

CHRISTMAS EVE (9:00 pm)  
SUN., DEC. 24, 2017

FIRST LUTHERAN, MARSHALL  
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

The Music of Christmas

*Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

*Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we believe and in believing we obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.*



I love the celebration of Christmas – everything about it – well, **almost** all of it...**our** culture certainly makes sure that there's a lot of it to love. It is a special time of year that offers an amazing array of indulgences, a smorgasbord of sensations, a big old cornucopia of Christmas concoctions that appeal to all five of our earthly senses.

- We **smell** (the fragrance of fir trees and cookies in the oven)
- We **see** (ornaments, lights and cards from loved ones and friends)
- We **touch** (wrapping paper and bows, we **feel** the snow and the cold)
- We **taste** (lefse, lutefisk??, candy canes and eggnog); and, finally,
- We **hear**...

...the *sounds* of the season:

*Merry Christmas* is spoken and sung to loved ones at home, friends at church, clerks in the stores and even strangers on the streets.

- We hear stories about Santa and the elves...
- We call family and friends...



- In our grandson's favorite tv show of all time, we get to see how the Grinch's small heart expands three times its size in one brave act.
- We hear Linus recite the story of Jesus' birth to help Charlie Brown discover what Christmas is all about...
- We hear pleas from children who find it so hard to wait...
- And we hear **silly** songs like Gramma Got Run Over by a Reindeer, and I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus...that have little **or nothing!** to do with the *reason for the season* and can drive some of us close to the edge of saying, **Bah, Humbug!** to it all.

But don't get me wrong. I've enjoyed listening to **good** Christmas music...(truth be told??? **since before Thanksgiving!!!**). I love it!

From Bach to Bing and Silver Bells to Silent Night, from the congregation singing *Angels from the Realm of Glory* to "all the Whos down in Whoville singing *Avoo Doray*, and from a song **about** a carpenter to a song **by** the Carpenters, I love the music that springs from this special season.



Music has an incredible power to move us, to affect our mood, to fire us up or settle us down, to bring a smile to our lips or a tear to our eyes.

It's even been proven to be something of a key with the ability to unlock parts of a person's brain that has been affected by diseases like Alzheimer's or conditions like aphasia. One program has volunteers who meet with families to discover the types of music that their loved ones enjoyed in the past. Then they load play lists onto devices for their clients to listen to.

Their effects, they found, can be stunning.

*"The initial reaction generally is wonder or joy, said the program's director. When you put the music on you can see them come back. Their eyes will open, they'll sit up a little bit. Depending on where they are in their disease, some people will start singing, some people will start talking about music."*

<http://www.marshallindependent.com/news/national-news-apwire/2017/01/music-therapy-makes-memory-loss-patients-calmer/>

The article goes on to talk about how familiar music helps ease these clients' anxieties and calms their compulsive behaviors. And on top of – as well as because of – all that, their caregivers are also blessed with a sense of relief.

Music is also an amazing and effective tool for proclaiming the good news of the gospel. Garrison Keillor, in an old *News from Lake Wobegone*, told a delightful tale of music's power to pull at the strings of even the most hardened of hearts.

A Religion professor from Germany, who had taken a job at Luther College down in Iowa, was without a place to spend the holidays. Wanting to sample a typical American experience of Christmas, the school arranged to have him stay with Pastor Enkvist and his family up in Lake Wobegone.

The Pastor even invited him to preach at one of the Christmas Eve services, but the Professor declined – he said that he'd lost his faith while studying religion and now is only able to *teach* it, not *preach* it.

Mrs. Enkvist invited him to attend the Friday night showing of the living nativity program at Our Lady of Perpetual Responsibility Catholic Church, but he declined that as well. Instead, the Professor decided to go for a walk on that unseasonably warm December evening. He walked all over town and finally climbed the hill, looking out over all the lights.



He focused on the spire of the Catholic Church and with a little imagination was almost able to envision his hometown back in Germany. At that very moment the Living Nativity Program ended, and people poured out of the church, standing on the sidewalk and lawn with their candles still lit and the music dancing on the cool night air. He heard its very familiar strains...

Hmm, hm, hm, hm...Stille Nacht/Silent Night.

He couldn't quite make out the words, but he could hear the notes with their amazing power to somehow bring it all back.

Like nothing else in all the world, the experience of Christmas Eve, with its special music, was able to pull him closer to his lost faith than at any other time or in any other way...

There are a couple of reasons for that. In the first place, **music** has that general power to draw us back to various poignant memories of our past. But even more so, the experience of Christmas is able to do that by engaging every one of our senses, especially in the realm of music.

The Angel Gabriel visits Elizabeth and Zechariah to tell that aged, childless couple that their years of longing have come to an end. And when they are able, they both respond by...singing songs of praise to God.



In the same way, when the angel visits Mary and tells her of the savior to be born, that young woman of faith is moved to...sing a psalm of praise. And finally, when the angel appears to the shepherds in the field to tell them of this good news of great joy, that heavenly messenger is joined by an army of angels, "the whirling hosts of heaven, the angels of God in thunderous chorus: (singing) *Gloria in Excelsis (Deo)!*"

In his book entitled, Preparing for Jesus, Walter Wangerin writes this prayer:

*O Lord, you are the musician, and we are all your instruments.*

*You breathe, and we come to life.*

*You blow, and we are trumpets for your glory.*

*You whirl through the world the winds of your Spirit, and we like chimes cannot keep silent.*

*You pluck the strings of our hearts, and we become a psalm.*

*You come, and we **must** sing.*

*Mary can't help it. The cause of song is in her womb.*

*And if the woman had been born with the voice of a frog, it doesn't matter: she is Your minstrel now, O Lord.*

Mary sings: *My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...Holy is God's name!* As she sings, so she believes.

And if you and I had been born with the voice of a frog, it doesn't matter: for we, too, are God's minstrels now.

Though we can't always make out the words, we can hear the music.

And though we can't always capture the mystery of faith, we can hear a word of good news.

And though we can't always hold on to the feeling of faith, we can trust that God is always holding on to us in faith.

And as we sing, so you and I can't help but believe.

*My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...  
Holy is God's name!*

Merry Christmas!

Amen.