

Advent 3C

December 13, 2009

Hymns: 3 (4) - 14 - 23 - 275

ZEPHANIAH 3:14-17 (slide 1 for reading of text)
CHRISTMAS – THE DAY THAT GOD SANG!

O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare Your praise – with singing! Amen!

Dear Advent singers of praise to God,

This Advent day we want to celebrate the gift of music. Martin Luther is quoted as saying: ***Next to the Word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world.*** And what would Christmas be without music? Didn't angels sing the night Christ was born? (Luke 2) Well, it doesn't actually say they were singing. It says they were praising God and saying, "*Glory to God in the highest . . .*" but that sure sounds like singing to me. Music is such a wonderful gift from God! **(end slide 1)**

Of course, we all have different tastes in music. Driving home from church one Sunday, a father turned the radio to a country station. "How can you stand that stuff?" complained his 16-year-old son. "It's all sad stuff about dogs and pickup trucks and bar rooms and broken hearts." Knowing his son preferred rather loud rock music, the dad asked, "Well, what's your music about?" "That's the beauty of it," the son said. "You just don't know!" Or did the son say it like this: That's the beauty of it: "YOU just don't know!" Beginning with the Elvis era we first experienced the proverbial "generation gap." By the Vietnam years the gap had become a huge gulf. Christmas is the one great season which seems to bring together recording artists of every age and stripe to sing the beautiful melodies AND lyrics that we all can understand and know!

Our Old Testament lesson from Zephaniah is really a seventh century B. C. Christmas carol! Listen to it again: **(slide 2) Sing, "O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem! . . . The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm."** This third Sunday of Advent is a day of singing. ***The LORD, the King of Israel, is with us. Sing, "O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart . . .***

Verse 17 of this same chapter says something even more interesting. Listen very carefully to this: **(slide 3) "The LORD your God is with you, He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing."** Did you get that? God takes such delight in us that *God sings over us*. I can visualize a mother hovering over a crib singing quietly to her newborn infant. Can you imagine God singing over us? Can you hear God singing? This is the testimony of Zephaniah: God sings over us.

There is a carol that comes to mind when I think of God singing. This carol was written in 1962, only forty-seven years ago. It is the little carol, "Do You See What I see?" Could it possibly be that this carol came out "past my time?!" Somehow, despite the hundreds of times I have heard this carol, I never nailed down the lyrics. Let's do a quick study on this carol: (projected – verse by verse in seven lines each?)

Said the night wind to the little lamb, "Do you see what I see?
Way up in the sky, little lamb, Do you see what I see?
A star, a star, dancing in the night With a tail as big as a kite, With a tail as big as a kite."

Said the little lamb to the shepherd boy, "Do you hear what I hear?
Ringing through the sky, shepherd boy, Do you hear what I hear?
A song, a song high above the trees With a voice as big as the sea, With a voice as big as the sea."

Said the shepherd boy to the mighty king, "Do you know what I know?"

In your palace warm, mighty king,
A Child, a Child shivers in the cold--

Do you know what I know?
Let us bring Him silver and gold,
Let us bring Him silver and gold."

Said the king to the people everywhere,
Pray for peace, people, everywhere,
The Child, the Child sleeping in the night
He will bring us goodness and light,
He will bring us goodness and light."

Do you see what I see? Do you hear what I hear? Why spend valuable sermon time on this particular carol? I hope you will think of this sermon each time you hear this carol from now until Christmas – and for years to come! Listen! Can you hear the voice of God singing over us? ***Said the little lamb to the shepherd boy-- "Do you hear what I hear? Ringing through the sky, shepherd boy? Do you hear what I hear? A song, a song high above the trees...With a voice as big as the seas, with a voice as big as the sea!!*** God IS Singing over us!

Now you may wonder why WE sing at Christmas time. And you may wonder, "Why in the world would God sing over us?" Instead of singing over us, God should be "Zinging" us! Instead of us joyfully lifting our hands in clapping with praise and singing, our hands might well hang limp in despair and depression. But Zephaniah exhorts us: "Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands hang limp!" Earlier in this text, the prophet announces that ***The Lord has taken away your punishment, He has turned back your enemy!*** We rightly deserve punishment for all our sins, but God sent Jesus to stand in and take our punishment for us. Now we don't have to fear that great accuser of our souls – Satan! God has turned him back and utterly defeated the devil through Jesus' cross.

