



CHRISTMAS

Sermon by Ven Moses Thabethe



25 December 2020

READINGS

Isaiah 52: 7-10; Psalm 98; Hebrews 1: 1-12; John 1: 1-14

How can I keep from singing

On this Christmas Day our voices are raised in Christmas carols as we join with the rest of the Christian world in opening our hearts to receive "the Word," "the Life," and "the Light." The evangelist John uses metaphors, describes Jesus as the Logos, the Word. "In the beginning was the Word," John writes, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. . . what has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. Christ. Even though John doesn't talk about shepherds and the virgin birth and the angel choruses, he still communicates his message loud and clear. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory." (Quote in the beginning....the light shines on....the word who is life....)

Every time we reach this highpoint in our liturgical year, we are unable to contain our joy. There is an old hymn titled: **How can I keep from singing?** Written by Robert Lowry popularised by the Irish Singer, Enya. The lyrics are beautiful, very strong and they talk about the trouble in the world, the strife, the turmoil, but at the end of each verse it ends with the simple line: "**How can I keep from singing?**" I quote 2 verses from it:

My life goes on in endless song
above earth's lamentations,
I hear the real, though far-off hymn
that hails a new creation.

Through all the tumult and the strife
I hear it's music ringing,
It sounds an echo in my soul.
How can I keep from singing?

The underlying theme of the song is that sometime at some stage in life, you've got to try and forget the trouble that is around you and try to be joyful - enjoy music and, by extension, enjoy life.

Music, as the carols do, has the capacity to stir our feelings better than the spoken or written words. If we were to look at our own lives, even amidst a year filled with divisive rhetoric (such as our current world political landscape) and revenge-seeking, yet we continue to hope, that some common ground might be found, however momentary: we all hunger for joy, and generous sharing, and peace – all the sentiments that Christmas holds for us. During this time of the year, we also dare to hope for reconciliation in our personal relationships and families, just as we dare to dream of peace among the nations – in spite of all the wars that are fought throughout the world.

We celebrate Christmas in many ways, among them gathering with family and friends, exchanging gifts and sending e-cards. Perhaps the most moving and memorable way we celebrate Christmas, however, is singing Christmas carols – and we have been doing this for a while now!. These melodious carols have lasted through the ages, from our childhood into our old age, the melodies are familiar and comforting, the words hauntingly beautiful and educational at the same time. The readings for this morning are like songs, (From the prophet Isaiah: How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news Ps 98:1 O sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things. His right hand and his holy arm have gotten him victory.) and their poetic celebration of God at work in the world, saving, vindicating, calling, and comforting, links us to our ancestors in faith who shared our common hope and longing. We sing along with them today. Yet we hold two conflicting emotions in check this morning: sheer joy and a sense of alienation at the same time: The angels sing out God's glory, yet we live -- like Jesus' family -- in a world devoid of peace but marred by disease and death.

And the good news we wait to hear on this celebratory day is that the day of our salvation and hope has arrived, that God is still with us – Emmanuel. After all, Christmas is about God entering human history! Christmas is about God telling us not to give up hope after all, telling us not to despair and that we are not on our own. Does Christmas morning invoke the feeling that God is still active in our lives? In your life? In the life of the entire Christian community?

The small, vulnerable and sweet baby Jesus (in our Gospel reading) reveals a mighty God, beyond our imagination or description. Perhaps that is why we sing carols: To remind ourselves that Christmas is our communal celebration, reminding us that God is with us still, God is still speaking, God is still acting in our lives and in the life of the world that God loves so well. And so we celebrate, and we sing our songs this Christmas morning. But how will we continue to sing these songs, in the days ahead? How can we make this morning be like every other morning of our lives? So that we don't lose the momentum of the message that Christmas Day carries?

Nadia Bolz-Weber, an Evangelical Lutheran writes:

"God did not enter the world of our nostalgic, silent-night, snow-blanketed, peace-on-earth, suspended reality of Christmas. God slipped into the vulnerability of skin and entered our violent and disturbing world." These words fulfill our Gospel passage theme: The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. (John 1:5). The light shines in the world in spite of the darkness all round because God has become human and dwells among us. This we have known from the beginning and have seen with our own eyes.

So, on this Christmas morning, we sing our carols to express the inexpressible: we sing to express something that we cannot put into words - the incredible mystery of God-made-flesh, Emmanuel. And when we get right down to it, it's not just "good news," in general, but it's "good news of great joy for you and all people."

For while the Gospel is never a private word, it is nevertheless a very personal word, reminding each and every one of us that God believes we are worthy of honour and dignity and, above all else, love. We all experience the joy of this Christmas season, even if it's mingled with some sadness. How can we keep from singing?

May you and your loved ones have a blessed and peaceful Christmas. Amen.