

Luke 2:8-20

The Sounds of Christmas

Listening for Jesus this season and every day

City sidewalks, busy sidewalks
Dressed in holiday style
In the air there's a feeling of Christmas
Children laughing, people passing
Meeting smile after smile
And on every street corner you hear

Silver bells, (silver bells) silver bells (silver bells)
It's Christmas time in the city
Ring-a-ling, (ring-a-ling)
Hear them ring, (hear them ring)
Soon it will be Christmas day

These lyrics, with a little Bing Crosby thrown in, seem to epitomize what we think of, when we think of, the sounds of Christmas. Which is interesting, as the song was not written and recorded until 1950. It has had that much of an influence on culture and Christmas since then that you would think that it was written when Jesus was born.

But the song does seem to reflect much closer our experience of Christmas than the story of the manger. Even if you have not been one of the ones shopping and preparing, you may have been traveling, or making sure the grandchildren have a little cash coming their way for Christmas, or preparing in some small way to celebrate the season.

Still the only preparations happening on that day over 2000 years ago in terms of what we now call Christmas, was making sure there was a place to rest for the night and then the labour and delivery of a child. The sounds of the city of Bethlehem would not necessarily have been the Silent Night that we are used to singing of.

Particularly during the day, there would have been much activity in Bethlehem as the Roman census had brought many people back to their hometown. Family reunions would have been noisy and busy, with people sleeping all over the place. The sound of people talking and laughing even into the wee hours would have permeated the air.

Yet, in one little corner of Bethlehem there was a young mother laying beside her baby. A whole world around her inattentive to what had just occurred. It is here that another song comes to mind, Simon and Garfunkel's, *The Sound of Silence*. The city was busy

but was silent when it came to this birth. The people unaware and too busy, to pay attention to this peasant couple. The reaction was one of not seeing or hearing.

There was also the silence out in the fields. There it was easy for an angel to get the attention of the shepherds. Only the sound of nature in that dark place was to be heard, and these shepherds would have been attentive to anything that would break the silence as that might alert them to danger to the flocks.

The sound of the angel's voice would not have been missed in that silence. How could it have been? These men were ready to hear and see things, it was what they did, it was part of the job. In the silence of the night, they were able to hear the message.

The sound of silence broken by the sound of joy, the joy of the angels, and then the joy and excitement of the shepherds themselves as they went into Bethlehem to find the child. The sound of joy as they shared with Mary and Joseph their story of the angels, and then the sound of joy in worship as they came to the child and gave glory to God. The joyous sound continuing as they returned to the fields "glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen as it had been told them." (Luke 2:20)

Then more silence. In this story we never hear any words from Mary. We read only these words, "But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart." (Luke 2:19) There by the manger, Mary and Joseph understood and heard the message. They knew who this baby was and was to be, and words were not necessary, words might just have been frightening.

In fact, it was likely that the appearance of the Shepherds just affirmed what they had already known from God. They understood that somehow and in some way, this innocent child, their baby, was going to have struggle. The outcome of his life already determined. He was God's Son, but for now they were the protectors of God's promise to the world.

In amongst, all of this, the sounds of activity, silence, and joy, would also have been the sound of crying. Tears as Mary had given birth, the cry of a new-born baby, and if we were to read from the Gospel of Matthew, we would know there would be a great cry from the people as their sons, two years and under, were later slaughtered by the establishment in Herod's attempt to be sure that down the road this child, that he was told about by the Magi, would not never grow old enough to take away Herod's power.

Sounds of Christmas...activity, silence, joy, and crying. These were the sounds at the time of Jesus birth and sounds still part of our experience today. In the activity of preparations for Christmas the story can become buried, yet, we can take time to be silent and contemplate the story. It is some of what you are doing in this moment having come to worship this morning.

Christmas is a time to celebrate and be joyful that Jesus, our Savior, has come into the world. That is the true joy of this season. That slogan seen on Facebook pages and bumper stickers, "Jesus is the reason for the season", is really on the mark.

It can also be a time of sadness, with tears shed, as people remember loved ones and times now passed. For some the silence almost unbearable. Others are facing treatments, illness both physical and mental. You may be the caregivers only able to watch and stand at the side as others suffer, feeling helpless and powerless. It could be loss of many kinds that take our attention, loss of work, a house, relationships.

As you prepare for Christmas, pay attention to the sounds you hear and then be reminded of the sound from that first Christmas.

This Jesus whose birth we celebrate, grew and aged, he experienced all that you and I experience. In his life and death, he knew the joy of friendship and family, times of silence as he separated himself from others to pray, the hustle and bustle of crowds as he fed 4 and 5 thousand people, and tears. Jesus knew tears when his friend Lazarus died, when he cried over the city of Jerusalem, in the Garden of Gethsemane, the betrayal of a friend, and tears in the pain and anguish of death on a cross.

You see Christmas and Easter can not be separated from one another. Just as God came to us in human form so that we could know God's amazing love for us, Jesus also died so that we could have a relationship with God that was not possible before the resurrection of Christ. God as fully human and fully divine in the Son, Jesus Christ!

This is the story of the incarnation, of the Messiah, of Jesus Christ, Lord and Saviour. It is an incredible story, one that people have been willing to die for, one that still has the power to move people to change and action today.

It takes faith to believe it, but when the power of the story is experienced, it is undeniable.

Is there much that is difficult to comprehend? For sure!

But I urge you not to limit the power of the story or the Holy Spirit working in your lives because it is hard to believe.

God has to be bigger than our comprehension or what kind of God would God be?

God has to be able to work outside of our understanding or imagination to be able to be called God. What God is God if you can put him in a box that you understand?

This Christmas, open yourself to Jesus, to his story, to his glory, and to your life. In it you will find strength, love, forgiveness, joy, and hope.

Merry Christmas, in Christ, with Christ, and through Christ. Amen.