

Songs That Change the World

PASTOR CHARLIE BERTHOUD

HOPE
PEACE
JOY
LOVE

Sunday, December 14, 2025 | Third Sunday of Advent
“Songs That Change the World” | Luke 1:46-55 | Pastor Charlie Berthoud

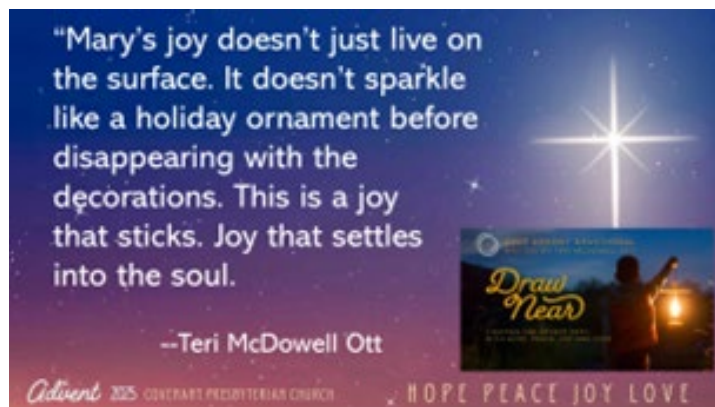
One of the best things about Christmas is the music. Most of us have our favorites.

Sometimes familiarity prevents us from really hearing the songs. Sometimes we miss the power and grace and beauty in the songs. Sometimes we just focus on the familiar first verses, but we can get new insight and inspiration from second third and fourth verses.

I remember that it wasn't until I was a minister that I really heard the third verse of “O Little Town of Bethlehem” which we sang after confessing our sin and hearing the good news of forgiveness:

How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is giv'n!
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heav'n.
No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in.

The songs are out there, proclaiming the good news and giving us guidance for living. Are we listening? Are we learning to sing them?



The biblical accounts of Christmas include several songs—songs which changed the world. Our gospel reading is Mary's song of joy, which she sings after learning that she will give birth to Jesus. Her joy is not superficial happiness, but rather as a deep abiding sense that things are changing for the better, that the wrongs of the world will be turned upside down.

Teri McDowell wrote about this in our Advent devotional. Mary sang of a deep and hopeful kind of joy. Listen for God's word:

“My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.
Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,

and holy is his name;
indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty.
He has come to the aid of his child Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

Mary’s song has given hope to all sorts of people on the underside of history over the years. The lost, the least, and the last have heard and sung her song as an anthem of transformation and courage.

There’s also the song of Simeon and the song of Zechariah, and of course there’s the best known song of all, the song of the angels, which the shepherds heard, the song of peace and good will for all.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,
“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

Luke 2:13-14

One of my longtime favorite Christmas songs is “It Came Upon the Midnight Clear” and if you know the song, you know that the “it” is that song of the angels. And in the final verse of that song, we’re explicitly invited to learn and sing the song of peace and goodwill:

For lo! the days are hastening on,
by prophet seen of old,
when with the ever-circling years
shall come the time foretold
when peace shall over all the earth
its ancient splendors fling,
and the whole world send back the song
which now the angels sing.

In just a few minutes, we’re going to have a Carol Sing, and as we sing, I have an invitation: From now until Christmas, I want to encourage you to listen for a new song this year or just listen to a somewhat familiar song in a new way, listening for God to speak to you.

I want to tell you about a hymn that has intrigued me this year, and then we're going to sing it as we lead into our Carol Sing.

Watchman Tell Us of the Night, #97 in the hymnal, has a beautiful tune that I've been slowly learning on the piano. It's a song about the coming of Jesus, framed in a dialogue between a watchman and a traveler.

Those two roles seem important for the life of faith: we need to keep our eyes open and watch for signs of God in our midst, and we recognize that we are traveling on the journey of faith.

We're going to sing it to each other. You on the left side of the sanctuary (my right) will sing the first and third lines, as the traveler, singing to the watchman.

You on the right side (my left) will sing the second and fourth lines, as the watchman, singing to the traveler.

Those of you at home can sing along however you like!

My hope is that you'll hear God singing afresh in one of these songs, and the words will take deeper root in your heart and your life, to help us as we watch for signs of God's kingdom and as we travel on the Christian journey.

Please stand and face each other as you can, as we sing this song about opening our eyes and moving forward in faith.



Amen!

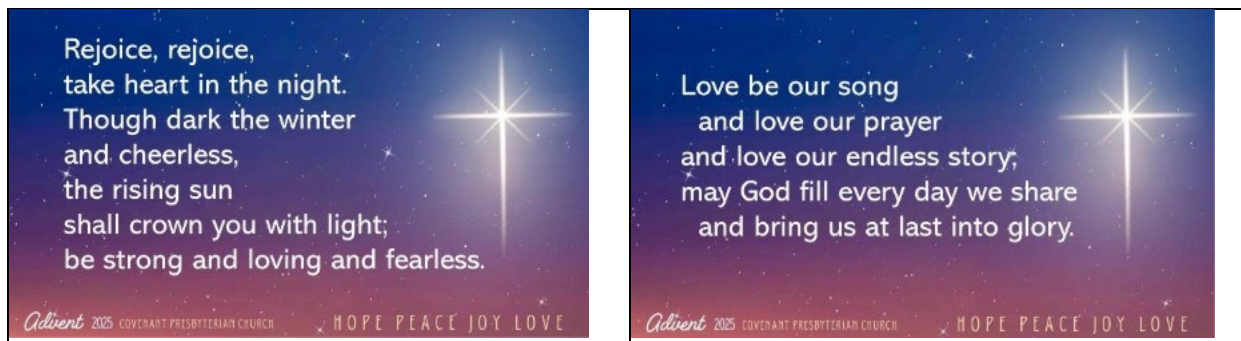
Blessing [at conclusion of service]

Instead of me offering a few words of blessing, today, we're going to sing a blessing to each other, from Hymn #107, "Awake, Awake, and Greet the New Morn" verse 4.

It's a hymn of joy, in the midst of darkness and winter, and it's encouragement for anyone who is in a dark and difficult time. And it's a reminder that our song is love.

Before we sing, I encourage you to think of someone who is in a challenging season right now, someone who is struggling and having a hard time. Maybe a family member, a co-worker, a classmate, a neighbor. Or maybe it's you. Whoever it is, you're singing this blessing to that person. And that person might be you yourself.

Let us sing together.



Text and Music: Marty Haugen. Text © 1990 GIA Publications, Inc. Music Arr. © 1990 GIA Publications, Inc.
Used and streamed under OneLicense #A-703697. All rights reserved.