

Dec 26, 2010

Rachael's cry, Joseph's dream – the sounds of Christmas

What are the sounds of Christmas for you? If you were given a tape recorder and a blank tape and sent out to find the sounds that would convey to others what Christmas is for you, what would those sounds be?

Carols, of course The squeals of children? The ring of the cash register?? The rustling, and crinkling of wrapping paper? The howling of December winds?

Wouldn't it be fun to create a sound portrait of Christmas? A great idea for a youth group next Advent, don't you think?

I think, though, that if we were honest in that sound portrait, there would be other sounds.

Among the gentle crackling fire and silent night There would be murmurs of frustration, sadness, disappointment

I don't know how it is for you but often people romanticize Christmas so much that the reality of it couldn't possibly live up to how you imagined it was going to be.

When families get together for instance – it can be wonderful. It can also be noisy and tense and children quarrel and old hurts surface and people find out that the relatives they looked so forward to spending time with are in many ways strangers to us.

It's very unrealistic to expect people who live separate lives all year to spend time together for a few days without some tension and differences and strong feelings....that's natural – it's not an indication that something is wrong....those sounds too are part of the soundscape of Christmas. Very human. Very real.

What I want to hold up for us today is the need to listen for all the sounds in your Christmas. Not just the pleasant, Hallmark moment ones....but all the sounds. All the feelings. All the parts of Christmas make up the truth of what happened at Bethlehem: the incarnation. The holiness of human life and human flesh. Real life and real flesh.

The sounds of Christmas include the glorious singing of the angels but also the agony of a woman in labour. The gentle sounds of the animals in the bark, and the cry of a newborn child. But also the sound of Rachael, weeping for her children AND the whisper of the voice in a dream: "arise, and go to Egypt, because the life of the child is in danger"

Matthew's account of Jesus' birth is very interesting – don't you think?

In all of Scripture, only he and Luke record it at all – even though Mark was the first to write. (why do you think that is? That would be an excellent topic for Bible Study some morning. Why doesn't Mark mention Jesus' birth? Or John? Or Paul?)

So –only Luke and Matthew record it – and each of them, very differently.

Here in Matthew, we have no angel visitor to Mary, no Magnificat, nothing of Zachariah and Elizabeth, no reason given for Bethlehem as the birthplace, no angels, no shepherds, no manger.....

We have an angel visiting Joseph to tell him it is alright to marry Mary. His entire account of the birth is:

Read 1: 25-2: 1

Then we have the account of the visit of the magi, which is “in the house” (Vs 11) indicating that they likely arrived quite some time after the birth, and immediately afterwards, our reading for today:

13-23

Matthew doesn't allow us to bask in the warmth and sentimentality and magic of the birth of this child – he plunges us immediately into real life. Jesus was born into a world of jealousy and violence and abuse of power. He began his life as a refugee – part of a family – a mother, father and child forced to flee their country to save their lives.

And you yourselves know the rest – the real life sounds of Christmas that still include jealousy and fear and abuse of power and disappointment and heartache of all kinds.

The sound of Rachael, weeping. This too is part of the soundscape of Christmas. Christ is born into the world again this Christmas and still tyrants terrorize their people and children have to flee, not to Egypt but to Canada and safe home and transition houses and foster home...Rachael still weeps.

If you have even wept for a lost child, you know the depth of this cry.

It is the sound of Christmas – it is the voice of God.

In the face of the cruelty of this tyrant Herod, who would kill all children under 2 to protect his own power, In the face of the violence in our world and the continued suffering of the innocents....

Where is God?

Our faith says loudly and clearly that God is not the cause of these things – but that God is in the midst of those who suffer – hurting and suffering with them. The sound of Rachael weeping is the voice of God. Entering into the world once again with all its glory and its pain. And hurting with us Feeling the pain as of a mother aching over the waywardness or loss of a child. This is the sound of Christmas.

The prophet said his name would be Emmanuel – God with us – and so it is. God with us.

And so the world turns again, and one more Christmas has come and is almost gone, and with it have come sounds: some magnificent and some that have broken our hearts. And in the midst of it all the sounds of God-with-us, Emmanuel -