

01-02-22 To the Praise of His Glory

Ephesians 1:3-14

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight 9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. 11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, 12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. 13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

At the risk of falling into the current debate over whether Christians should tone down the language and imagery when it comes to their faith, the Bible presents the Incarnation as an act of war against Satan, sin, and death.

The Christmas season continues to Epiphany and as we sing the Christmas carols, they have a lot to teach us and others, who are not believers. These are sources that confronts our culture with the whole Gospel, offering some of the finest Christian teaching ever produced by redeemed Christians. Christmas offers us the amazing opportunity to not only immerse ourselves in these deep Christian truths, but also present them to others.

Let's look at a few of these carols and some of their verses that might surprise you by their clarity and depth.

First, you get a sense of God's rescue mission, that was the Incarnation, in the traditional English carol, "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen." Listen to the words.

God rest ye merry gentlemen. Let nothing you dismay. Remember Christ our Savior was born on Christmas Day to save us all from Satan's power when we were gone astray. Oh, tidings of comfort and joy

In the Advent hymn, “O Come, O Come Emmanuel,” the coming of Christ is presented in the context of God’s Old Testament promises about the coming Messiah. *O come, O come, Thou Lord of Might, Who to Thy tribes, on Sinai’s heigh in ancient times didst give the law, in cloud, and majesty, and awe. Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

Another verse goes: *O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free Thine own from Satan’s tyranny; From depths of hell Thy people save and give them victory o’er the grave. Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

Few hymns offer a Christology as rich as “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing,” which says: *Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see, hail the incarnate deity. Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel.*

And another verse: *Hail the heaven born Prince of Peace, hail, the sun of Righteousness. Light and life to all He brings, risen with healing in His wings. Christ the highest heaven adored, Christ the everlasting Lord. Come Desire of nations come, fix in us Thy humble home.*

This carol speaks about God’s feelings about us, the ones He made in His image. We are His sheep, His creatures, and He not only loves us but heals us. We respond with inviting Him into our hearts to “*fix in us Thy humble home.*”

Another hymn that speaks of our relationship with Him is “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day.” It describes the hope of how this cosmic battle will eventually turn out. Listen to these words: *And in despair, I bowed my head: “There is no peace on earth,” I said, “For hate is strong and mocks the song of “Peace on earth, goodwill to men.” Then pealed the bells more loud and deep: “God is not dead, nor doth He sleep, The wrong shall fail, the right prevail, with peace on earth, goodwill to men”*

And then, *Till, ringing singing, on its way, the world revolved from night to day, A voice, a chime, a chant sublime, of peace on earth, goodwill to men!* God is at work as the world revolves.

Paul in our second lesson speaks several times the phrase ‘to the praise of God’s glory.’ As we praise Him, it not only pleases Him but it changes something in us to be more Christ-like. That’s why singing from the heart is so important and not just mouthing the words. This is true of all the hymns we sing as we move into this New Year.

These songs, and others, tell the fullness of the Christian story: a world that belongs to God, our lost plight due to sin, our captivity to Satan’s schemes, the working of God through the ages, His promises revealed in the long path of redemption which God worked through the patriarchs, prophets, and kings, in fulfillment of promises given so long ago; the wonders of the Incarnation, the fear and hope of Mary and Joseph, and the realization and glory of angelic hosts proclaiming their King, and ours with their “*Gloria in excelsis deo.*”

Another carol points us to our relationship to God. “When Christmas Morn is Dawning” V.2 says, “*How kind of You, our Savior, for us to come to earth. O may we not by sinning despise your lowly birth, O may we not by sinning despise your lowly birth.*” Verse 3 continues, “*We need You, O Lord Jesus, to be our dearest Friend. Your love will guard and guide us and keep us to life’s end.* Your love will guard and guide us and keep us to life’s end. “

The story of Christ’s actual birth is told in many carols like *Silent Night, Away in the Manger, O Little Town of Bethlehem* or *O Come, All Ye Faithful* and others.

Each year these hymns remind us that God did not leave us in our broken state, but came and lived among us so that He might die for us. We have in these songs the good news of the Gospel.

And, as comforting and instructive as they are to our own hearts, at what other time of the year do otherwise disinterested friends, neighbors, and family members find themselves humming along with theology? What greater opportunity will we have to share the Christ than at a time when our listeners are already hearing its truths every day?

Look for opportunities to share your stories of how God has helped you in the past. Let the Holy Spirit do the rest. It is not our task to drag people to the foot of the cross, as one writer put it. He went on to say, we need only to put a stone in their shoe. If you’re concerned about grandchildren becoming faithful, tell them your stories.

The Christmas season offers a moment to emulate the witness of Philip to the Ethiopian. The world around us knows their need. They might hide it under vain pleasures and false narratives, but they also know that things are not quite right. What they need is to hear how things might be made right in Christ Jesus.

Let’s take this opportunity, singing our way through Christmas, to share the joy that has been given to us that this joy may spread to others.

(With helps from: *The Rich Theology of Christmas Carols* by John Stonestreet & timothy Padgett)

The Bible points us in the direction of praise with the Psalms such as Psalm 96:1 Sing a new song to the Lord! Let the whole earth sing to the Lord! 2 Sing to the Lord; praise His name. Each day proclaim the good news that He saves.

Or Psalm 100:1 Shout with joy to the Lord, all the earth! 2 Worship the Lord with gladness. Come before Him, singing with joy.

Many modern songs add to our repertoire when it comes to Christmas. Just to mention two, the first is *Mary Did You Know?* Adalie sang that song on Christmas Eve. Verses say: Mary, did you know that your baby boy would one day walk on water? Mary, did you know that your baby boy would save our sons and daughters?

Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new? This child that you've delivered, will soon deliver you.

Mary, did you know that your baby boy will give sight to a blind man?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy will calm the storm with his hand?
Did you know that your baby boy has walked where angels trod?
When you kiss your little baby, you kiss the face of God.

Mary, did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy would one day rule the nations?
Did you know that your baby boy is Heaven's perfect Lamb?
That sleeping child you're holding is the great I am.

Do you hear the Gospel in those verses all stemming from Christ's birth? Then a second Christmas song that is a caution to us all is called "While You Were Sleeping."
Oh, little town of Bethlehem, Looks like another silent night. Above your deep and dreamless sleep, a giant star lights up the sky. And while you're lying in the dark, there shines an everlasting light for the King has left His throne and is sleeping in a manger tonight, tonight. Oh, Bethlehem, what you have missed while you were sleeping? For God became a man and stepped into your world today. Oh Bethlehem, you will go down in history as a city with no room for its King while you were sleeping, while you were sleeping.

Oh, little town of Jerusalem, Looks like another silent night. The Father gave His only Son, the way, the truth, the life had come, but there was no room for Him in the world He came to save. Jerusalem, what you have missed while you were sleeping? The Savior of the world is dying on your cross today. Jerusalem, you will go down in history as a city with no room for its King, while you were sleeping, while you were sleeping.

United States of America, looks like another silent night. As we're sung to sleep by philosophies that save the trees and kill the children and while we're lying in the dark, there's a shout heard 'cross the eastern sky. For the Bridegroom has returned and has carried His bride away in the night, in the night
America, what will we miss while we are sleeping? Will Jesus come again and leave us slumbering where we lay? America, will we go down in history as a nation with no room for its King? Will we be sleeping?

Music that is faith oriented has power and God's Spirit can speak to our hearts as we sing the carols and songs around Christmas and all throughout the year ahead. May God bless you as you sing from both your heart and your mind to the glory of God. Amen