

**SERMON FOR CHRISTMAS DAY
DECEMBER 25, 2012
BASED ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN 1: 1-14**

Well it's finally here. Christmas has arrived. And with it all the little Christmas morning debates have also been revived.

I don't know about your household but around mine there are always Christmas Day debates. Do we open the presents before we go to church or after? Actually that one's been pretty much settled. Ever since my boys have become teenagers all of a sudden getting up early in the morning even to open gifts isn't much of an issue anymore. Now it's become, do we wait until grandpa shows up for dinner or don't we bother? Whose turn is it to gather up the wrapping and take it out to the garbage this year? And who gets to help mom clear the table and do the dishes after dinner?

There are always debates of some kind or another at my place. But at least here at church one debate has been definitely settled by the arrival of this Christmas Day. And that's the debate over when it's appropriate to start singing Christmas carols. If you're not familiar with this debate let me explain by saying that Lutheran pastors have this very annoying trait of wanting to delay the singing of Christmas carols until the Christmas season actually arrives. They kind of have this crazy idea that waiting to sing carols not only is a good spiritual discipline but it helps us to appreciate those songs all the more when we do reach Christmas.

On the other hand, most sane, normal, and right-thinking lay people can't wait to start singing them as soon as possible. So for the four weeks of Advent there's this little tussle that goes on under the calm surface of life here at Good Shepherd with the pastor resisting the urge to sing Christmas carols and the lay people working hard to lead their pastor into temptation.

But all that ends right here. All that ends today. If there's one place that peace on earth and goodwill among men actually exists today it's right here at Good Shepherd. Because today we all agree that it's time to let 'em rip. To open our voices in full-throated enthusiasm and make these rafters ring with Noels and Glories galore.

And why not? There's more than enough reasons to fill this day with carols and Christmas songs. For one, Christmas music has got to be some of the most beautiful and enjoyable music ever written. For another, Christmas carols are

probably the songs that touch our hearts and our emotions the deepest on the whole.

But there's another reason why this is a wonderful day to fill with our singing. Because to hear our scriptures describe it, singing is simply the most natural response we could ever make to the glorious news of this Christmas Day. Consider the angel who appeared to the shepherds in the story we read last night. No sooner has she got the words out her mouth than the heavenly chorus bursts forth with a song of praise. The shepherds may have been struck dumb with terror, but heaven simply can't let this moment slip by without letting loose its own Hallelujah chorus into the starry night.

And the writer of our psalm this morning is positively giddy about welcoming the good news of great joy with whatever music lies at hand:

*Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth;
Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody.
With trumpets and the sound of the horn.
Let the seas roar, Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy
at the presence of the LORD*

To hear our scriptures tell it, there'd hardly anything else to do but sing when it comes to the joy of this day.

But it's finally when we get to our gospel reading today that we discover the most profound reason for the preacher to shut up and for the musicians to take over.

"In the beginning was the Word," John says, "and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being... And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."

Maybe we find these words a little confusing at times. I mean we know John is talking about Jesus. But what does John mean by calling Jesus a Word or even THE word? It's probably not an image that we would have come up with in our own. Not an image we usually associate with a human being.

But maybe sometimes it takes a hymn to understand a hymn. In our worship hymnal is a wonderful song that was introduced to us a number of years ago. It's called "When Long Before Time". Three of its verses read like this:

When long before time and the worlds were begun,
when there was no earth and no sky and no sun,
and all was deep silence and night reigned supreme,
and even our Maker had only a dream...

The silence was broken when God sang the Song,
and light pierced the darkness and rhythm began,
and with its first birthcries creation was born,
and creaturely voices sang praise to the morn.

Though, down through the ages, the Song disappeared,
its harmonies broken and almost unheard,
the Singer comes to us to sing it again:
our God is with us in the world now as then.

I think that hymn is one of the best commentaries around on John's gospel. Because it helps us to understand that what John is really doing in his gospel is talking about God singing. God singing a love song into the world. For ages John tells us God had a beautiful love song burning away in his heart until one day he could hold it in no longer and so he sang it out loud. And the result was that the world was created. God's love song created the world.

And for a while all was perfect. Human beings knew the song well and would often sing it back to God. But then sin crept in and over time the song was muffled and distorted and forgotten. For sure God hoped that the prophets he raised up would remind the people of his beautiful love song. But that would only work for a while before the people fell back into the disharmony of sin. Until one day God decided that there was only one thing left to do.

And so God sang the song out loud one more time. And as the song filled the universe, and as it broke through the barrier between heaven and earth it took on a new shape and a new form. Not a planet this time, but a human being. And on a starry night 2,000 years ago, somewhere in the hinterland of Israel, that love song took its first breath and became Jesus. God's love song was now a living, breathing, human being. And in everything he did, everything he said, in his living

and his dying, and his rising, Jesus filled the world once again with the beautiful melody of God's ageless song of grace.

And that's the song that still echoes through the ages all the way down to us on this glorious Christmas morning. It's the song we hear in the promises of John's gospel...the promise that we have the power to become children of God, and the promise that we have a light no darkness can ever overcome. It's the song we hear every time we confess our brokenness and hear that life-saving declaration that your sins are forgiven. It's the song we hear as the bread is broken and the wine is poured at this holy supper of Christ's body and blood. It's the song we hear in the sound of the water that fills this font running through our fingers as we remember our baptism. And it's the song we hear in our times of confusion or grief or anxiety every time we are listened to, or comforted, or encouraged by a brother or sister in Christ.

It's a song that has broken the grip of sin, and shattered the power of death. And it's a song that gives us a reason to hope and the strength to live every day even in the face of our doubts and fears,

And that's why we sing today. We sing because God first sang to us in the birth of Jesus. We sing because Christmas is the wonderful news that God has filled our hearts with the most beautiful music we could ever know. And we sing so that the joy which is ours in the birth of Jesus this morning may be known far and wide, that it might fill every corner of this creation, and that it might heal every heart around us that's grown deaf.

The Marian Center is a Roman Catholic inner city soup kitchen in Regina. And every year Jeff my pastor friend from Regina gets their Christmas letter. This year the letter included a short paragraph written by each of the staff members describing where they had encountered Jesus in the past year. Veronica, the youngest staff member wrote the following:

"Recently, Steve Heroux, one of our staff people, was transferred from Marian Centre Regina to Marian Center Edmonton. On his birthday, we phoned Steve in Edmonton to sing to him. In a moment of spontaneity, the whole dining room full of the men off the streets came together to sing for Steve. This was the first time I have ever seen **every** side of the dining room converge to share something together. The card players, the loners, the loud ones, the quiet ones...all gathered with joy to sing for Steve. When they finished singing they all took turns saying their names into the phone and giving a brief message to Steve...Their faces, as

each took his turn, were so sincere. I think this is why we are living our life here at Marian Centre. In the brief time that Steve was here, he became their friend. Steve loved them, and they sang.”

How more simply and powerfully can you put it. “Steve loved them, so they sang.”

So are we loved beyond comprehension by a God whose song is sung anew into our hearts this glorious morning. And so do we go out from this worship to sing that song for all the world to hear in our celebrating, in our serving, in our caring for each other, in our following, and in our faithful living.

AMEN.