

The Christmas Missive 2021



A Proclamation

Many ages after God created the heavens and the earth,
When man and woman were formed in God's own image;
Long after the great flood, when God set the rainbow in the clouds as a
sign of the covenant;
Twenty-one centuries from the time of Abraham and Sarah;
Thirteen centuries after Moses led God's people to freedom;
Eleven centuries from the time of Ruth and the judges;
A thousand years from the anointing of David as king;
In the one hundred and ninety-fourth Olympiad;
The seven hundred and fifty-second year from the founding of the city of
Rome;
In the forty second year of the reign of Octavian Augustus;
In the sixth age of the world, all earth being at peace,
Jesus Christ, eternal God, Son of the eternal Father,
Willing to hallow the world by his coming in mercy,
Was born of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem of Judea.
Today is the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, God made Flesh

Hymn 83 *O come, all ye faithful*

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye, to Bethlehem;
Come, and behold him, born the King of angels;

O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation;
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above;
Glory to God, glory in the highest;

Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning;
Jesus, to thee be glory given;
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing;

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qXAWEcITEsU>

Leader: Blessed are you, God of all creation,

People: And blessed are the families into which you gather us.

Leader: You come to us in everything you have created, in the seas, stars, rivers and rocks. Now we celebrate the expected gift of yourself, sent to us as a fragile child, sharer of our flesh and blood. Fill us, we pray with your Holy Spirit that we might follow the star of your hope, reflect the light of your grace, and freely offer own gifts wherever we go. Shine in us like the blazing sun. With all that is trivial and false, force our roots deeper into your mercy; drive us to seek rest and replenishment in the oceans of your love. **Amen**

Hymn 96 *Angels we have heard on high*

Angels we have heard on high, sweetly singing o'er the plains,
And the mountains in reply echoing their joyous strains.
Gloria in excelsis Deo, gloria in excelsis Deo.

Shepherds, why this jubilee; why these songs of happy cheer?
What great brightness did you see? What glad tidings did you hear?

Come to Bethlehem and see him whose birth the angels sing;
Come, adore on bended knee Christ the Lord, the newborn King.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B5iaV989_5M

Isaiah 9:2-7

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. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 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 onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Psalm 98

O sing to the Lord a new song* ***For he has done marvelous things.***

The Lord has made known his victory* ***His vindication in the sight of the nations.***

He has remembered his steadfast love* ***And faithfulness to the house of Israel.***

Make a joyful noise to the Lord* ***Break forth into joyous song.***

Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre* ***With the lyre and the sound of melody.***

With trumpets and the sound of the horn* ***Make a joyful noise before the Lord.***

Let the sea roar, and all that fills it* ***The world and all who live in it.***

Let the floods clap their hands* ***Let the hills sing together for joy.***

At the presence of the Lord* ***For he comes to judge the earth.***

He will judge the world with righteousness* ***And the peoples with his truth.***

Hebrews 1:1-12

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you"? Or again, "I will be his Father, and he will be my Son"? And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." Of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, and his servants flames of fire." But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions." And, "In the beginning, Lord, you founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like clothing; like a cloak you will roll them up, and like clothing they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will never end."

Hymn 110 *The snow lay on the ground*

The snow lay on the ground, the stars shone bright,
When Christ our Lord was born on Christmas night.
Venite adoremus Dominum; venite adoremus Dominum.

Venite adoremus Dominum; venite adoremus Dominum.

Saint Joseph, too, was by to tend the child;
To guard him, and protect his mother mild;
The angels hovered round, and sang this song,
Venite adoremus Dominum.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KemJiHjzakQ>

Luke 2:1-20

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 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: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Christmas Eve 2021

O sing to the Lord a new song -- for the grace of God has appeared, offering salvation to all, leaving us room to question our worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-aware, creative and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of Jesus Christ who gave himself that he might redeem us from all iniquity and shepherd a people who are zealous for good deeds.

In religions, there are two dimensions: these are sometimes described by as the horizontal dimension, which comprises our relationships with our fellow human beings, and the vertical dimension: our relationship with the Higher Powers. A lot of religious believers place a higher priority on the vertical dimension, calling it the primary focus, the real deal. But as Isaac Bashevis Singer points out, the essence of religion is the horizontal dimension, how we comport ourselves amongst our fellow creatures. The vertical dimension is only important insofar as its results in better horizontal human action.

Contemporary evolutionists have shed light on the effects enduring religions like Christianity have on their adherents: although cooperation and altruism don't confer much, if any advantage on individuals, groups with lots of cooperative people in them outperform other groups. Natural selection pulls in the direction of survival of the fittest, it's true, maximizing the individual slice of a given pie, but natural selection also pulls in the direction of group flourishing; how well do we succeed at making bigger pies? We are seeing in our own time the result when peoples fail to cooperate with one another.

But on this very day, we gather here to revel in the excitement and wonder at the miracle of a tangible, walking, talking God, who comes alive for us by coming alive in us. As we celebrate the day of Jesus' birth, we reassert our common identity as joyfully thoughtful and well intentioned people. And if we, according to Jesus' example, become conscious of the selflessness and sacrifice that constitute Christian lives, if we are determined to seek ways of pacifying human strife, healing human suffering, and expanding human cooperation, we can take comfort in one underlying truth: Christ is come again to validate these our purposes in an atmosphere friendly to our bolder selves.

