

“Our Christmas Song”

December 25, 2016

The First Christmas Songs series

Join in if you know it:

And so I'm offering this simple phrase

To kids from one to ninety-two

Although it's been said many times, many ways

Merry Christmas to you

I know I started at the end of the song, and I know the images in the song make for a beautiful scene: chestnuts roasting on an open fire, carols being sung by a choir, turkey and mistletoe, excited kids waiting for gifts. Throw in Nat King Cole's voice, and we have a hit that has lasted for years. This song is literally called “The Christmas Song.”

But Scripture invites us to sing a different song today. Consider the greeting that we use this time of year: “Merry Christmas!” It's okay to say it, but what does it mean for us to share the news of Christmas? It goes beyond a simple greeting. Christmas literally means “Christ-mass” - the worship of Christ. And we celebrate today - not simply that Christ is born in Bethlehem, but that he lived and served - and died and rose again - that we might have new life and hope!

We've been singing during this series - hearing the popular songs we love up against the sacred songs of Scripture. Just as songs help us to learn and express our faith, so it was for God's people from the very beginning. The Psalms are songs to be sung - many of them praise songs to God. Songs are at the center of sharing our faith. In our Methodist tradition, singing is important. Charles Wesley used popular bar tunes to share his faith in Christ. John Piper says, “Singing is the Christian's way of saying: God is so great that thinking will not suffice, there must be deep feeling; and talking will not suffice, there must be singing.”

Certainly it seems that what's happening with the writer of Psalm 98 - one of the enthronement psalms as they're called. This psalm puts God on the throne above every earthly ruler. The psalmist is clear to say that “God is King.” And when we hear those words today, we remember that the Christ-child is the embodiment of God's reign.

And if we consider God's desire to be with us and to be one of us, it's incredible to think about the risk that God takes! To come in the most vulnerable way - as a baby - and to come even though his rule and reign would be contested.

It started right after his birth and continued throughout his life and ministry. But that didn't stop him. Even death didn't stop him!

It's a reason to praise God and remember that "Our God reigns!" Yes, "Merry Christmas" is a lovely greeting, but how will we lift up the truth that "God reigns" as a message of this season?

We hear that message from Isaiah, and we need to know that Isaiah's time as a prophet covers a long stretch - both when the Israelites are in exile and when they return to Jerusalem. The passage we read today comes during the exile. It's a word of hope for those who are away from home, feeling abandoned, and uncertain about the future. They're waiting for the return of the Lord so that they can go home again. They're waiting for someone to come and liberate them - to set them free! And so they watch for a messenger to come with news - hopefully good news - that they will be redeemed!

We hear Isaiah's words on Christmas Day as a reminder of the good news that in Jesus, God is with us. We have a Savior who is Christ the Lord. His reign will never end. But beyond that, Jesus seeks to rule in our hearts. He sets us free from sin and death and offers new life. And every day, not just on Christmas, but every day, we nurture our relationship with him.

If you worshipped here last night, you've seen this short video. But it's worth seeing again. As we're thinking about God's reign in our lives and the gift of new life in Christ, I invite you to watch "A Great Light."

MEDIA: "A GREAT LIGHT"

Though he comes in humility and so unexpected, Christmas really is about the power of God at work. "God reigns" is the truth of what happens at Christmas. God reigns, and God chooses to bring salvation – wholeness – to the ends of the earth. It is not just for us or for some, but God wants everyone to know peace, good news, and the joy of new life. Jesus is the announcement. He is the message of good news. He is the reason for us to praise God! We are not alone, and we'll never be alone!

C.S. Lewis says, "I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses, but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep telling one another how beautiful they are, the delight is incomplete till it is expressed."

C.S. Lewis reminds us that our praise isn't complete until we express it. I hope that our Christmas song goes beyond a simple "Merry Christmas." I hope that our worship becomes our witness - that the love of God isn't just something we receive at Christmas when it's revealed to us in Jesus. I hope that God's love is

also revealed through us. I pray that we embody the truth that “God reigns” in our joys and in our struggles - offering honest, faithful prayers and trusting that truth of Emmanuel - God is with us!

And don't forget what Isaiah proclaims - that a messenger who brings good news and announces peace and salvation is what's needed for people who are waiting. Friends, messengers with good news to share aren't just people we read about. The call to tell others about peace and salvation that comes from God isn't just part of the Christmas story. It's ours to tell! It's ours to sing! It's our story to embody so that it's told with every word and action.

Last night, one little girl was dressed up as an angel for our Christmas Eve service. And while she was here, she was very interested in the nativity set. She looked at baby Jesus in the manger and said something about him sitting up. It was a powerful message to hear - that Jesus doesn't stay in the manger, but he grows up. He experiences our humanity. He teaches and heals. He breaks the boundaries that we try to create and shows us that God's love cannot be contained by anything we try to do. God's love isn't for us to control, but for us to embrace and share.

People need to hear that God reigns - and that God has never and will never abandon them. God took a risk to be with us, and we're called to respond with hearts open to God's leading and hands ready to serve. People need to know that following Jesus isn't just something we talk about, but it's something we do daily by living love.

Our Christmas song is more than a picturesque scene about this time of year. When we say “God reigns,” we're saying that God is in control, and we want to be a part of God's Kingdom.

Friends, may “God reigns” become a song that we sing clearly. May “God reigns” become a part of our celebration today - and be a part of our lives every day.

Thanks be to God! AMEN.