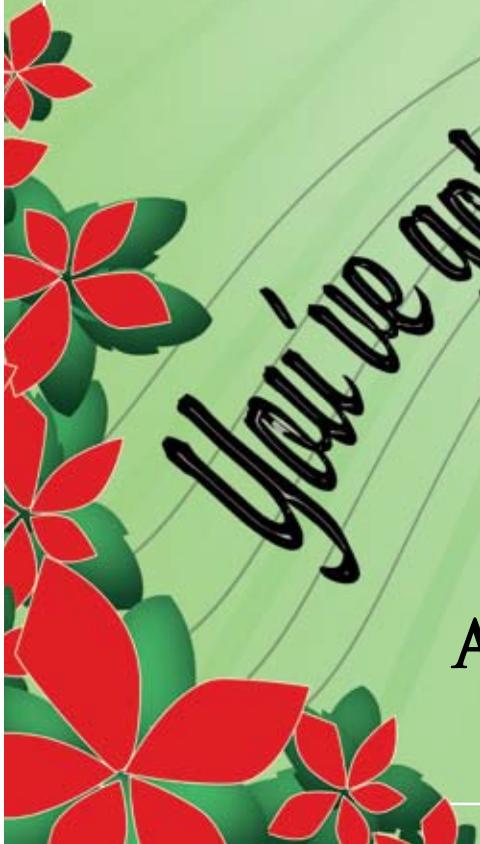


Awake!

You've got a Song to Sing

FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH
of NORTH HOLLYWOOD ELDERS'
ADVENT MEDITATIONS
2012



1 DECEMBER 2012

ROBERT M. BOCK, SENIOR PASTOR

I don't remember the year but I'll never forget the song. It was Christmas Eve. Dolores Immel, who had an angelic voice, began quietly singing from her place in the front row of the choir:

*December Child, born on a cold cold mornin',
All stars had gone except for the one bright light.
The world was sleepin' when you arrived in all your meekness.
December child you came to help us get our mind right.*

I don't think it was the words so much as it was the way Dolores sang them. The song became one of my favorites and I requested that Dolores sing it every year. It was written by Bob Moline who studied with Earle Immel at Valley College. Bob became well known for his musical compositions with the Disney organization.

Another favorite is "Sweet Little Jesus Boy" written in the 1930s by Robert MacGimsey. Written in the style of the African Americans with whom MacGimsey worked as a young man, it begins:

*Sweet little Jesus boy,
They made you be born in a manger;
Sweet little holy child,
We didn't know who you were.*

Most of my favorite Christmas songs are simple and quiet stories of Jesus' birth. Don't misunderstand, I appreciate more than most a full pipe organ, brass, and choir singing the "Hallelujah Chorus" and I really enjoy hearing the congregation singing "The First Noel," "Hark the Herald Angels Sing," and other Christmas favorites. But in the quietness of Christmas Eve I gravitate toward the simple, quiet songs like "December Child" and "Sweet Little Jesus Boy." Such songs always touch my soul.

The Elders chose an interesting theme for their 2012 Advent Meditation Book: "You've Got a Song to Sing." I was there when that theme was chosen back in August, but it didn't hit me until I began writing . . . I couldn't write a song if my life depended on it. I stand in total awe and admiration of Josh Elson, John Henry Kreidler, Ty Parr, and the many others in our church family who write beautiful, meaningful, and significant songs and music. But me . . . write a song? You've got to be kidding? What were the Elders thinking?

However, giving more thought it was obvious that "song" doesn't necessarily mean a melodious "song" like in singing. "Song" can be the movement of your mind that guides you to do a random act of kindness. "Song" can be the sound of your heart being touched and

opened to help a person in the midst of crisis. A “song” can be the echoing sound of your footprints walking down a lonely hospital corridor to visit someone in pain. The notes of our personal songs are the notes found in the ebb and flow of our everyday life. Those notes are our heart beating the rhythm of life.

Each of us has a song to sing ... a song of praise, a song of love, a song of wonder. No one else has a song exactly like our songs and our songs are not like those of anyone else. I’m not sure where the Spirit will lead the Elders in writing their meditations this year. However, I do know this: they will share their songs with you. That is their Christmas gift to you and our church family and friends. I hope that reading about their songs will inspire you to sing your own song loudly and beautifully or softly and sweetly in thanksgiving for the Christ Child.

The December Child did come on a cold, cold morning to bring the warmth of God’s Love to the world.

May this Advent Season be filled with the beauty of your song.

Pergé!
Pastor Bob

2 DECEMBER 2012

PATSY MEYER KREITLER

When we were given “Awake, you have a song to sing” as the theme for Advent, I thought it would be easy to write because I am both a singer and songwriter. It has proven to be challenging because I couldn’t decide if the song was 1) a new song, 2) a (song) seed started needing completion, or 3) a song not yet written. I thought about these three stages of songs (which are in my files) and how these three stages could compare to our relationship with Christ.

