

Christmas Eve emotions Sermon
Open Our Hearts
Dec 24, 2021

Let us pray. May the words that I share this evening be pleasing to you and touch all our hearts drawing each of us closer to you – God of love. Amen

Tonight, Christmas Eve, is a time for the heart more so than for the mind. Everything about tonight invites us to feel something rather than to think something. A bright star shining in the night leading the shepherds to the manger; a heavenly host of angels singing glory to God in the highest and a very special baby boy being born; he is lying in a manger wrapped in swaddling cloth warmly and securely cared for by Mary and Joseph. More than any other service of the year, we come tonight **not** wanting to hear so much about proofs of biblical texts and reasons for some great truth or mystery of God but wanting more to feel and experience the warmth and love, the softness and wonder of God coming to us. That is why we focus tonight on listening to scripture and singing the Christmas hymns that move within us – and touch that special place in our hearts.

We call this a religious service, but it is hard for us to separate the non-religious traditions that are going on around us this sacred night from the secular traditions -- a Christmas tree aglow with lights and a whole array of ornaments full of sentimental value- not to mention the gifts underneath the tree that will soon be opened. Our senses, sight, taste, touch, and sound are all awakened this night. It's a night when we want to feel what we believe; more than say: I believe in God; tonight, we want to feel God's presence and know the touch of God's hand upon us.

I want to remind us that God is with each of us – always and we don't have to only seek God's presence one night a year. God is not only in the church – but at home with those watching from home right now too. The presence of God is not only found in the music in the hymnal, but in all kinds of music of the season.

You can ask my husband – I start listening to Christmas music the weekend after Thanksgiving, when I begin to decorate the house with Christmas decorations new and old. Every year a wooden Santa's sleigh comes out that was my mother's. She had a flower arrangement in it – that Santa's sleigh, is filled today with greens and flowers white and red carnations as it was when I was a child. That sleigh has had a prominent place in our home through out Advent.

I love all the familiar Christmas carols but there is one Christmas song – that brings tears to my eyes because it symbolizes for me the deep love and grace that Jesus' life came to remind us of. It's not in our hymnal, and I haven't heard it yet this season – until I played it on my computer myself. Do you know the song "The Christmas Shoes" – it was made into a movie. My children actually bought me the movie one year – knowing how much I loved the song and the story. In case you don't know it - It's a tender song of a very poor little boy trying to buy his "Mamma" a pair of shoes. The song says, "it's Christmas Eve, and his Daddi says "Mamma" doesn't have much time – she's been sick for quit a while"; the little boy tells the store clerk – "these shoes will make her smile – and I want her to look beautiful – if "Mama" meets Jesus tonight. The song goes on and you realize he doesn't have enough money to buy the shoes– and the man standing behind him in line helps out. The song is written from that gentleman's perspective and it ends with the man being so touched by the love and compassion of this little

boy he says--- “I know that I caught a glimpse of heavens love tonight”.(unquote)
For me this song touches so many emotions – emotions that seem to be heightened at this time of year. It highlights so many of the gifts that Jesus came to give us; Hope, peace, joy, love, mercy, kindness, compassion and so much more.

I tell you about this song because I think it’s important to remember that the wonder and love of God is not just in church but in each of us. We find God’s love in songs that are not always about God, but about the goodness of human kind. We find God’s love in grocery stores, and classrooms. The song and Jesus’ birth remind us about the giving of yourself to others in need. We find God’s love in the memories of times gone by – a special Christmas ornament, the scent of the Christmas Tree and even an old wooden sleigh.

In a few minutes we are going to sing together the hymn “Silent Night, Holy Night” – This is a special hymn for so many people. I find it interesting to know how it came to be. Joseph Mohr was assistant priest in Austria when he wrote this hymn in 1818. The church organ had just broken down, so Joseph quickly sat down Christmas Eve morning and wrote this tune and lyrics to be played on his guitar. He played it that night at the Christmas Eve service. He and the pastor sang the stanzas and the choir repeated the last two lines in four-part harmony.

So here we are a little over 200 years later – singing Silent Night, get your candles ready – and let the sights, and sounds surround you and touch all your emotions.

It doesn’t matter why or what draws you closer to God, or what causes you to want to seek a spiritual life with God – what matters is that we all seek to live our

lives sharing the many gifts that Jesus gave us so long ago – the gifts of hope, peace, joy, love. Tonight, on this special night – we remember the little baby born in a stable and laid to rest in a manger and we open our hearts to all the gifts that Jesus' life gave us. May our time together in worship this evening fill each of us with God's love. Amen