



“A Quiet, Holy Night”

Text: Luke 2:1-20

a sermon by the Rev. Kevin Scott Fleming

Christmas Eve

Thursday, December 24, 2020

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - EVANSVILLE, INDIANA

It feels not quite right, on this Christmas Eve night,
To be sitting at home, awaiting the light.
It feels not quite right, to not hear from the choir,
Who sings with such beauty at this holy hour.
It seems not quite right, to behold empty pews,
When they're usually packed to hear the Good News.

But it is what it is, and - what's more - what must be,
If we would be safe and remain COVID-free.
We must stay in our homes, sequestered, alone,
We must all keep our distance 'til the virus has flown.
But rest ye assured, you're not left in the lurch,
For before there were buildings, our homes were the church.

On Christmases past, far down history's line,
There were many a Christmas quite far from sublime.
We too quickly forget, in the light of our grief,
That too many-a Christmas was claimed by a thief.
Oh, not like the Grinch who was wicked and green,
But oft by conditions not easily seen.

Back a few years before this church was founded,
Soldiers who wore blue and grey were camp-grounded,
Away from their families, their children, their land,
It was certainly not quite the Christmas they planned.
Hard tack and pork, not the goose and the sweets,
That should have been placed on their tables to eat.

And back before that, in quite cold Valley Forge,
A bleak message was sent by old General George.
Three thousand were naked, and freezing, and starving,
And there was some question if there would be an army.
They ate hick'ry nuts and watered-down soup,
And when spring arrived, their lives were recouped.

In the turbulent days of the First World War,
Christmas was not from the neighborhood store.
It was "unpatriotic" to give in to excess,
So, goods and small gifts were to soldiers addressed.
Warm gloves and socks were shipped off with glee
For delivery by Santa who wore Army khaki.

Are you sensing a pattern? A lesson? A trend?
We are not the first folk a strange Christmas to spend.
For in deserts, and jungles, at desks, and in tents,
Christmas was changed by a turn of events.
A sickness, a death, a relationship broken,
All conspired to leave Christmas arrive quite unwoven.
The day often come, but not as it should be,
From a lone empty chair, to a substandard tree.
The Christmas card wasn't the best we could send,
The sermon was not the best one to be penned.
The list can be long and contorted and strange,
To replace that most perfect of Christmas arranged.

But that first Christmas night was, at best, unexpected,
For two weary travelers to great hardship subjected.
In the muck of a stable, in the blood of a birth,
A new baby arrived on the face of the earth.
No nursery, no NICU, no warm blankets or cradle,
Just the simplest of care provided post-natal.

No family was near, or so we are told,
To offer assistance to the child in the cold.
Some shepherds showed up with a story quite flaky,
That left the new parents feeling just a bit shaky.
An army of angels to the shepherds was singing,
And "peace on the earth" was the message sent flinging.

We've been handed a story quite clean and quite bright,
But that's not the story of that first Christmas night.
It was chaos, confusion, a right holy mess,
Turmoil, bedlam, and a bundle of stress.
There was sweat, there was pain, there were screams in the night,
There was shock, there was worry, there was unbridled fright.

And add to that all that the sure, certain fact,
That their land was held captive and under attack.
The Empire had claimed possession and hold,
Of all of the lands God had promised of old.
There was danger and peril, abuse and oppression,
On that night when the Kingdom of God had inception.

The poor were the poorer, the hungry unfed,
When the Infant was placed in his warm manger bed.
The sick were the sicker, the thirsty athirst,
The powerless poor lived under a curse.
That first holy night was not perfect, not close,
It was dark and foreboding, when the light first arose.

So this strangely odd Christmas we honor this night,
Is not - it has not - always been just quite right.
But we are here and the day now draws nigh,
So, let's muster some merry, let's give it a try.
Even this Christmas must be met with some cheer,
We cannot let Christmas bring more dread and drear.
The light shines in the darkness and the darkness is weak,
When the light of God's love is what we all speak.
When we share what we have with those who have not,
We bring to this world in so many ways wrought,
The hope and the joy and the peace and the light
That lies at the heart of all Christmas Eve nights.

If the light-keepers fail, to the darkness succumb,
Or give in to the feeling to be glum or just numb,
The light slowly dwindles and begins to diminish,
And soon the good news is in every way finished.
We can't let that happen! We can't be a party,
To anything less than a Christmas quite hearty.

The night may be quiet, it's assuredly holy,
And if for this year it seems just a bit lowly,
Still the Christ comes among us, to set us all free,
From the fears that enslave us and turn them to glee.
Christ comes to dispel the grief and the loss
To reclaim the gold and remove all the dross.

A child is now born. A son is now given.
And by this wee child our sins are forgiven.
The light shines in darkness, our fear turns to joy,
As we welcome the gift of this heaven-sent boy.
Life finds new meaning, new purpose, new order,
That flows quite regardless of nation or border.

So raise your glad carols, if just in your home,
Light the glad lights, even if you're alone.
The child sent from heaven will save us from harm,
And that is a gift – a real shot in the arm!
The joy of this Christmas cannot be denied,
So, open your hearts and open them wide.

In the highest the angels are singing and winging
Their way to the earth with their glad tidings bringing.
The wholeness and healing and brightness and light,
Will not be diminished this strange Christmas Eve night.
It's Christmas! It's Christmas! From shore unto shore,
Be glad and be merry, now and evermore!



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