I have woken many times with a new song idea brewing in my mind, hence the paper and pen on the night stand so I can frantically scribble before it disappears. I have also woken many times with something new that God has put on my heart, things like call this person, forgive that person, give this away to this person, or say you are sorry, etc. When we continually listen, God can create something new in our hearts that transforms us into new creations.

Then there’s the seed of a song that’s started but keeps dancing around in the “where do I go with this” file in the back of our minds. It is possible we haven’t explored the depth of what Jesus might do in us or where He may take us in the walk we have started with Him. Sometimes songs, people, and God go in different places than we think they will. God has written different endings to some of the “songs” of my life than those I would have written

myself. It's up to me to be in relationship with Him every day so I can be co-creator with Christ and follow through with what He puts on my heart to the finish.

When thinking about Jesus, in parallel to the song not yet written, I think of taking the moments to sit down at the piano or comfy chair and allow the space for the creative process to begin. Sometimes we have to "Be Still" and sit in that holy space with God to allow Him to stir up something in our relationship with Him. Perhaps God is getting ready to make a change in our hearts or use gifts we've yet to use for His glory. I think of songs as my "babies," so it's like waiting for a baby to be born once I start it and waiting for it to be fully finished.

So, I encourage you to be awake as you anticipate celebrating the birth of the Christ child. During this Advent Season, listen for Jesus' call to sing a new or different "song," to finish a "song" He has started in you, or perhaps to allow the birth of a "song" not yet written.

3 DECEMBER 2012

RICHARD FOLLETT

"Awake! You have a song to sing" was selected as the theme for these Advent meditations this year to show that each of us has our individual song, our individual contributions to make, but, as a member of the choir, I have a different take on it also. You see, I define my singing voice as a choral voice, not a solo voice. In public speaking, as a college professor I'm perfectly comfortable going solo, but in singing, there are others much better than I, and I'm more than content to support them, to sing backup for them, and to blend in with my peers from the back row.

Yes, I have a song to sing with the choir, but it's in harmony with, in conjunction with, and (I hope—wait for the pun here) in tune with my fellow singers.

And isn't that, too, an important song to sing? We can't have a choir of one. The choir of angels in the Gospel of Luke was not a solo. There's a magic, a joy, a power in the blending of heavenly voices, and most songs work best when no single voice stands out.

So, this Advent season, I'm content to sing my song with others, to blend in, to rejoice in the harmonies, and to share the music with my peers. You soloists can go your own way; I'm singing with my friends and we're having a jolly good time.

4 DECEMBER 2012

SHERI IZZARD

Share Your Song in Prayer and in Service

A song is an expression of who we are, our thoughts, joys, fears, desires and hopes, which is shared with God and often others. So here comes Christmas, when, once again, we are renewed with Jesus' song. Maybe a good title for the song of Jesus would be "Faith, Hope and Love." His example, his song, is a code to follow for your own song, still being composed and shared.

Mary, before Jesus' birth, expressed a song of her life (Song of Mary), that she would gracefully carry her purpose given by the angel, to completion—raising up Jesus to be the Savior of mankind. She was in prayer when this came to her, whether she was bowing her head, or clasping her hands, or not. She was hearing the call. She was in communion with God.

God listens and speaks to us every day, in large and small ways, if only we stop long enough to recognize it. Prayer is a song to God when we express ourselves to Him. Our prayers are music to God's ears. He wants to hear from you and for you to listen to him. I truly believe that. And His answers are His song to you. If you're listening, in silent awareness, you have communed with Him and the conversation is a two-way street, much more of a friendship than if you are doing all the talking. Through both speaking and listening, your song is taking shape to be sung...with His guidance. As the friendship grows through this prayerful communion, the music becomes more and more beautiful. He offers faith, hope, love and so much more to you. When you take up that song and add your strengths to it, you will serve the world and God, too.

May Christmas strengthen you to sing your song to the world outside you and bring the music of your love, faith and hope to those around you all of your days.

5 DECEMBER 2012

REV. ALFREDO GÓMEZ

*Tengo un nuevo canto
Pronto está mi corazón, oh Dios, mi corazón está dispuesto;
Cantaré, y trovaré salmos.
Despierta, alma mía; despierta, salterio y arpa;
Me levantaré de mañana.
Te alabaré entre los pueblos, oh Señor;*

*Cantaré de ti entre las naciones.
Porque grande es hasta los cielos tu misericordia,
Y hasta las nubes tu verdad.
Exaltado seas sobre los cielos, oh Dios;
Sobre toda la tierra sea tu gloria.
—Salmo 57:7 -11*

Cantar, me gusta, aunque no se hacerlo; y es algo que disfruto, a solas. Cantar es algo que generalmente nos levanta el animo, creo que todos tenemos un canto que nos gusta, nos bendice o nos hace sentir bien.

Este canto puede estar relacionado con nuestra vida diaria, con algún momento importante de nuestra vida, ser parte de nuestra espiritualidad, recordarnos algo o alguien, o hablar de algún deseo que hay en nosotros en nuestro corazón.