What is to be the upshot of all this?! ***(repeat slide 2) Sing, O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem!*** Love always makes the heart sing. Our singing begins with God's love for us. Now that you have been redeemed and forgiven, and are thus holy in His sight – ***(repeat slide 3) God now Takes great delight in you, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.*** This, in turn, results in our love for God and love for one another.

That is a story that must be told at Christmas. If that doesn't make your heart sing, nothing will. ***(slide 4)*** Our lives are filled with love. God sings over us! And as recipients of God's great love, we sing of the wonders of Christmas. ***God's love reaches its climax in the manger of Bethlehem.*** Here's what happened in that manger--God took on human flesh. God came and dwelled among us. Very few recognized Him, but God was there in a lowly stable, reconciling the world unto Himself. I know it's an outrageous thing to say, but that's what happened there. And people have been singing about it ever since.

David Devine told a revealing story in the Washington Post sometime back. It was about a youngish white man in jeans, a long-sleeved tee shirt and a baseball cap who emerged from a subway station in Washington one Friday morning. He positioned himself against a wall beside a trash basket. From a small case, the young man removed a violin. Placing the open case at his feet, he threw in a few dollars and pocket change as seed money. Then he swiveled his case to face the people who passed by, and began to play. If you have ever been to a Twins' or Vikings' game, you have seen something similar outside the stadium. Yet this was very different:

In the next 43 minutes, as this violinist performed 6 great classical pieces, 1097 people passed by, almost all of them on their way to work in mid-level government jobs. No one knew that the violinist was one of the world's leading classical musicians, Joshua Bell. Bell is an acclaimed virtuoso, who fills concert halls. One composer said of him: "He plays like a god." On this Friday morning Bell played on one of the most valuable violins ever made--a Stradivari valued at \$3.5 million. The train station provided good acoustics for Bell's

performance. His beautiful music filled the morning air.

A reporter stood observing and recording the event. In the first 3 minutes, 63 people walked past without seeming to notice the virtuoso. Then a man stopped, looked and quickly walked on. Across the 45 minutes Joshua Bell played, 7 people stopped to listen for at least a minute. 27 people gave money. Usually, in concert, Bell gets paid \$1000 per minute. This day, in total, he received \$32.17. At the end of each piece, there was no applause--just silent indifference. The master musician was ignored. People walked past musical glory without giving it a second glance.

Except for two people. A postal worker named John--described as a 'smallish man with a baldish head.' John had learned the violin as a youth. He recognized the quality of Joshua Bell's performance and stood enjoying it from a distance. And then there was a demographer named Stacy. Stacy had seen Bell in concert 3 weeks before. She recognized him. And here he was, the international virtuoso, sawing away, begging for money. She had no idea what was going on, but whatever it was, she wasn't about to miss it. Stacy positioned herself 9-10 feet away from Bell, front row, center. She had a huge grin on her face. The grin, and Stacy, remained planted in that spot until the end. Stacy told the reporter: 'It was the most astonishing thing I've ever seen in Washington. Joshua Bell was standing there playing in rush hour, and people were not stopping, not even looking, and some were flipping quarters at him! Quarters! I was thinking, Omigosh, what kind of a city do I live in that this could happen?'"

One of the world's great musicians playing on the street for coins! Only a few recognized him. **(slide 5) Does it sound somewhat familiar?** Only a few recognized Christ in the stable of Bethlehem. Some star-struck shepherds, some magi from the East and a humble carpenter and his bride-to-be. But not many. And yet that event turned the world upside down. It was enough to start the whole world singing. And why shouldn't it? Why shouldn't all creation sing? And why shouldn't we sing, who recognize the baby in the manger? After all, as the result of Christmas - the God of all creation--the God of the moon and the stars and the wind and the waves--sings over us. Can you hear it? Listen closely. It is the song of everlasting love, hope, peace, and joy. It is the song of Jesus Christ. Amen!

Christmas is a day the Lord has made! Let us rejoice, be glad, and sing to God in it! Amen!