

“The Music of Christmas”
Colossians 3:12-17

- 12 Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved,
 clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.
- 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone.
 Forgive as the Lord forgave you.
- 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.
- 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.
 And be thankful.
- 16 Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly
 as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom
 through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.
- 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus,
 giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Introduction

Christians have always created and have sung joyful, stirring songs that celebrate the wonder of our relation with God. I am thankful for composers and song writers who have expressed faith in Jesus through music especially for the Christmas season with songs and carols. In contrast to this, comedian Steve Martin performed a song on The Late Show with David Letterman. Have a look on YouTube. (www.youtube.com/watch?v=wogta8alHiU).

“You know, religious people have such beautiful music and art. And atheists have nothing... until now. This is the entire atheists’ hymnal (one sheet of paper), a little song called “Atheists Don’t Have No Songs.”

“Christians have their hymns and pages, Hava Nagila’s for the Jews,
Baptists have the rock of ages, Atheists just sing the blues.
Romantics play Claire de Lune, Born agains sing “He is risen,”
But no one ever wrote a tune, For godless existentialism.
For Atheists there’s no good news. They’ll never sing a song of faith.
In their songs they have one rule: The ‘he’ is always lowercase (The ‘he’ is always lowercase).”

Of course, Steve Martin’s humor is meant to entertain us. And it does. But what a contrast to music that moves the heart and nurtures faith. It makes sense that tears and joy often accompany Christmas music like the biblical words and baroque style of Handel’s *Messiah*, like the Nativity Carol of John Rutter the choir will sing tonight, or the many carols of Christmas.

Jesus the Christ, the Messiah brings with him an invitation unlike any other. “O Come, All Ye Faithful.” Come and see the Father, the Creator, the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. Come and see the Son, the Light, and the Overcomer of darkness. Come and see the Presence of the Holy Spirit, Giver of Life

and Faith. It's why St. Paul can write to the Colossian church in the passage we read: "With psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, sing to God with gratitude in your hearts."

A recent Pew Research Center survey asked about belief in four parts of the biblical Christmas account: that an angel heralded the birth of Jesus; that it was a virgin birth; that he was placed in a manger; and that the magi were guided by a star to the child Jesus. Only 57% of Americans believe in all four, down from 65% in 2014. Self-identified theists and the religiously unaffiliated were less likely now than in the past to believe the story of Jesus' birth. And, there was "a small but significant decline in the share of Christians who believe the Christmas narrative contained in the Bible."

I. Compassion? Kindness? Humility? Gentleness? Patience?

Have you ever wondered, "What if Jesus had never been born?" What would be your life be like if Jesus hadn't come? What realities and beauties and graces would you miss? On one hand, it's an impossible question. Earlier in Colossians, the Bible tells us how the whole universe is in him, through him, and for him (Col. 1:16). Without him, everything comes apart. On the other hand, it can help us appreciate Jesus coming to consider individual blessings owing directly to him.

An easy answer to the question is to look at religious or political places in the world today where Jesus isn't allowed. In predominantly religious Muslim countries and in political Communist countries, human rights are virtually non-existent. Freedoms that we so enjoy and take for granted are impossible.

But, mostly, if Jesus hadn't come, we wouldn't know the fullness of God's love. In John 15, Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." And Jesus did. As Paul preached in Romans 5, "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."

If Jesus didn't come, we wouldn't know the depths of God's humility and compassion toward us. The Bible speaks of how Jesus took on and understands all of our weaknesses and temptations and sufferings. And he did it that we might also be more merciful toward others. "Therefore," writes Paul, "Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." The world would be more greatly impoverished in these things had Jesus not been born.

And, if Christmas didn't happen, neither did Good Friday or Easter Sunday. We wouldn't know his atoning death and life-giving resurrection. We wouldn't know our own salvation. God's word declares "If while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life" (also in Romans 5).

Christmas is seeing and enjoying Jesus as the incomparable Son of God. May God give you eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to rejoice in the music of Christmas, enjoying Jesus Christ with ever-increasing clarity, joy, and awe.

II. Singing Psalms, Hymns, Spiritual Songs

Then Paul writes, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts... Let the word of Christ dwell among you richly... all in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

In the silly movie *Talladega Nights*, the character Ricky Bobby prays at the dinner table with his family. With eyes closed and hands clasped, he prays, “Lord, baby Jesus” and “tiny, infant Jesus” and “8 pound- 6 ounce- newborn infant Jesus.” He can't even finish his prayer before his wife chimes in— “Hey, you know, sweetie, Jesus did grow up.” Ricky responds, “I like the Christmas Jesus best and I'm saying grace. When you say grace, you can say it to grown up Jesus or teen-age Jesus or to bearded Jesus or whoever you want.” Ricky's wife is challenging the many people who celebrate Christmas and leave the baby Jesus there for the rest of the year. There are only two passages in the New Testament about Christmas: Matthew 1 “And you shall name him Jesus for he will save his people from their sins,” and Luke 2 “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ, the Messiah, the Lord.” So, Mrs. Ricky's saying, “Don't leave baby Jesus in the manger.”

God always initiates, we are always called to respond. The Lord embraces us with the gift of unmerited favor. Faith begins by simply receiving that gift. But the gift is meant to be used. How many gifts do we give or receive for Christmas where the gift is shelved, never used or even thrown away!

For Christmas to be effective, you and I have to “Let.” Let the Peace of Christ rule. Let the Word of Christ dwell, “pitch its tent,” live in you. Contrary to what the world often thinks about Christians, our life and faith in Christ aren't measured by the things we do or don't do, but from being in Christ, dying with Christ and being raised with Christ. Paul is calling the Colossians (and us) to live out what they have already become, because one has already been saved and created new.



Christmas is meant to start that new life in Christ. Trusting and believing, experiencing the fruits of faith, integrating faith and life, seeking spiritual growth, holding life affirming values, promoting social change, acting and serving. These are the marks of a mature life. So, don't leave Jesus in the manger.

Conclusion

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, you are holy,” set apart for special use. And you are “dearly loved.” Is there anything more important? To know that you are loved? As Mother Teresa and the Sisters of Mercy had attended to the poorest of the poor, they certainly provided for physical needs, but their mission was, to quote, “We must be able to radiate the joy of Christ, express it in our actions... We want to make them feel that they are loved.” Therefore, Paul writes, “Clothe yourselves (put on this Christmas outfit, new clothes): compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience... And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Live in the joy of the music of Christmas.