Junto con el canto que nos gusta por lo regular también hay un ritmo de nuestra preferencia, llámese rock, country, pop, himno, salsa, merengue, reggae, góspel, mariachi, o bachata, de tal manera que si escuchamos nuestro canto en un ritmo que no nos gusta, no se oye igual y no sentimos la misma paz, la misma bendición, la misma emoción, sentimiento, o lo que regularmente sentimos.

Por supuesto tengo algunos cantos que me gustan y me hacen sentir todo lo descrito arriba y cada uno es en diferente ritmo, pero hay un canto sencillo pero muy significativo, un canto que no importa en que ritmo sea cantado o por quien sea cantado me hace sentir lo mismo y pensar en lo mismo y es mi esperanza que toda las personas sin importar nación raza o credo podamos ponernos de acuerdo y cantar “al mundo paz” (Peace to the world) pero sobre todo ponerlo en practica.

*I have a new song
My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise.
Awake, my glory; awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early.
I will praise you, O Lord, among the people: I will sing unto you among the nations.
For your mercy is great unto the heavens, and your truth unto the clouds.
Be exalted, O God, above the heavens: let your glory be above all the earth.
—Psalm 57:7-11*

I like singing though it is something that I enjoy alone. Singing is something that usually lifts the spirit, I think we all have a song that we like, that blesses us, or that makes us feel good. This song can be related to our daily life or an important moment of our lives, can be part of our spirituality, can bring us memories, or can speak of a desire in our heart.

Along with the song that we like on a regular basis, there is also a rhythm of our preference—call it rock, country, pop, hymns, salsa, merengue, reggae, gospel, mariachi, or

bachata—in such a way that if we listen to our song at a rhythm that we do not like, it doesn't sound or feel the same or have the same peace, blessing, or emotion we regularly feel.

Of course, I have some songs that I like and that make me feel everything described above and each is in a different rhythm, but there is a very significant song, a song that does not matter if the rhythm is not my preference yet it still makes me feel the same and think the same. My hope is that all people regardless of nation, race, or creed can agree and sing "Peace to the world" but above all to put it in practice.

6 DECEMBER 2012

JAY ALDRICH

How many times are you sitting in church when you look in the bulletin, see various hymns to be sung, check them out by turning to the pages, and say, "Another noncommittal hymn"—it doesn't do anything for you? Well, we all have our favorites ones that we love to sing and ones that really lift our spirits. When we see that we are going to sing one of our favorites, we really need to let the congregation know that it is a favorite: stand up and sing it loudly!

Here are some excerpts from one of my favorite hymns:

Help Us Accept Each Other

*Help us accept each other as Christ accepted us;
teach us as sister, brother, each person to embrace.
Be present, Lord, among us and bring us to believe we
are ourselves accepted and meant to love and live.*

*Teach us, O Lord, your lessons, as in our daily life
we struggle to be human and search for hope and faith.
Teach us to care for people, for all, not just for some,
to love them as we find them or as they may become.*

WORDS: Fred Kaan, 1974

MUSIC: John Ness Beck, 1977

STAND UP AND SING!

7 DECEMBER 2012

JUDY DAY

Songs, whether you sing, dance, or just listen, can wake the soul, tell your mood, or just fill quiet moments. I realize the songs I liked that woke something in me fell into eras.

The first one is in high school, the surf scene, “Wipeout” by the Surfares. I think it was that driving drum beat. In college, it became protest songs and songs of peace. In “If I had a Hammer” by Peter, Paul and Mary, the words stood out. Freedom, justice and love for my brother and sister—what more could I want? When my children were young, I can’t even think of an adult song I sang. “The Wheels on the Bus” occupied my mind and at one point I’m pretty sure I sang it when I was asleep. In the late ‘90s my children had all grown up and “Unanswered Prayers” by Garth Brooks took over. Maybe, just maybe, those prayers I didn’t think were answered were, in God’s way and in His time (things to ponder.) And finally today, our theme is “Awake, you have a song to sing.” This theme had caused me to reflect. I noticed the joy and excitement in singing. I do have a song to sing. It could be “Go tell it on the Mountain, over the hills and everywhere; go tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born”; or Psalm 100, “Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the Lands! Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!” Or maybe one of my favorites in the advent season, “There’s a Song in the Air.”

*There’s a Song in the air there’s a star in the sky!
There’s a mother’s deep prayer and a Baby’s low cry!
And the star rains its fire while the angle choirs sing,
(And the last line of verse 3)
And we greet in the cradle our Savior and King.*

I’ve found my song. What awakes your soul to sing?

8 DECEMBER 2012

ALISON HAWKINS-KEOGH

Heart Song

A song is a pathway though the notes, making various stops at the high points, low points, some longer or shorter, some thinner and emptier. Flat and ominous... rich and loud... sounds like the résumé of my life... sounds like my song... my Heartsong... the travels of my heart. The rests and beats along the way...

