

“The Light of Love”

Isaiah 9:2,6-7

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The 4th Sunday in Advent

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Isaiah 9:2, 6-7

² The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.

⁶ For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named

Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onwards and for evermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

In my weekly email to you all this week, I shared how hard it's been for me to feel like it's really almost Christmas. The weather is primarily the culprit. When the grass is still green, and temperatures are in the 60's, it feels like March to me ... like I should be getting the Easter baskets out from the basement instead of the Christmas stockings! True confessions: we haven't even gotten our Christmas tree up yet!

But there are signs that, indeed, it's almost Christmas – signs not so much from lights in windows or cards in the mail, but signs from *you*, my brothers and sisters in Christ. I've been struck this last week by the poignancy that this season brings for many.

- The frantic pressure to get everything accomplished – I've heard some trying to get gifts wrapped and cards sent ... students finishing final exams and parents helping their young adult move out of the dorm ... CFOs getting finances wrapped up and family foundations getting end-of-the-year distributions made ... newlyweds trying to get away and snowbirds planning their trip to Florida. It makes me tired just thinking about it!
- Others of you have shared how lonely you are, and how this week is worst of all, when everyone else seems to be surrounded by family and friends, while your most constant companion is memories from the past, now that your wife or husband has passed away, or the divorce is final, or the job is over and there's nothing on the horizon, and each day is an effort to find new purpose.
- Still others of you have whispered how worried they are, over your loved one's illness, or your own ... a child's mood swings or a parent's steep decline ... a job that's ending prematurely, or performance expectations pressing down ... the stock market's careening swings, or the world's security challenges.

- And still others of you have been beaming with joy, for these are the sweetest moments in the world – when children’s laughter fills the air, or your young adult comes home with a backpack full of dirty clothes from college, or your beloved fills your heart with joy, or the simple wonder of the sunset stops you in your tracks.

The fact is that most of us come into this last week before Christmas preoccupied - and it’s hard to focus on Christmas itself.

Which is why it feels so right to me that we will take time this morning to stop. To breathe. To light another candle. To sing another carol. To hear another Scripture. To take in the love of God, here, in this place, where we’re reminded who we are, where we’re invited to remember that we’re not alone, where we’re encouraged to focus on God’s love, God’s strong, resilient love that bears us up and holds us fast with steady buoyancy.

So instead of me yammering away with yet another sermon, I invite you to rest in this moment in the presence of God’s love. In a moment, our wonderful choir and instrumentalists will share with you an offering of music. I invite you to take a deep breath and relax into their sound. For many of us who love this beautiful music, and for those for whom classical music is less familiar, I encourage you to seek and to find delight in this gift. Relax into familiar tunes, and be attentive to new melodies. Listen for the harmonies – cascades of sound like the tinkling of bells.

Listen for echoes – women’s voices taking the lead, as the men’s voices follow like a round. Attend to the poignancy of flute and strings, as if they are your heart stretched by memory or worry or hope.

Receive this as a gift from these musicians, an expression of God’s love made flesh. And however you have come to this place, may you find the peace of this season in this sacred moment.

“Gaudete”

Sanctuary Choir and Juliani Ensemble
(Piae Cantiones, 1582; arr. Anders Öhrwall, 1932-2012)

Gaudete

Rejoice! Rejoice! Christ is born of the Virgin Mary. Rejoice!

Sinfonia

In Dulci Jubilo

In dulci jubilo (In sweet rejoicing) let us our homage show;
Our heart’s joy reclineth *in praeseptio* (in the manger)
And like a bright star shineth, *matris in gremio*. (in his mother’s lap)
Alpha es et O. (He is Alpha and Omega.)
O Jesu parvule! (O tiny Jesus) My heart is sore for Thee!
Hear me, I beseech Thee! *O puer optime!* (O excellent boy)
My prayer let it reach Thee, *O princeps gloriae!* (O prince of glory)
Trahe me post te! (Let me follow after you)
Ubi sunt gaudia, (Where are joys) if that they be not there?
Angels there are singing *nova cantica*, (new songs)
there the bells are ringing in *regis curia*: (in the king’s court)
O, that we were there!

Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

Lo, how a rose e'er blooming from tender stem hath sprung!
Of Jesse's lineage coming, as men of old have sung.

It came, a flow'ret bright, amid the cold of winter,
When half-spent was the night.

Isaiah 'twas foretold it, the rose I have in mind.

With Mary we behold it, the virgin mother kind.

To show God's love aright, she bore to us a savior
when half-spent was the night.

This Flower, whose fragrance tender with sweetness fills the air,
dispels with glorious splendor the darkness everywhere.

True man, yet very God; from sin and death he saves us,
and lightens every load.

Gloria in excelsis Deo

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace to men of good will.

Christ is born today. Hosiana!

Deus est Laetitiae

To us, a child has been born today, a message of peace he is bringing.
A child who in humble manger lay, while angels and shepherds are
singing.

The Son of God has come to be; from all our bonds to set us free.
Now nothing can defeat Him.

Sing and rejoice, the day is here; Christ is the Lord and heaven is
near.

Fall on your knees and greet him.

The shepherds watching their flocks that night heard heavenly voices
swelling;

a star high above made day out of night. What wondrous tidings
foretelling.

The angels sang: “Good news we bring. Born is the Son of God, our
King.”

‘Tis Christ, our heavenly pastor.

Oh, what a wondrous jubilee; what a wondrous sight to see;
Christ our heavenly Master.”

With joy to the world, how the heavens rang, the glorious news all
resounding.

That Jesus is born, the cherubim sange, with peace and with love all
abounding.

Good will to all and peace on earth. Rejoice and praise the holy birth
and Mary, she who bore Him.

Fall to your knees and sing his praise. Thanks give to him, this day of
days.

Come, let us all adore him.

Psallite

Psallite! (Sing!) Lift your voice and sing.

‘Tis Lord Jesus, Christ our King. Psallite!

Virgin Mary, on this morn to us has borne a child; a child so meek
and mild.

In his crib, meek and mild, Virgin-born holy child,
while the heavenly angels sing praise to the newborn King.

Psallite! Praise the newborn King!

Angels and archangels sing. Psallite!

Son of God to us is born, O holy morn! Sing praise! Rejoice this day
of days.

Resonet in Laudibus

Let the earth with praise resound. Let the earth with joy abound.
Kings and shepherds all surround the holy child,
the infant born of Mary.

Here, fulfilled, the prophecy of Gabriel. Eja! (Oh, or Ah)
Jesus of the Virgin born, praise his name this holy morn. Halleluja.
On this day a child is born in Israel.

Born of virgin Mary, Jesus Christ, our King.

There is refuge in his name: Emmanuel.

He alone brings peace and joy, so love him well.

Zion, now behold this child, born of Mary undefiled.

Son of God, so meek and mild, now worship him,
the infant born of Mary.