

‘Enter Into the Song’
Rev. Dr. Ann C. Kemper
December 20, 2015

based on Luke 1:39-45 and Luke 1:47-55

I’m about to say something that I know has the power to ruffle a few feathers; rile up some strong opinions; and you can bet I’ll get more than a few comments after worship.

I really don’t like singing Christmas carols before Christmas.

I know! I know! Singing carols is part of what brings the Christmas spirit alive. But it has always felt, to me, a little like jumping the gun.

It’s skipping over the melodic Pastoral and jumping right into heralding angels without stopping to smell the roses.

I have tried this year, and in years past, to find a way to tread the line of compromise without completely caving to the Christmas Carol dilemma.

This year it occurred to me that a simple sermon or lesson about the progression from Advent to Christmas is in order.

So, get out your hymnals! We’re going to Enter into the Song...beginning with the Promised Coming and ending with the Birth of Christ.

I always tell my Confirmation students, if you’re confused by what the sermon is about or the focus of worship, just read the hymns.

Hymns are the way we ‘fill-in-the-blanks’ and give dimension to theology that can’t be done by words and prayers alone.

Songs fill a gap that can instill a deeper, richer understanding of scripture. Songs can help us internalize the message in ways that stick. Ask any child to recite the alphabet and you can be sure it will be by singing...and many of the ways we have learned about Jesus is by entering into the song.

Our first carol is from the

Black hymnal: #2091 – verse 1 (We’re going to end worship today with this hymn, but it is good to remind ourselves what exactly it is we’re waiting for!)

[sing]

‘The King of Glory Comes’ is a relatively “new” song set to the tune of a traditional Israeli folk song. The words help prepare us by encouraging us to open the gates of our hearts to welcome this King of glory.

The promise is an ancient one...God who will come to us will rule our hearts and minds as a King of peace, justice, and love. We open the gates of our hearts and lift our voices in song.

Red hymnal: #213 – verse 2

‘Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates’ was written as a song in 1642, and is based on Psalm 24. People have been singing this hymn of preparation for 373 years! But as a Psalm in praise of God, people have been singing it for over 2000 years!

Generations of faithful followers sang how it wasn’t enough to just open the gates of your heart a little bit... but to fling wide the portals of your heart! Adorn your hearts with prayer and love and joy...

God cannot enter the temple of your heart if it’s only open a crack. Open your hearts! Fling wide the portals!

Red hymnal: #216 – verse 3

Truthfully, this has never been one of my favorite preparation hymns. I think it might be the tune; but there is no question the words are a powerful introduction into the theology of Emmanuel, God with us. “True man yet very God, from sin and death now save us, and share our every load.”

To fling wide the portals of our heart means we make ourselves vulnerable to the theology of Christmas: God, who comes to share our suffering, to save us from our selfish, unjust tendencies, and to offer hope that the sins that keep us from being faithful and justice-loving are purged from our hearts and minds.

Understanding who is coming to walk among us; share life with us; and to suffer for us...isn’t the Christmas cookie/ Frosty the Snowman kind of Christmas that competes for our attention. It is the Christmas of light and revelation.

The journey through Advent is a journey of confronting and distinguishing between that which is real and that which is...glitter.

Red hymnal: #223 – verse 3

This isn’t one we sing often is it? “Come, dearest child, into our hearts, and leave your crib behind you! Let this be where the new life starts for all who seek and find you.”

This is the fourth Sunday of Advent...are the gates of our hearts open wide enough to receive God with us? Can we hold nothing back, but fling wide the gate, welcoming the One who comes to love us? The babe will leave the crib...and we must leave it too and start a new life, a new way, a new level of commitment.

We are Easter people, after all. We know how the story ends. But by reliving and anticipating and preparing every Advent for a new life helps us grasp the gift of grace in Emmanuel.

Last song: Red hymnal: #230 – verse 4

“Cast out our sin, and enter in, be born *in* us today.” That pretty much says it all, doesn’t it?

The angels are singing! I think we’re ready.

Preparing for the coming of Christ into our hearts takes preparation; ...reflection; ...commitment; ...focus...and a willingness to dial out the noise of competing allegiances.

We can't expect to be ready for Christmas morning without preparation.

Today's scripture reading from Luke was the familiar story of Mary and Elizabeth, and Mary's Song of praise...the Magnificat.

This was a familiar song to Mary and Elizabeth. It had been sung before in the ancient texts: by Hannah, who praised God for opening her womb to conceive a child; and by Miriam, sister of Moses, who praised God for deliverance from the Pharaoh's soldiers as they escaped from Egypt.

The song that Mary sang would have been as familiar to her and Elizabeth as 'O Little Town of Bethlehem' is to us.

Mary accepted the chosen-ness of God's own choosing and entered into the song.

Advent is a time we enter into the songs that speak to our hearts and minds of God's everlasting, ever-present spirit with us.

We have much to learn from the God/man Jesus in the coming year. Are we ready? Are the portals of our hearts flung wide so that Emmanuel, the King of Glory may enter in?

I pray that is so.

Amen.