I remember a friend having a huge spiritual epiphany several years back that I did not feel particularly equipped to deal with so I just listened and what I heard continually from her lips was "Just be love." She was a newer friend at the time, and although incredibly laser bright, not necessarily open and embracing of a spiritual life, the words "Just be love" were uncharacteristic for her, and I saw very clearly her personal song playing out. She sprinkled these words with wild abandon, continually in conversation: "That's all... just be love." And there was no doubt that where she had catapulted from and to, Spirit had descended upon her... in an explosion! At first I was irked. She had come to me, after all, for spiritual advice, but then her divine insight had surpassed me as she became my teacher... as is often the case.

There is nothing quite like someone exploding into a consciousness of Love before you, in their own life and heart song... to go deeper into your own... especially when it seems so simple.

So remembering this, the verse of my Heartsong amidst anything and everything this Advent season, is 'Just be love...' Walk it, breathe it, accept it, give it... ask for blessing on food with gratitude so that you can eat it... drown it and every living being in your path in it... Forgive and see love and beauty with new eyes... Dance it... Sing it... Laugh it all the way down to your boots... Just create it.. It is our God given right to do just that

In every corner, there is Christ waiting ...even within the mire, with His loving kindness. His Light is coming so that we might remember our hearts and scramble to fly to it...as he gathers us like moths to a Glorious flame... Oh the joyful anticipation, sights, sounds and scents of this beautiful season, ...these...Glory... days..

Awake...and 'Just... be... Love'

Peace.

9 DECEMBER 2012

MARLA FAIN

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not yet seen. —Hebrews 11:1

There have been several times this year when despair and discouragement have threatened to overtake me. My husband and I have had financial difficulties and family members have heard devastating health diagnoses. These negative experiences have been sprinkled throughout the year making the distress seem never-ending. Now it's Christmastime. Oh, boy. I'm supposed to be happy and joyous and, you know what, I am.

I can enjoy this beautiful season because I have faith. My faith and a lot of prayer helped

me get through this awful year and even produced some wonderful results. Faith brings us to a place where we can endure and accept reality. Faith ensures our acceptance of what God has presented us and allows us to embrace all conditions and carry on. Faith also turns the negative into positives. Mary and Joseph prove that.

Mary, a young woman engaged but not yet married, is asked by God's messenger to accept the Holy Spirit and to become pregnant which back then was absolutely unthinkable for a decent Jewish girl. And Joseph, can you imagine the shame and embarrassment he felt as it became known his betrothed was already with child? Yet they both said yes to Gabriel, to God. Because of their faith, we were given the greatest gift known to Man. It's simple; if they didn't have faith, we wouldn't have Jesus.

During difficult times I find prayer intensifies my faith. The answers I hope for don't always come but I am better equipped to handle the adversity; I can accept God's plan for me. So during this Advent season, have some faith along with the eggnog and enjoy yourself! Reflect on Mary and Joseph and their incredible faith and give your love to Jesus.

10 DECEMBER 2012

MARY SUE MALOTTE

Awake, you have a song.

Actually, I have lots of songs. When I was just a toddler, my "mother with the beautiful voice" would rock me and sing to me for hours. Our home was filled with music! Mother played the piano with dexterity. Hum a tune and she could play it as though it was a concert piece.

Some evenings Mother's friends would gather. She would play; they would sing. It always delighted me to sit in a corner and giggle as Dick Durett boomed forth in his basso profundo voice. The high sopranos sometimes made me squirm, but some made me laugh outright. I relish the memory of those times.

At Christmastime Mother and Dad would entertain large groups. Mother would sit and play at the piano, and it was like a magnet. Many would gather round to sing carols, spilling from the music room and the living room into the large reception hall. The music resonated upward, beyond the grand ballroom on the third floor to the wintry sky. What fond memories I have of those days.

The warmest memory is the one of the carol "Silent Night." Early Christmas morning our family of eight and any visiting friends or relatives, would gather at the top of the stairs of our home with lighted candles. While Mother played and sang, we paraded one at a time down the stairs carrying our candles and singing "Silent Night." Santa had come the night before and performed miracles. Lo and behold! In the living room, there was a shimmering lighted tree

and gifts for all.

The greatest gift in that room, however, was shared love! I am sure Jesus smiled and felt very welcome.

Father of the baby Jesus, hear our songs of love and devotion as a gift to all the world. We offer them in Jesus' precious name, amen.

11 DECEMBER 2012

RANDY CARVER

In the spring of 1971, I had just completed my combat tour of duty overseas in the U.S. Army. Out of the army and beginning my graduate studies at UCLA, I was living alone in Beverly Glen trying to get settled, meet people, and make friends. But it was tough trying to assimilate into society. I became depressed, moody, and lonely. One day I heard a song on the radio, so I went out and bought the album with the song, "Morning Has Broken" recorded by Cat Stevens. It was an English hymn that gave me the hope of a new day and a perception that God had made the day for me, filled with infinite creative possibilities and His blessings. Every morning that song helped me to wake up and realize I had a new song to sing. That song had made a huge difference in my life.

