

Scripture Lesson: Luke 2:1-20

Sermon: It Wasn't a Silent Night by Pastor Jenn

It wasn't a silent night. When you think about it. There were animals in the stable making noises from moos to neighs to coos. There were groans of pain by Mary as well as coaching words from the midwife and husband Joseph. Then what would follow would be cries of a newborn baby. It wasn't a silent night.

And it wasn't a silent night when the angels came to the shepherds to announce the birth of the Savior of the world. There would have been baaing by the sheep along with talking by the shepherds and then this great host of angels made quite a sound praising God. It wasn't a silent night.

It's not a silent night now. We have people of all ages squished in seats, ruffling each other's papers and items that surround you. If we listen closely we can hear children trying to be quiet but they can't help themselves, this is a very exciting night for them.

It's *not* to be a silent night. At least not in the sense of silence lacking sound. It is to be a silent night with silence meaning the second definition according to Webster's Dictionary= a calmness, a stillness that brings us to focus on what is around us. And what surrounds us is the good news of great joy of the birth of Jesus Christ. And yet, in that silence there is noise.

I love that part in the How the Grinch stole Christmas where he lists his complaints against Christmas and one of them is all the 'noise, noise, noise' how the Whos down in Whoville "bang on tong-tinglers, they'll blow their floo-flounders, they'll crash on jang-jinglers!" He can't stand the noise.

This is a season of noise a noise even beyond the jang jinglers or tong tinglers, I'm talking about the opposite of the silent stillness it's when things occur that we haven't planned for, that totally disrupts us and what we expect of the season. Maybe an unexpected bill that dips into your Christmas fund. Or a flood that destroyed your basement and decorations to celebrate with. Or even an illness of a loved one that disrupts the plans and hopes you had. Those are the noises that come crashing down on you and they pull you away from the silence of the season, the focus of what it is about. But maybe that is part of the season. Because that's life. Plans get altered, unexpected things occur, and as they do there is this possibility to experience God in a deeper more meaningful way.

In the book of Psalm there is a great song that sings about God coming and reclaiming Israel. It was written during a time when the world appeared to have fallen around the Israelites as empire after empire was attacking them. Yet God calls upon them to look beyond the noise, be still and know God. Psalm 46 ¹ *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.* ² *Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;* ³ *though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult.* ⁸ *Come, behold the works of the Lord; see what desolations he has brought on the earth.* ⁹ *He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire.* ¹⁰ *'Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.'* ¹¹ *The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.* The Israelites are reminded that though difficulties arise, they have God on their side, the Lord of hosts is with them, God is their refuge, their strength, and when they are still, when they are calm, they will see this, they will know and recognize the blessed assurance in that truth.

It's the same in the Christmas story. It was a difficult time for Israel under the oppression of the Romans and the Israelites had given up on waiting for the Messiah, so when the Messiah did come, it wasn't how anyone planned. No one expected an elderly couple to have a son that they would name John, a name that is not in the family. But he would be used by God to prepare the way for the Savior. And no one expected a young poor virgin to become pregnant by the Holy Spirit. She didn't expect it and neither did her carpenter husband to be Joseph. I'm sure neither of them expected to take a 9 day journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem when she was due to have the child because some emperor wanted to raise the taxes. No one expected the Messiah to be born in a stable, in a manger where animals are fed because there was no room at the inn. It's not how anyone dreamed the Messiah would come. And no one expected that shepherds the poorest of the poor, the outcasts of society would be summoned by the angels as the first to receive and witness the good news of Emmanuel. It's not silence that brings us to the Christmas story, it's noise. A noise that only by the means of God can become a still calmness that breaks in and changes us forever.

In 1818 a young priest was preparing for a very special worship service he had planned and anticipated for some time. This was in the newly constructed Church of St. Nicholas in Salzburg. Father Joseph Mohr was preparing for the midnight mass to welcome in the birth of Christ. The choir had been practicing for months and sounded great, the sanctuary looked lovely, and even his sermon had come together. Everything was in order that is until he went to check on the organ, he hit a key, and nothing happened. The organ was broken. Mohr was distraught. Without music the service would be ruined. So he quickly traveled to the organist's home, Franz Gruber and shared the news. Gruber listened then assured the priest that everything would be all right and suggested the priest play his guitar for the background music. Those words didn't help the priest because he said the music that had been planned and rehearsed by the choir was organ music and the two are not the same. To calm his friend down, Gruber suggested they come up with a simpler song, surely they could find something. Only then did the priest remember a Christmas poem he had written 3 years prior when he was walking from his grandfather's house to church. Mohr raced to his home to get the poem, presented it to Gruber and asked him to arrange the music for the guitar. Within a few hours the choir learned the song and later that night the congregation received a gift that was not planned, nor expected, but with the small sound of the guitar, and quiet voices that sang, they heard the Lord silence the noise with this message titled "Stille Nacht"

Silent night, holy night! All is calm, all is bright. Round yon Virgin, Mother and Child. Holy infant so tender and mild, Sleep in heavenly peace, Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night! Son of God love's pure light. Radiant beams from Thy holy face With dawn of redeeming grace, Jesus Lord, at Thy birth. Jesus Lord, at Thy birth

In 1818 a young priest name Father Mohr came to recognize what lies behind the truth of this faith and of Christmas: That life does not always work out as we hope, things happen that disrupt our plans and dreams, yet God will always work to accomplish meaning even in our mistakes and ruined plans, and the best thing we can do is learn to be still and know God, the God of great love and redemption.

Tonight among all this noise, I pray that this become your silent night. Tonight among all this noise I pray that everything may be calm and appear bright. Most of all tonight among this noise, may there be a heavenly peace, a rest not of this world, as you receive the Christ child born to help you be still and know God.

Let us pray: With life unexpected things occur. With Christmas there will be noise. But because of Christmas we have the faith to take those unexpected things and grasp onto you, Holy God, who will work among us and bless us in Jesus name. Amen.