

A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered Down

Tuesday, January 5, 2021

Christmas Treasures for the Whole Year

But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

—Luke 2:19

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thanksgiving in your heart to God. —Colossians 3:16

Today marks the last day of Christmas. Yes, there really are twelve days of Christmas, and for those who seek any excuse for a party, this evening will be the Twelfth Night! For most of us this is a moment to sigh and concede that this beloved season has now concluded and it is time to clean up and put away all this Christmas stuff. (And for those who wish to keep the tree up a little longer, I have no objection.) As you store away your decorations and symbols of the season, I urge you to keep at least a few items and slip them into your pocket for the rest of the year. No, I am not talking about stuffing your pockets with tinsel or fruitcake. What I have in mind are the wonderful hymns of the season. There are far too many great carols out there to be properly honored in a twelve-day span, so take a few with you through the year. Here's the plan.

Songs have such an impact upon us, particularly the words, and music is a fantastic communicator and builder of faith. Hymns are a treasure trove of faith and doctrine! We commonly scold ourselves for not knowing more of our Bibles and of Christian teaching, and this is a real concern, but just as great a challenge is our failure to spend a little time thinking about the Bible and doctrine that we do know. To know the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the 23rd Psalm is to already have a library of faith within one's spirit. We need to spend more time considering those readings. Much the same can be said of our songs. Take some time to meditate over "Amazing Grace" and you will know what I mean. There are so many songs which hold profound and life changing truth. Many are songs which we already know, and many are carols. Don't pack all these lessons and celebrations of faith in the attic, but take at least a few with you through the year. I will share just a few carols and their rich phrases which I have found so moving, but if you know many others which you find just as powerful, then God bless you on your pursuit of faith building song.

There are so many phrases which pierce the heart with grace and hope. Just the title of the hymn "Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne," is jarring to the spirit and refreshing to the soul. "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" tells of Christ who came "to save us all from Satan's power when we had gone astray." Perhaps the richest carol I know is Wesley's "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing," which leads me to meditate over "God and sinners

reconciled," "Late in time behold he come," "Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; Hail the incarnate Deity, Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel." Blessing is to be found in the familiar words of the first stanzas, but there are also latter, lesser-known stanzas which will unexpectedly assault us with joyful hope. Some time ago I was moved by Edmund Sears' invitation to peace in "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear." This stanza is a song for our present time, and most hymnals list it as the third.

"O ye, beneath life's crushing load, Whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way, With painful steps and slow, --
Look now! for glad and golden hours, Come swiftly on the wing:
O rest beside the weary road, And hear the angels sing."

"The First Nowell" had never been a favorite of mine, but one year I was bowled over by the last stanza and it has stayed with me since.

"Then let us all with one accord,
Sing praises to our heavenly Lord,
That hath made heaven and earth of naught,
And with His blood mankind hath bought."

Such a stirring summary of our Lord's grace and love!

There are newer hymns which pack a punch.

"I wonder as I wander out under the sky,
Why Jesus the Savior should come for to die,
for poor ornery sinners like you and like I,
I wonder as I wander, out under the sky."

And there are the words of the contemporary Christian song, "He Was One of Us."

"He was one of us, somehow like you and me.
The God we serve breathed the air that we breathe.
He stood where we stand, so He knows what we need.
He was one of us."

I would be curious to hear your favorite carols and lyric phrases.

Luke tells us that the events of that first Christmas were so amazing that Mary stored the memories in her heart and thought of them throughout her life. Christmas is too amazing to grasp in twelve days, so do some ongoing treasuring and pondering of your own. Paul urges us to sing our faith with a heartfelt joy. Ponder your favorite carols in your heart, and if you should burst into Christmas song out of season, we won't hold it against you.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

Grant, O Lord, that through our worship this day we may be awakened to the wonder of thy love for us; that familiar words may shine with new meaning and that the habit of worship may be cleansed of all stale formality and mere ceremonial observance. Open our eyes to see thy loveliness and make our hearts to burn within us as thou dost speak thy word to us in this hour, so that in wondering awe we may know ourselves forgiven, energized with new life and throbbing with new power. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. —Leslie Weatherhead, 1883-1975