Thirteen years ago, I was stopped for a red light driving east on Moorpark Street at Colfax. There on the southeast corner, in front of the FCCNH, was a large banner flopping in the wind. It announced a 5:15 pm Contemporary Worship Service with live music. I was praying at the time and I asked the Lord why I should go back to church. The last time I attended services was at a Baptist Church 27 years ago. After all, I had only stopped feeling guilty about not going to church on Sunday after being away for 27 years. So why should I go now? His answer came, "Randy, people go to church to tell God they love Him," pure and simple. It had never dawned on me before. I said, "But I can tell you that I love you walking on a beach, going for a walk in the park, or sitting in a car at an intersection at a red light like I'm doing right now." His answer, "What's wrong with doing it in church?" I didn't have an answer for that. "OK, OK," I said. "I'll go to that service one time and one time only, UNLESS I hear something I feel You've addressed specifically to me as a sign that I should come back to this church.

As I had promised, the next Sunday, I arrived at the Social Hall doors at 5:15, had some coffee, and a chocolate-chip cookie. I sat down and began to pray that the Lord would let me see or hear a sign whether or not I should return to FCCNH. Immediately after I had said AMEN, the band started playing my old familiar song, "Morning Has Broken"!!! My prayer was answered and I've been at FCCNH ever since. For 12 years, it has been my church home and that has made all the difference in my Life. Awake, you have a song to sing ... indeed.

*Morning has broken, like the first morning
Blackbird has spoken, like the first bird
Praise for the singing, praise for the morning
Praise for the springing fresh from the word*

*Sweet the rain's new fall, sunlit from heaven
Like the first dewfall, on the first grass
Praise for the sweetness of the wet garden
Sprung in completeness where His feet pass*

*Mine is the sunlight, mine is the morning
Born of the one light, Eden saw play
Praise with elation, praise every morning
God's recreation of the new day*

—Lyrics by Eleanor Farjeon

12 DECEMBER 2012

BARBARA WILES

Knowing that I had this Advent Meditation to write and feeling that I am probably one of the most non-musical members of our church, I naturally procrastinated writing until the last minute. By doing so, however, I had the privilege of hearing Dr. Rick Lowry preach at the October 21st morning service. Those of you who also were there may remember these words: "Listen to the melody of your heart." Dr. Lowry reminded us that hospitality, kindness, and justice really count as we metaphorically "dine" with those we daily encounter, as well as those with whom we share the Lord's Table each Sunday.

His words hit home. One of my favorite hymns is "In the Garden" by C. Austin Miles. Written in 1913, it is in our Chalice Hymnal. It was my Dad's all-time favorite hymn and his Dad's, too. I like it because it's about listening. Listening to God!

Gratefully, I realized that my song is the melody in my heart. I do have a song to sing. I have a song to hear. I have a song to live. May I listen more fully to God's voice and act on His wishes for me.

Merry Christmas and a very listening New Year, everyone!

13 DECEMBER 2012

REV. GALEN GOBEN

I seem to wake up many mornings with either the Wally Park or the Cars for Kids song playing on the radio. I try to get my hand up to turn the radio off as quickly as possible, yet it is too late. WHAM! That song is stuck in my head and it is there all day. That song is like a video game that has the infinite lives cheat code programmed in. No matter what I do—sing the song out to the end or put another song on the radio, I can't seem to get rid of it.

I long for that kind of permanence and persistence to be the hallmark of my life with Christ. I know it is there, deep inside me. I know that, not because of anything that I do, but because of who God is. Yet so many distractions get in the way of that song of Life singing itself completely in my life. Worry, fear, anxiety, and the need to prove my own worthiness sing another song. They sing a discordant one to my spirit.

I try to accept that song for what it is (my own false self seeking to divert me from my true self to maintain control) or to block it with a different song (redoubling my efforts to be “good and acceptable” before God). Yet each of them comes from the same place, my attempt to be the composer and conductor of my life.

One of my favorite Christmas songs is “There’s a Song in the Air!”

*We rejoice in the light, and we echo the song
That comes down through the night from the heavenly throng,
And we welcome the glorious gospel they bring,
And we greet in the cradle our savior and king.*

—Chalice Hymnal #159

This verse holds out hope to me. As I open myself to welcome this gospel of Jesus Christ, to rejoice in its Light, I will echo His song, the song of Life. And that song is one I never want to get rid of.

14 DECEMBER 2012

SHERI IZZARD

A song expresses who we are. Jesus “sang this song” to his disciples:

If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish and it will be done for you.If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another (John 15:10-17).

This love song will last forever and will guide us in our own song of life. Through prayer and friendship with Christ and the Father, we can leave a beautiful song for all who come after us. To abide in the Father and his Son, and to pray in the Spirit, in love for one another, is to know God’s framework for the song we must give to the world, in service, thought, word, and deed. Thank You, Lord, for this amazing gift, thank you.

Merry Christmas!

