

Order of Service: The Sounds of Christmas
Senses of Christmas Advent Series
Menno Mennonite Church

December 22, 2019

Prelude: Stable soundscape

Words of welcome/Call to worship

setting up the sounds of the season [soundscape continues underneath?]

Light Candle 1

Song: HWB 215 *What Child is this*

The Word of Anticipation: Matthew 1:18-23 (*reader lights 2nd candle*)

Meditation Part I

Songs of Anticipation & Longing by request (1-2 verses) (*2-3 songs*)

Children's Story: Barb Franz

Heralding Birth: Luke 2:8-13 (*reader lights 3rd candle*)

Meditation Part II

Songs of Celebration and Proclamation by Request (1-2 Verses; 2-3 songs)

Offering

Listening for God with us: Revelation 21:1-5A (*reader [TBD] lights 4th candle*)

Meditation Part III

Songs of Anticipation and hope by request (2-3 songs, 1-2 verse each)

Sharing and Response

Congregational Prayer

Closing Song: HWB 209 *Oh How Joyfully*

Benediction

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Light Candle 1

Song: HWB 215

What Child is this

The Word of Anticipation: Matthew 1:18-23 (*reader lights 2nd candle*)

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

²³ “Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,”
which means, “God is with us.”

The word of anticipation: Matthew 1:18-23 (reader [TBD] lights 2nd candle) [Brief meditation] (Bryce)

The sounds of Christmas have been with us ever since Halloween. To induce us into the buying frenzy the season requires, most public spaces have been spreading holiday cheer for quite some time now. In a day where every movement of the day’s routine can have an appropriate sound track to go with it, Christmas is hardly lacking. With voices and bands right out of the era of the making of popular culture—Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra and the rest underscore our holidays with their stylings of the classics. Every pop star worth their salt seems to publish their versions sooner or later. Personally I am partial to a more than healthy dose of Handel’s Messiah set on repeat for the whole of advent or there about. I can never quite stop

hearing my father's voice in the Tenor solos. That and a good dollop of John Denver and the Muppets singing Christmas tunes puts me right in the Christmas spirit. Christmas eve for me is being trundled in the back of an early 80's Honda for the 5 to 8 hour drive to Indiana and my Grandmothers (depending on the weather), with the little drummer boy seemingly on repeat on the AM radio.

When we think of the sounds of Christmas, we are taken the cultural niceties of the season. Yet, the real sounds of the season are not always that nice. The voice of those waiting in anticipation for their glimpse of God's salvation, wondering aloud *how long O Lord*. The peculiar tone of the prophets proclaiming in the wilderness: "Repent for the time is near." The wonder-filled promises given in dreams where the unbelievable is asked to be accepted and lived into to. The sounds of Christmas include the cries of long humanity waiting for the world to change, a frightened family invited into faith that God will provide, the mundane sounds of the stable in which Incarnation born. If you read long enough in Matthew's advent story, you will even hear the inconceivable wailing of the massacre of the innocents as Herod tries to hold onto power the only way he knows how. In short, the sounds of Christmas—real Christmas are the sounds of life and living. Sometime sweet, sometimes scary, loud and raucous to the clarion call to prepare ye the way of the Lord. We know this, because we have our own groans and cries of anticipation too. Still, God comes into the soundscape of the whole of life, noisy as it is, discordant though it may be, and provides the music of the spheres.

Even as we have our personal playlists of the season, we are invited to hear again the still small voice: even now I am here; even yet I am coming; even still, all things in Christ are made new, whole, and complete in God's good time.

Songs of Anticipation & Longing by request (1-2 verses) (2-3 songs)

Children's Story: Barb Franz

Heralding Birth: Luke 2:8-13 (*reader lights 3rd candle*)

The Shepherds and the Angels

⁸ In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." ¹³ And

suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,
14 “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!

Meditation Part II

Have you ever considered the angel’s opening line? Each and every time, it’s the same thing when they have to deal with humanity: “wait a minute: do not be afraid—this is *GOOD* news; really”. What patience it must take to deliver even the best news to we fearful souls. Its quite a process: first you have to make your appearance, then you have to calm people down from hysteria sufficiently to say what must be said, and only then might you be able to see the light dawn on the uncomprehending that this might be something we want to hear. Whether as a solo or a whole multitude, encountering the pronouncement of “God is here, and his salvation is at hand” has to take some getting used to.

I wonder how often we are like Ebenezer Scrooge are disinclined to hear, and less given to listening—really listening to what God is saying instead of is missing what we hear as “You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato. There’s more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!” in encountering the warning ghost of his partner Marley. We are given to sound, logical explanations of things, and disinclined to listening too long to that which fails to the suit our ears. Perhaps do we miss the announcements of God with us that ring in our time and place, that would seek to excite even our weary hearts? Perhaps so. Leaning again on Mr. Dickens, I wonder whether it can be said of us that we keep Christmas well, noting the occasion to hear again the glad tidings of great joy, and not a holiday bound with tradition and wrapped in familiarity to be trotted out, appreciated, and then tucked away like our favorite Christmas Sweetener. Are we afraid of what we might hear? How might we miss the angels of today, inviting us to that which God is doing now?

Christmas must be about opening ourselves to the ways of God in the here and now every bit as much it was then. God, grant us the courage to encounter the song that is sung by the choirs of today, and the keenness to stop in awe, knowing glory when we find it.

Songs of Celebration and Proclamation by Request (1-2 Verses; 2-3 songs)

Offering

Listening for God with us: Revelation 21:1-5A (*reader [TBD] lights 4th candle*)

21 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth;
for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away,
and the sea was no more.

² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem,
coming down out of heaven from God,
prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,
“See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them as their God;
they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them;

⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.”

⁵ And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.”

Meditation Part III

“See, I am making all things new.” That is the promise. That is the hope. That is our song, in this season and every season. As unchangeable as the seasons seem, and as impossibly immovable the troubles of our lives and our world are with us, and they are real, and they are myriad, that is the pronouncement, the hope we must keep before us. It is a matter of faith; try though we might to prove that this is real, that the world of the kingdom remains under construction even yet, that the way of God holds promise to us even here, even yet. The way of faith is the way of hope as that the world is about to turn.

Which cannot be taken lightly. Hope is an all too rare commodity. We look at our world, look at our problems, look at our lives, and we struggle to know what is about to happen, let alone to be able to rest in a meaningful hope that it is good. Yet, time and again that is exactly what we are invited to: to hope in God, to keep the vision of a new heaven and new earth ringing forth, even when the din of the insolvable problems seem so massive. We have whole generations convinced that hope is beyond them in facing the realities of the changing world and altering environment. We know our lives can sometimes seem unchanging, unchangeable.

Yet hear this: God has dwelt, is dwelling, and will dwell among the people. This is about the work of God in past, present and future. God's hope rises even beyond the certainties of the day. God's reconciling vision promises that there is no place we can be where God is not. This is the Good News; that God has come and dwelt among us, and hope remains alive. May the sweet sound of the everlasting song fill our ears, enliven our hearts, and set us marching yet again to the beat of God's future forever more. Merry Christmas is a declaration of hope; May it be so for you, now and always. Amen

Songs of Anticipation and hope by request (2-3 songs, 1-2 verse each)

Sharing and Response

Congregational Prayer

Closing Song: HWB 209 *Oh How Joyfully*

Benediction