

WELCOME 24 December 2022 – Christmas Eve '22 A

Isaiah 9:1-7 & Luke 2:8-20

Good evening & welcome on this most wonderful night. Welcome guests & visitors & family gathered from afar...

I'm John Guilfoyle - it's my privilege to wish you a blessed Christmas as God gathers us tonight to experience the love God has for us in the child in the manger, God's Son Jesus Christ. Please hang around after worship there are icy poles & some watermelon to make this hot night somewhat more bearable...and if you do stay for a bit we get a chance to know one another better...

There is something about Christmas...don't care who you are or where you're from We carry into tonight...An expectation. An anticipation. An excitement. and the songs...we all know 'em. For the last month or more everywhere we've gone the carols & songs of tonight have surrounded us...Whether you love 'em or have had enough by now...the songs reverberate through this season.

And the songs are songs of joy...Whatever else is going on in the world on in your world...Heaven breaks wide open & God announces the birth of his firstborn Son to the whole world. God holds nothing back. The angels break out into song. Those who hear the song rejoice with exceeding great joy. Isaiah, hundreds of years earlier said it's the only right response to the arrival of God's redemption. *"Sing for joy, O heavens, for the LORD has done this; shout aloud, O earth beneath. Burst into song, you mountains, you forests and all your trees, for the Lord has redeemed Jacob, he displays his glory in Israel"* [Is 44:23](#)

So together, let's Experience Christmas & hear the song that was written for your heart...to be sung in you & by you day after day. *I am bringing you good news of great joy for all people: to you is born...a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord...* "A Saviour is born for you. *"a child has been born for us, a son given to us; all authority rests upon his shoulders. He is called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.* Every promise of God fulfilled in him. Everything of God is him.

So sing...Your weariness is being lifted. Your hurts are being healed. The failures that haunt you are forgiven. But more than anything...joy can be multiplied in your heart & in your home & in everything you do. *"Glory to God in the highest heaven, & on earth peace among those whom God favours!"* Tonight...because of that child...God's favour rests on you.

We'll explore & experience that tonight...

Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

You, amazing & awesome God, have made this wondrous evening shine with a radiance exceeding all the stars in the sky. For our freedom & healing, you have seized the initiative & come to live with us. Draw close tonight & fill us with wonder like those making their first visit, & with the sturdy love & assurance of those who have known your embrace for many years. Through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen!

Let's hear the good news for tonight.

PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON...

Father...on this wondrous night you sent your son to take on frail human flesh so that all who are drawn to trust in him would know you fully & spend all eternity in your presence. You sent angels to announce his birth & a star to proclaim it to the ends of the earth. Win our hearts to yours & sing through us the good news of great joy of being made new in your love ...In Jesus name we pray. Amen

CHRISTMAS EVE '22 A – EXPERIENCE CHRISTMAS: HEAR THE SONG!

Spotify...for those who don't know...is an on-line music listening service. It's like a radio w/ 1 exception; **YOU** get to choose the songs or the artists you hear. Like a giant on-line jukebox. **YOU** get to choose what you listen to.

BUT...Like all things on-line; Spotify tries to out-think you. Spotify (like most other on-line resources) is written to think ahead of you. It recommends songs similar to the ones you choose & plugs them into your playlist w/o you asking. So... you're having an evening of Frank Sinatra & Dean Martin & there's Michael Bublé. You've got Slim Dusty going & Lee Kernaghan pops in. OR like in our house someone else will plug in a song you weren't expecting or wouldn't choose. We'll have Willie Nelson or some quiet jazz going on & someone throws in a song about International Harvesters or Corn.

But if we're honest...that happens in real life & it isn't just songs in the literal sense of music/notes/performance. For instance...you get out of bed in the morning & **YOU'RE** "singing" a pretty happy tune. The legs have you upright. The lungs are getting oxygen in & CO₂ out & your brain & heart are in synch to make the rest of the bits go where you want to go. But you grab the paper, the headline sings an angry song of crime & violence in town...a C-mas week burglary/car fire. Another headline adds a tune of road traffic fatalities.

You put down the paper & tune in the ABC & they've got the melody of inflation & rising prices & diminished buying power & falling returns at the farm gate. Then there's the chorus of climate catastrophe. So you go to the café & one friend has a verse or two about cancer & hip replacement, another mumbles a refrain confused by dementia, & another adds a harmony of grief from his own life.

You get home & greet the neighbours as they head off to spend the weekend w/ a child whose married life has completely come unstuck...a tune of brokenness shakes the family tree. As they leave the fellow across the street stops by for the grand finale of his own...a child who has chosen a lifestyle completely foreign to the godliness & virtue they were raised to pursue. You go on-line & the news feed is punctuated by the incessant drumbeat of war & that off-tempo out-of-tune ballad of Harry & Meghan.

Your day ends w/ an earworm of worry/anxiety/dread...a lingering hum of fear has settled in uninvited. For too many of us the playlist of our day is some rehashed refrain of pain & frustration, disappointment & sadness...a long ago chorus of hurt feelings & bruised egos or a traumatizing re-mix of memories, thoughts & lies that have a life of their own on constant replay...

But tonight...God offers a new song...in 2 verses...

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; all authority rests upon his shoulders.
*He is called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Great will be his authority, and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness
from this time onward and forevermore.*

"Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord...*"Glory to God in the highest heaven, & on earth peace among those whom God favours!"*

Tonight...the Father through His Son rewrites our sad despairing melodies into a vibrant new song. Jesus is born to reconcile us to the Father & restore to us **ALL** that sin death & evil steal. Jesus is born to establish once & for all our place as God's beloved children & re-shape all the wounded lyrics & broken chords of our lives into a song of hope & joy restoration & peace that reverberates: *"Glory to God in the highest & peace to his people on earth..." Peace to all whom God bestows his favour & in Jesus that's you!* Tonight...God joins our human choir from the inside, as one of us, from birth to death & everything in between & the song He sings is 1 song...a song of love – hope – peace joy in restoration & reconciliation. God sings 1 tune **"I** love you; you're mine now"...irrevocably unceasingly unwaveringly God sings 1 tune **"I** love you; you're mine now" w/o a note of anger, judgment, disappointment, threat of punishment ... God sings only *"I love you; you're mine now"*

God knows the tune of dark & difficult days in this life, how confused our singing about who we are & what we should do w/ ourselves...He knows the painful melody of things we do to each other out of that confusion & insecurity. God saw we were off-key from what he created us to be...how we were on our own page of the songbook, not his. But God didn't come to punish, frighten, scold, or threaten, or any of the other things we often say God does. Instead, God came to tell us that we are loved: deeply, truly, fully & forever.

"Do not be afraid...I've got good news of great joy for all people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord...a child has been born for us, a son given to us; all authority rests upon his shoulders. & through him God draws into his heart each of us free us from all the things/stuff/hurts/fears that bind us trap us trip us keep us from living full & abundant lives here & now. In the chorus of the prophet & song of the angels...God says, "My love is deeper than your emptiness... greater than your despair...stronger than your death...can give joy & hope & heal like nothing else." Let that be the song sung in your heart from now on...Let's pray...