15 DECEMBER 2012

REV. JEFFERSON BEEKER

I Wonder as I Wander

*I wonder as I wander out under the sky,
How Jesus the Savior did come for to die.
For poor on’ry people like you and like I...
I wonder as I wander out under the sky.*

Our lives consist of wandering. We wander through school, through church, through

careers, relationships—you name it, we are a wandering people. Not certainly in the sense that the ancient peoples of Israel wandered without home or geographical roots. Our wandering is not a hopeless, undirected one, but it consists of the experiences we have that shape and form who we are as individuals and as a collective people.

Through all of this wandering we can reflect on the presence of the Christ in our lives, the Christ who began as the tiny baby Jesus, the one who came to gather, redeem, and restore Israel and also to do those things for us.

I think, perhaps, that in our wandering we are constantly in a state of wonder. We are forever answering for Jesus his most important question, “Who do people say that I am?” I would submit that through our wandering the answer to this question may change from time to time.

At Advent we see the baby with much hope ahead for our world. Do we keep Jesus as that one image, or do we allow him to grow in our minds, hearts, and in our faithful belief? Do we allow the baby to become the Christ?

We can take that image of the baby, with that beautiful hope, and we can see that image of the Christ build within us. It built for the person Jesus as he allowed the dove of perfect Spirit to anoint him as the Christ, and it grows for us as we allow that same dove to touch our lives.

16 DECEMBER 2012

IRION DEROUEN

The Song I Sing (and not just at Christmas)

Those who sit near me in church know that I do not sing. Would that I could, but I do not wish to offend my fellow congregants. The song I sing is that of giving. I am not sure why or how this song emerged as the character trait I cherish most. My family was not especially generous in any way, but, even as a child, I was a giving girl.

Consider the Bible verse, Luke 6:38: “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” Although I love this Bible verse, it is not the motivation for my giving, though I must admit, it is the Gospel!

My giving originates from the JOY it brings. Joy rises from giving of my time and my talents, bringing food to those in need, listening to those who need to be heard, supporting monetarily those I can, giving gifts to those I love throughout the year in all sorts of ways.

At Christmastime, we all have the opportunity to give, especially to First Christian Church

of North Hollywood through involvement and volunteering. It is a beautiful season, celebrating the ONE who gave so much to us.

I am a joyful girl.

17 DECEMBER 2012

MICHAEL LEVER

"Come, they told me..."

A boy was told there was a new king to be honored. He was poor, barely getting by and certainly not in a position to pay the customary respect, as were those more fortunate.

"I am a poor boy too..."

He had no riches, no property, livestock or precious oils, spices or other currency. And yet he still had the desire to go to Bethlehem. Upon his arrival at the stable, he watched as others laid their favors at the foot of the manger. Panic set in, for he had nothing of such value to offer. The pounding in his chest grew louder and more insistent. Then he realized it was all that he could do.

"Shall I play for you..."

He picked up his only possession and began to play. He beat his drum with great joy and passion and all who heard it were swept up in this joyful noise. He wasn't a shepherd, inn keeper, or wise man, yet he stood as their equal, his offering on par with the rest.

"Then He smiled at me..."

When he finished, the newborn baby looked up at him and smiled. His simple gift, perhaps more valuable than any gold, frankincense, or myrrh, came from his very heart and was pleasing to the Lord.

Remember this season and throughout the year that the simplest way to honor Him is to listen to your heart and to give of yourself.

18 DECEMBER 2012

ANNA SIGALA

A Song to Sing

My Father was born in Sinaloa, Mexico. His family, with his eight brothers and sisters, came to United States in the '70s, and I was raised on my Dad's side of the family. My Mother is an only child and does not have a big family. As a child I can remember my aunts and cousins singing songs for everything. When there is a child's birthday, there is a song to sing when hitting the piñata. When a child falls down and injures him or herself, there's a song to sing—it goes something like a frog's tail if you don't heal today then you will tomorrow. I know it sounds silly but when you're a child, it really does help to hear that song.

In Mexico they celebrate the day of the dead, Dia de los Muertos. The family gathers at the cemetery for their loved ones who have passed on and eats their favorite food and sings their favorite songs. At Christmas time, my family celebrates Los Tres Reyes Magos, The Three Wise Men. This Holiday represents the three wise men traveled afar bearing gifts for baby Jesus. The children in Mexico look forward to this holiday because the three wise men would leave gifts for the children in or near their shoes. Each family and friends unite at a different person's house caroling outside with food and singing "La posada." They all have dinner and repeat the festivities again for 12 nights. The last night of caroling and dinner, a King's cake known as Rosca de Reyes is made. It is a sweet bread with a plastic baby Jesus inside. The person who is served baby Jesus is obligated to host a dinner on Feb 2 called Candlemas Day.

My life is filled with songs and joy of tradition and now I able to pass down this tradition to my children.

19 DECEMBER 2012

CLAIRE MITCHLLL

Christmas seems to come earlier these passing years as we get ready for our Christmas Boutique and a Christmas preview at the workplace. So, I find myself getting into the frame of mind, "retail," "Jesus' birthday."

