



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Christmas Living

Rev. Louise Rogers

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On the street where we live, practically every house is decorated with lights for the Christmas holidays. Our next door neighbors have a plastic manger scene that lights up. Soon, when things begin to thaw just a bit around here, we can count on Ed to go out and start packing away all the lights and the figures of the holy family. He calls over to Bill, “I am packing away baby Jesus for another year.” We smile because we know exactly what he means. Fine for lawn decorations but it got me to wondering, how can we keep from packing Jesus away as we step into the beginning of a new year? How can we not just celebrate Christmas but carry the joy of Christmas with us all year long?

The shepherds, the angels and the heavenly hosts are all gone now, and Joseph and Mary have the joy and responsibility to raise the baby Jesus. As a young Jewish couple, they do what they have been taught; they go to the temple for Mary's purification and for Jesus to be to be consecrated to God in observance of the law. While artists often portray Jesus with a halo or a beam of heavenly light on his head, he actually came into the world just like any other human baby. His family enters the temple that day looking ordinary like any other peasant family. Yet, miracles continue as in the temple they encountered two wise elders who have been waiting for the baby Jesus for most of their lives.

Simeon and Anna have waited decades for the anointed one, fasting and praying for insight to recognize God's beloved. A Greek word, *prosdechomai*, brilliantly describes Simeon. *Prosdechomai* means to wait forward. He was waiting forward, bad grammar but a vivid image of a man calmly waiting to see what God will do to fulfill the promise

that Simeon will not die until he sees the Messiah. When the baby Jesus enters the temple, carried by his parents, Anna and Simeon see what everyone else misses, God's vision incarnate in a little baby.

This little child is our Savior. God kept the promise! Jesus' very birth is the fulfillment of God's promises to redeem us from our sins. His life and death, the action of his spirit, proves that he is the Son of the living God. This is the gospel: the good news the angel proclaimed. The angel does not merely say that Christ is born; he says, 'for *you*,' for you he is born. He does not say, 'I bring news of great joy'; he says, 'to *you*, I bring news of great joy.'" True for them and still true for us today.

Then Simeon holds the baby, gazes into the face of the Messiah, he blesses the child and praises God.

The response is praise. They praise. No motive. No agenda. No plan. Just relishing the moment. Praise the moment that God shows up. What we learn from these elders - praise is key. When God is in our midst we too break out in praise. This is what we do every Christmas. We sing out with praises that Jesus is in our midst.

We praise God who shows up to be known to us as a vulnerable child like all humanity.

We praise God whose love is felt in our pain and loss.

We praise God whose hope knows no limits.

We give praise to shout out love and compassion over hatred and heartlessness.

We give praise to affirm our belief that the world can be different, and that difference is known as the kingdom of God here and now.

We desperately need to learn from the elders to watch for God in our midst. To live in expectation of God's presence as we live our ordinary lives. For we too have received the Good News of great joy.

Howard Thurman, philosopher, theologian, educator, and civil rights leader wrote a poem for those of us who want to do more than simply celebrate Christmas, who want to live for Jesus every day.

When the Song of the Angels Is Stilled

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and the princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flocks,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among people,
To make music in the heart.

This is the true legacy of Christmas. The Spirit of God is with us as we work for the kingdom in our words and in our actions wherever we find ourselves.

A beautiful story of living the Christmas joy is found in the book *Butterflies and Fireflies*, a publication of the Westminster writing group. This story has been told before but is well worth sharing. George Krock tells a story about his father in the story the *Maintenance Man*. It begins on a very sad day, the funeral of George's sister Janet who died young at age 60. As the family was greeting people at the visitation the Maintenance Man arrived He was dressed in a red jogging suit and yellow running shoes. "You George, the oldest brother" he asked George Krock, "Yes" he nodded. I want to tell you about your dad, George's father who was standing about fifteen feet away

Your parents came to see your sister Janet every day. Your dad was so kind to gentle, so caring, I could hardly believe it. He was different from most visitors. He would stop and talk to me, to other members of the staff. He would talk to maids, kitchen staff and maintenance workers. Most visitors ignore us, look down on us and are often rude and demanding. Yet despite your sisters condition your father seemed so happy, I decided to be like him, always kind and happy. So one day I asked him, what has his secret, how did he do it? He told me he was a Christian. I asked what it meant and he told me. I started going to church like him. I want to be like you dad and Jesus every day. With that he turned and left.

Friends, as we step into the New Year, may we be like George's father and carry the joy of Christ where ever we find ourselves. As the psalmist declared, "O satisfy us in the

morning with Your lovingkindness, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.” In so doing we are truly living for Christ and making music in the heart.



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2040 Washington Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15241
412-835-6630

www.westminster-church.org