Christmas was not celebrated by early Christians – birthday parties were a heathen custom. When the Puritans were briefly in charge of England, celebrating Christmas was forbidden by law and in Massachusetts, before the Revolution, Christmas observance could earn you a jail sentence if you were caught. You'd better watch out indeed! Boisterous revelry and pagan symbols like brightly decorated trees – despite their origins in the festival of lights -- were seen as distractions, deflecting true believers from their primary purpose in life, which was a kind of purity.

But a religion whose understanding of God does not evolve has little chance of surviving the test of time. Lots of us now know it is wondrous and good to celebrate together. We have come to understand that purity is

overrated, all it does is push folks to the vertical focus of religion that overlooks the horizontal, which matters more. It just makes people want to get higher on some fantastic ladder and look down on other people. No, we celebrate because it is joyful and fun, and because celebrating together makes us better neighbors. We celebrate because there is one night of the year when the arrival of God in our midst is the central event. The rest of the year we turn our attentions – more or less – to the implications and obligations of this night.

One implication is, of course that God is with us, and will always be with us and in us. Outside of a relationship with God, we do not operate or exist except in brief temporality. One obligation this brings is self-examination: Who am I trying to be? How am I trying to respond to my godly potential? The possibilities are endless. Time and again, we sing with the Psalmist, “Sing to the Lord a new song.” The Archbishop of Canterbury said recently, “We have to face the fact that the vast majority of people under 35 not only think that some of the things we say are incomprehensible, but also think that, about some things we are just plain wrong, unjust, maybe even wicked.” We absolutely must take that into account when we imagine and formulate the new songs of ours.

From Psalm 19: “The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims God’s handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech and night to night declares knowledge.” Christ is born again this night because God is still communicating with us daily, influencing us and accompanying us through this life, if we will only pay attention. That wellspring of openmindedness, imagination and creativity, that came into this life as a Bethlehem baby once -- and that once again comes into life tonight -- is the origin of our celebration.

Here from the Gospel of Mary (not in your everyday Bible):

O light of life we have known you

O womb of all that grows we have known you

O womb pregnant with the nature of God we have known you

O never-ending endurance of God who gives birth, we worship your goodness

This is known as Mary’s Thanksgiving Prayer, and is among the many early Christian documents that have been unearthed over the last century

and a half. Known as the Gnostic Gospels, they were characterized as the work of early Christian heretics: men in power decided were wrong. Several stories, like this one, are told from the point of view of women. The Gospel of Mary, for instance, tells the story of Mary Magdalene, one of Jesus's closest associates, who has been given teachings from Jesus that she passes on to his male disciples.

O light of life we have known you

O womb of all that grows we have known you

O womb pregnant with the nature of God we have known you

O never-ending endurance of God who gives birth, we worship your goodness

Tonight there is a womb pregnant with divinity itself, making us ready for taking that next step forward, in our relationships that are hurting or broken, the parts of our minds that don't know what to do, and the many areas of our societies that need help."

Tonight is the night for new birth, in our hearts, in our churches, and in our family of nations. Tonight God offers fresh purpose and new joy to the world. Tonight God joins us in a new beginning, a new song that propels us to a Merry Christmas and a happier, better year to come.

Prayers for healing and strength: Karen, Kyle, Bill, Carrie, Judy,

For those who have died: John Burke, Nöelle Valentine

Hymn 112 *In the bleak midwinter*

In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,
In the bleak midwinter, long ago.

Angels and archangels may have gathered there,
Cherubim and seraphim thronged the air;
But his mother only, in her maiden bliss,
Worshiped the beloved with a kiss.

What can I give him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wise man, I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give him--give my heart.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2dTbnh0A0c>

Prayer after Communion

Most gracious God, Author of all Creation on this night you have made known to us again the power and wonder of Christ's birth and the gift of your blessed Communion. Confirm our faith, fix our eyes on your will, give us compassionate hearts and send us forth to be healers in this suffering world. To you be glory and dominion now and forever. **Amen.**

Hymn 111 *Silent Night*

Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin mother and child, holy Infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace; sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night, shepherds quake at the sight,
Glories stream from heaven afar, heavenly hosts sing alleluia;
Christ, the Savior, is born! Christ, the Savior, is born!

Silent night, holy night, son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from thy holy face, with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord at thy birth; Jesus, Lord at thy birth.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=19L_Gnul8Rc

Now may the Lord go before you with heavenly light, always and everywhere, that you may perceive with clear sight, act with pure intention and revere one another with true affection. And may the blessing of God Almighty, Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier remain with you and your loved ones this day and forevermore.

Hymn 100 *Joy to the world*

Joy to the world! the Lord is come: let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare him room, and heaven and nature sing,
And heaven and nature sing, and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.

Joy to the world! the Savior reigns; let us our songs employ,
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains,
Repeat the sounding joy, repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove
The glories of his righteousness and wonders of his love,
And wonders of his love, and wonders, wonders of his love.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bukaA1sz0MQ>

Christmas Poinsettias Given By:

Mary Sue Gee in loving memory of Irene and Robert Webb

Edith Ross in thanksgiving for the marriage of Taylor and Graham Farrell

Jan and Bob Swanson in loving memory of Fen, Angie and Danny Warner

Christine and Lee Johnson in loving memory of Ina Abraham

Donna Baker in memory of loving husband John Baker

Dorene Hughes in loving memory of Ian and Don Hughes

Sally Young and Jane Gersten in loving memory of Bob Yong and Roy Gersten