Oh, for the good ole days! I remember the big black table with the thick round legs which was a staple in our living room for many years, and it served many purposes. One particular year it served as our Christmas tree. There was no real Christmas tree that year. My older siblings dressed the big black table with presents, tree lights, and handmade decorations. As a

young girl, I remember the joy in my heart that we would have a tree after all.

It's hard to imagine a table with thick legs as a Christmas tree. My big brothers and sisters did not want to disappoint the babies, which is what my twin sister and I were fondly called. After all, we always had a tree, most times as late as Christmas Eve! That was a tradition in our home. It was always meant to be a big surprise.

With their God given talent, they kept Christmas going on for another year.

This wonderful memory is Christmas to me, as an adult and a child. I can see the big black table as I share this story. I don't know whatever happened to it. I do know this: it meant family, thoughtfulness, and love.

20 DECEMBER 2012

ADRIAN SPINKS

The day that I made the choice to walk in the darkness was the day I knew that my will was not God's will for me. Growing up in a community where racism and hate are practiced on a daily basis became so normal to me that I just lived that way for 43 years. Never really giving myself the chance to open my eyes and heart to the truth was how I had to live for so many years because my spirit was so dead.

This meditation is of awakening and when I processed this I realized that Romans 8 is the keys to my awakening. Understanding I cannot serve two masters and understanding that to live by the flesh is to die by the flesh helped me become desperate enough to seek the Spirit. Surrendering was the key I needed to open the door to freedom and Romans 8 allows me to live with the Holy Spirit where my life was transformed from dark to light. Now I practice that every day of my life to share the love that was given to me through Jesus who died on the cross for us.

When Jesus said, "Forgive them, Father, because they do not know what they do," that action opened my eyes to understanding we are all children of God, and it is through unity that our spirits awaken and we tie together to share this message of hope to the still lost and bring them home. Wow! What a responsibility of an awakening!

21 DECEMBER 2012

JOSÉ PRETLOW

One year as Christmas season was approaching, one of the people in our office shared a holiday idea with us. She had a list of families who were hurting and were really in need of some holiday cheer. She put the names in a bowl and each of us was to pick out a name of a family and then personally deliver a gift to them of up to \$25. I was more than happy to be a part of it and picked out a name that turned out to be a family with four children.

I found a novelty shop with beautiful hand painted pine cones at the bargain price of \$3.00 per cone. I made my choices, put them in a basket, drove to a part of LA I'd never been in before. The street was narrow and crowded with cars and, after several failed attempts, arrived at a house that looked unoccupied. The windows had drapes and I couldn't see inside. There was a single pair of boots on the front steps, so that encouraged me to go to the door.

I knocked and a woman and a little girl answered. I held the basket out to them saying the name of the family I had been assigned, but neither the girl nor the mother reached for the basket. I soon found out why. It was the right house, but the wrong people. They told me the family I was looking for lived in the room at the end of the hall. They pointed my way. I walked past several rooms on my way down the hall. In the first room was a family playing some sort of game together. In another room was a mother cooking for some kids on one of those small portable plug in cookers. The third door was closed but I could hear kids laughing listening to what sounded like television. I quickly realized a family was living in each of the tiny rooms.

At end of the hall was a woman with four kids sitting around on the floor cutting up magazines, making some kind of collage. It was the family I was supposed to be seeing. They were living in one room with a couch, a mattress turned up against the wall, a bunch of kids' books, and some dolls. When I presented the basket, the kids jumped around like I was Santa Claus. I gave each of them a painted pine cone. Each kid said thank you. I had nothing for the mother, so I gave her the basket. I told them my name, wished them a Merry Christmas, and was on my way. I told my wife about the visit when I got home, but mostly I was quiet.

There is a window in my bedroom that I look out at night and I can see a bright blue light on the side of an odd shaped building in the distance. I often use the light as a focal point when I want to think about stuff. This night I thought about the family in that room. I wished I could go back and give them those pine cones all over again. I wished I had sat on the floor and played with those kids. I wished I had told the mother something that I hadn't. I also found out something about the blue light in the distance outside my window. It goes off at 2 am. I saw it go off that night.

22 DECEMBER 2012

STEVE JOHNSON

I have always been a simple man: live a simple life, drive a simple car, believe in simple things, and dress in simple clothes. And I'm happy with my life. I have always strived to do my best in the most direct and simple way.

Because of the way I was brought up, I don't care for fancy things, fancy places, fancy cars, and fancy people. I enjoy plain folks, quiet times, and the laughter of little children. It all seems to work for me in my life and in my love of the Lord.

I always have a song in my heart. Sometimes the song is loud; at other times it is quiet. But no matter what, the song is there and it directs my life. It is what I believe and how I pattern my life and my enjoyment of all of God's gifts.

A song of my heart that I hold true and dear and live by talks about three very important things in life: old dogs, children, and watermelon wine.

