

Let's Celebrate Jesus And Sing Like We Mean It!

Luke 2:8-16

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AUDIO - <http://fbcjc.buzzsprout.com/7678/138523>

I absolutely love Christmas music. I start as early as possible each year, listening to it. In fact, I've decided that if they can begin doing holiday commercials on TV right after Halloween, I can start listening to Christmas carols. In my mind, I can peg certain Christmas songs to specific places, people and events. The carol "Mary's Little Boy Child" takes me back to our farm home, when I was about 13, listening to it on the old LP vinyl recording. The song "Sweet Little Jesus Boy" reminds me of a pastor's wife we knew who would sing that beautiful meditation every Advent. And on and on. Music is powerful. It taps our emotions, especially when we want to express the inexpressible.

So why is Christmas music important to us? FIRST OF ALL, music is for everyone. Music unites us. It is democratic. No matter our station in life, our financial status, social standing. Remember the angel's message? "...for all the people..." (v. 10). And scripture provides a perfect example of this. The shepherds! Shepherds were watching their flock in the middle of the night. Shepherds were a low class sort of people, according to human standards. They lived in tents or outside, so they didn't bathe often and therefore didn't smell very good. Their sheep grazed either on public pastures or on other people's land. So they were resented. So are you following this? When God got ready to announce the birth of His Son, he shared it with the lowest rung of the social ladder. A single angel makes the birth announcement (vv. 9-12). Then that angel was joined by an army of angels, a choir of mammoth proportions (v. 13), as they sang, chanted and shouted the news: the Savior is born!

Now I notice on Facebook that when you want to announce the birth of your child or grandchild, you share the news with people you care about, people you love and respect and people who are important to you. So God's birth announcement, God's music, came to the lowly. God's Christmas music is for everyone. It unites us.

And by the way, maybe you're here this morning and you don't feel like you fit in. You're not the church type. You feel like an outsider. You are not now a follower of Jesus. Be assured. The music is for you! You're included! God's message is for you, too.

Why is music so important at Christmastime? SECOND, because music assists our worship. Ponder this: "Singing is a language that God has given us to express our deepest longings, greatest joys, and most profound trust in the One who created us and loves us unconditionally" (Carolyn Winfrey Gillette). To say it simply, in singing, we express what we believe most deeply. In chapter 2, Luke seems to be reaching for words to describe the event and the music. He twice uses the word "glory" (vv. 9, 14). The Greek word is *doxa*, from which we get our word "doxology." It means a radiating, brilliant splendor. This is what the music was trying to communicate.

George Frederick Handel's father wanted him to be a lawyer, not a musician. So as a child, Handel would wait until his father was asleep, then sneak up to the attic and secretly practice his instruments. When he was in his 50's, he was asked to write a new oratorio for a benefit in Dublin. He worked on it in manic fashion, completing the 50 pieces of "Messiah" in 25 days. When he finished it, he said, "I think God has visited me." Amen to that! Do you want to know my two favorite moments of our Christmas Eve Lord's Supper service? The first is when that moment arrives to sing Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" and there is this spontaneous whoosh! as we all stand together in honor our Savior and God. And my second favorite moment is the opposite--at the end of the service, when we softly and lovingly hold our lit candles and sing "Silent Night." I always want that moment to linger longer than it does.

I was praying with a group of pastors recently and one of them prayed, "And Lord, help us to believe what we sing." How true. Sometimes I sing my way into faith. And I do that through worship, through singing. Remember the message to the shepherds? "Do not be afraid" (v. 10).

FINALLY, our music is our evangelism, it's how we share our faith. I recently read the memoir of Nonna Bannister, a Ukrainian who told about life under the old Communist regime of Stalin in the USSR. The children were taught at school that there was no God. And the children were encouraged to snitch on their parents and report if any faith was practiced at home. People were watched closely to see if anyone celebrated Christmas. Nanna's family hid a small Christmas tree in the pantry, out of sight! [*The Secret Holocaust Diaries: The Untold Story of Nonna Bannister*]. It is true for us, too. Our celebration of Jesus' birth spills over and becomes a witness, a public testimony.

Now, in the grip of winter, I want us to do a strange thing. I want us to think for a moment about July 4! Remember those great fireworks shows. My favorite is when they somehow manage a sort of "time released" display, in which the fireworks don't go off all at once. They linger in the air and in sequence, one goes off, then another, then another. Pow! Pop! Pow! This Tuesday and Wednesday, Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, all over the world, in different time zones, one after another, in the sky, we join the angels in singing. So that all day long the message of Jesus goes out and lights up the heavens. And heaven and nature sing! Glory to God in the highest!