

Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
December 20, 2015
John Crosby
When Heaven Came Down: Messiah Who Reconciles
Isaiah 11:1-11, Matthew 11:28-30

Christmas in North America wouldn't be Christmas without the music, without the carols, without the songs we know, "I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Clause" . . . I mean . . .

You can't have Christmas without carols, but in North America you also can't have Christmas without a Christmas tree. You have Christmas trees around you and close to you every year and sometimes my Christmas trees turn out looking like this (shows picture of a well-decorated tree). Well once. Often my Christmas trees end up looking like this (shows picture of Charlie Brown Christmas tree). And when I had children, my Christmas trees often looked like this (shows a tattered-looking tree). But let me show you a different Christmas tree. We've been talking about the prophets as they looked forward to the coming of Christmas, the coming of the Messiah, and they had in mind a Christmas tree as well. Six hundred years before the very first Christmas, the prophet Isaiah talked about the first Christmas tree like this. He said:

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
² The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—
³ and he will delight in the fear of the Lord. [Isaiah 11:1-3]

And on that Christmas the tree will be there, and

⁶ The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.
⁷ The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The infant will play near the cobra's den,
and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. ⁹ They will neither harm nor
destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea. ¹⁰ In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for
the peoples; all the nations will rally to him. [Isaiah 11:6-11]

Now that's Christmas! And for hundreds of years, not years or decades, but for centuries, the hearts of everyone who heard that who were in exile, or oppression, or just in their normal day jobs knowing that life is not right, when people heard that they were filled with longing and hope, and that continues. There is for many of you, many of us, the strain of life, the strain of being

unreconciled. Many of you are tired, and you're tired of being anxious, you're tired of being angry, you're tired of fighting and constantly having to prove yourself. There's always one more bill, one more angry, scary conflict on TV or across the driveway, always one more health report about somebody that you love. And you hear that a time is coming. Now, my wife is an anglophile—that means she loves the British royalty—and she gets all the stuff. I like the pictures of the cute, young baby princes and kids and yet, I got to tell you, as much as I like the idea of a king on the throne of England, that's not the kind of king we're talking about. This is a Savior King and you can't have a Savior without a crisis, without things being bad. And so, after hundreds and hundreds of years of hearing the prophet Isaiah say it's going to come, it's going to come, one day a man stood up in a boat in the middle of a storm and He called out and He said, "Peace. Be still" and the oceans obeyed and the waves calmed down. And in the stomachs of all those that heard and saw that, the churning went away and their hearts were going, "Maybe, is this the time?" After 600 years of listening to the prophet, many people going, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah . . ." but then the one who stood up in the boat turned to people and said,

²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." [Matthew 11:28-30]

So, when the birth of that baby, that Messiah, that Savior, that King, when that birth is in hand, the people closest responded with shouts of joy and amazement and they started to sing songs. Remember? It's about songs. Songs that said things need to change and they are going to change. Don't be fooled by the ornaments on your tree. Don't be kidded or disillusioned by what's under your tree. Christmas is the start of a new world order. It's the declaration of a new king. And the dad of John the Baptist looks down at his baby boy and he says:

⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven ⁷⁹ to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace." [Luke 1:78-79]

And he made it a song. Nobody saw it more clearly than Mary, the mother of this Messiah, this baby, Jesus of the North side, Jesus of Nazareth. And when she saw the baby she said:

⁴⁶ "My soul glorifies the Lord
⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
⁴⁸ for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.
⁵⁰ His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.
⁵¹ He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors.” [Luke 1:46-55]

Just as He promised Isaiah. Just as He promised.

Those are the songs of the first Christmases. They are songs of the return of the real King. And it's good news, but it's not good news for everybody, right? When Mary sings, she says this is great for the hurting. It's not so great for the rulers on their thrones. This is great news for the hungry, not so for those that are rich; they can't even move. Or the proud.

Last night when we were getting in the midst of this service, I was walking around collecting the prayer cards and you were singing carols, and I joked with one of my friends, one of my guy friends, he was singing. He never sings. I said, “Dude, the only song you know?” It is. We know these songs. Even guys can sing these songs, but it made me think. I saw an incident on TV portraying faith the other day that was so powerful that I wondered, “Why can't church be like that?” And the thing that made it so striking to me was that the director of this show started off as a Christian and after childhood is not. He is far from God. He says, “I was inoculated with the Christian message.” What an image. He was inoculated with the church. The actions of church people turned that child away. I have to tell you, I think he knows all the songs better than I do, but they are in his head and not his heart. I think it's harder to bring back the inoculated than anybody else. They have turned away because somebody has pushed them away—some Sunday school teacher, some person in church, or some crisis. And they know us, but they don't know Him. I don't think those people are going to be wooed back on Christmas Eve with arguments about God, or beautiful Sanctuaries. I think what will bring them back to the God of love are your lives of love, your acts of serving the King, your building houses with the poor, developing relationships with them. They remember the words, they've just forgotten the tune.

Songs and trees. Which of these trees do you want to waken under this Christmas? The Christmas songs are either cultural remnants or they are an oath of loyalty. An oath of loyalty. They call us to choose who will be our king and will we follow our king? The Messiah was one of those songs. Let's hear that song sung again in ways that might bring the King to life for me and for you.

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