as God's full image, in human form, to repair God's broken image created in us. And the authority of sin, the power of evil, the powers of this world, all the other authorities that claim our allegiance, or call us to live their ways, they are all lesser powers than this Jesus of Christmas!

Don't serve a lesser power! Don't settle for limited authority. Don't answer to middle management! Go right to the top! Only give your allegiance to those powers that align with the highest authority.

Jesus created all things. He is Lord of all creation. And so, as creation has now fallen and is broken from it's original created intention, only the original creator can put it right. So, the next stanza of the poem proclaims how the Creator comes in the human Jesus in order to re-create fallen creation. The new body Jesus makes is the Church. It is His people restored in His image by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

PP#10: Colossians 1:15-20 (CEB)

18 He is the head of the body, the church,
 who is the beginning,
 the One who is firstborn from among the dead
 so that He might occupy the first place in everything.
 19 Because all the fullness of God was pleased to live in Him,
 20 and he reconciled all things to Himself through Him—
 whether things on earth or in the heavens.
 He brought peace through the blood of His cross.

Verse 18, "He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the One who is firstborn from among the dead so that He might occupy the first place in everything."

Jesus is first born over creation, and He comes to be firstborn from among the dead. He dies human death as a sacrifice, personally, physically, and spiritually taking on Himself the fatal wounds of sin to satisfy its claim. And so, He becomes the first resurrected eternally, the first one who blazes the way for the rest of us. Even though He was brought low in creation in His birth and humiliated in His persecution and death, He is lifted up to His rightful high position as Savior and Lord. He is the Head of God's people, the Church, and the first of everything!

Verse 19, "Because all the fullness of God was pleased [chose of His own free will] to live in Him [this is Christmas], and He reconciled all things to Himself through Him—whether things on earth or in the heavens. He brought peace through the blood of His cross."

Jesus came to restore us back to God, reconcile all things—us—back to God (to Himself) through Him (His death on the cross). Therefore we now have a new creation, and a new order. We once lived estranged from God and under the powers of this fallen world. Now, we are restored to God and live in a new identity, both our own restored image of God, and within the newly created covenant of the Church, God's people on earth. We live by different priorities, different patterns, different possibilities. We step in time not to the fallen middle-management of the authorities of this world: of greed, of selfishness, of hate, of tearing down. We step in alignment with the supreme power of Jesus. We have His peace in our hearts, and we live as peacemakers with others.

PP#11: "Songs of Christmas: Song of Joy" *with an image of Jesus in us restoring us to other people.*

This changes us, who we are, and how we live. We live restored to God, restored to our purpose and identity, and restored to one another. Anna came to the baby Jesus "and began to praise God and to speak about Jesus to everyone who was looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38) Redemption...restoration... to God, and to one another, had come! Anna erupted in Christmas songs of joy!

Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, "All of these new things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and *who gave us the ministry of reconciliation*. God reconciled the world to Himself through Christ, by not counting people's sins against them."

This past week we've been watching some old Disney classics. Yesterday we watched the 1960 version of *Swiss Family Robinson*. At one point in the movie, the two teen boys were off on their own. And sure enough, they get arguing and fighting. They treat each other badly. But then the dad suddenly showed up. He said that they needed to reconcile, behave differently, treat each other with respect. There was a new order once he showed up.

Left to ourselves, we argue, we fight, and treat each other badly. We tear down. We blame. We stay angry. We don't forgive. We punish. We make slaves. "Long lay the world in sin and error pining."

But then comes that holy night! Our Lord shows up, and implements a new order, a different order. Because of Him, we reconcile. We treat others with respect.

"A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices!"

We become singers of this radical Christmas song of joy. And through us, this song rolls over a world gripped in struggle. We choose to overlook. We decide to forgive. We agree to put others first. When we stand up in Jesus' new order, hostilities pause and shooting stops. Across the rolling swells of the vast human ocean of separation and loneliness, to those lost and separated at sea, we sing the song of being found, of being restored, of being worth it. The slave is our brother!

Christmas is a dangerous celebration. It reorders us, and how we live: what we do, what we say, what we spend our time doing. Christmas permeates all through the rest of our lives, giving us a new song of joy of a different order.

So, church, as the world puts Christmas away, puts it behind them, we keep singing! Sing the song of Christmas joy, loudly, today, every day. Sing it to your crazy neighbor, the annoying person at the store, the irritating coworker, the one everyone else labels a loser. They are our brother, and we offer reconciliation. It's a radical, dangerous song. Will you ready to keep singing?

“Joy to the world, the Lord is come!”

Closing Song: *Joy* -Sanctify

Memory Verse: -David

“God reconciled the world to Himself through Christ, by not counting people’s sins against them.” -2 Corinthians 5:19

Announcements: - David

No Wednesday evening programming - New Year’s Day!

Benediction: - David