*People think about themselves when others are not around,
And friends are hard to find when they discover that you're down.
Old dogs care about you even when you make mistakes,
And God bless little children while they are still too young to hate*

—Tom T. Hall

And when it comes to the watermelon wine, the wine brings to mind peaceful, lazy, and shady summertime, the time to just sit back and enjoy life and all of its beauty. Life and all that's involved can be crazy, fast, and hectic. Take the time to stop and smell the roses, see the beauty; slow down and savor each moment that God has created in and for you. Put that song in your heart, hold onto it, and sing it for all the world to see and hear.

Life is simple, life is beautiful, and life is meant to enjoy each and every moment. I hope my song makes you have a song of your own. Sing it loud, long, and often. And live by it, for it will make life beautiful.

23 DECEMBER 2012

ROGER GONZALEZ HIBNER

A Heavenly Gift

And here we are again, Advent Season, the time we spend celebrating the coming birth of the child Jesus, a time when gifts are exchanged, well wishes are shared.

Is it that I have the faith to trust unconditionally in Faith?

Do I make the room to ask of Heaven to fill me?

Do I listen to the voice of Silence?

Following is a prayer found in the oldest Church in Bogota, Colombia, from the 1600s:

Child Jesus, you are the King of Peace; help me accept without bitterness the things I cannot change. You are the Strength of the Christian; give me courage to transform in me that which must be bettered. You are Eternal Wisdom; show me every instant how to act so as to please God and do the most good for others. Amen.

Merry, Merry Christmas!

24 DECEMBER 2012

REV. LOUISE SLOAN-GOBEN

Psalm 126

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.

Then our mouth was filled with laughter,

and our tongue with shouts of joy;

then it was said among the nations,

"The Lord has done great things for them."

The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.

Restore our fortunes, O Lord,

like the watercourses in the Negeb.

May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.

*Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
carrying their sheaves.*

Psalm 126 is one of “Songs of Ascent” for the Hebrew people, those psalms that were collected together for the faithful to use when they made pilgrimage to Jerusalem. In Advent, this psalm is part of the regular readings for the season when, as Christians, we begin our pilgrimage not to Jerusalem, but to Bethlehem in preparation to welcome anew the Christ child.

We are like those who dream, not with visions of sugar-plums but visions of hope and joy and the reign of God. And we pray that, like the Magi who came from afar, the nations of the world will come to worship God and to see that, indeed, God has done great things for us.

So tune up your rusty vocal chords. It’s time to lift our songs and shouts of joy. With the heavenly host, let us sing our “Gloria in the highest heaven,” and “Peace on earth, goodwill toward all!”

Let us trust the God who can transform our tears to shouts of joy and our “Bah humbugs” to “Our light has come!”

Let us make our pilgrimage to the mountain of the LORD.

Arise! You have a song to sing!

25 DECEMBER 2012

ROBERT M. BOCK, SENIOR PASTOR

Throughout my ministry, on the Sunday following Christmas, I hear the same comment from those who regularly attend worship – “We didn’t get to sing enough of the familiar Christmas carols.” When I was growing up no one ever tired of singing carols. As a result my home church devoted one Sunday during the Advent Season to nothing but Prayer, Holy Communion and the singing of carols.

This universal love of singing the carols of Christmas may have led the Elders of our church to choose as their Advent theme this year – “Awake – You have a Song to Sing!” When I first read that theme I thought – “I love music. I love Christmas carols. I often sing in the shower. But I’m not a singer and I’m not singing for anyone.”

Then I realized that the “song” could either be something literally sung or something of a figurative nature. It could be a new song that no one has ever heard or it could be an old song that everyone knows. It could be the song of a great oratorio sung to the accompaniment of

a pipe organ or the simple melody and words of a folk song sung with a guitar. It could be a song sung in words or a song sung quietly in our hearts. It could be anything – as long as it is my song. So – what song do I have to sing that reflects my true feelings on Christmas Day?

Today I know the song I want to sing. It is the Angel's Song sung to the shepherds – the most beautiful of all songs on Christmas Day – "Glory to God in the Highest and on earth, peace, good will to all."

I believe we all need to awaken and sing together that marvelous song that greets this glorious morning – "Glory to God in the Highest..." First, Glory to God ... for God is the one true Creator, Sustainer and Author of life. Glory to God, for God has given us the gift of life everlasting, the gift of Jesus the Christ, The Son of God. And second ... "and peace, good will to all." Peace comes to us through God who is the only author of true peace. Through God and Jesus we learn the secret of peace and peaceful living. And that is the true gift of Christmas.

On this most beautiful day there are many songs I could sing. But the song I feel compelled to sing has been sung millions of times in the past two thousand years. It was sung first by Angels and since then by millions of grateful followers of Jesus. The Shepherd's Song, heard first in the quiet fields outside of Bethlehem and subsequently in churches and cathedrals of all shapes and sizes around the world. No setting is too grand nor too humble to hear the Angel's song – "Glory to God in the Highest and on earth, peace, good will to all."

That is the song I want to sing on Christmas Day.

Won't you join me?

Merry Christmas!

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