

Carol Sing 2024: Good News for All People

A Family Talk by Rev. Joel Christian Glenn

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Good News for All People

When Jesus was born 2000 years ago, it was important that people heard about it. Who were some of the people who heard about His birth? Mary and Joseph, and the Shepherds, and the Wise Men. But the news of Jesus birth was not just for a few people. Notice how many people the angels said this good news would be for:

Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:

"Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"
(Luke 2:8-14)

Who was the news for? Not just the shepherds, but for *all* people! The Lord wanted all people to know about His birth. That's because He wants everyone to know about Him, so that they can learn from Him, follow Him, and live good lives.

Let's think for a moment about how different all those people are that the Lord loves. What languages, ages, countries, races, likes and dislikes, personalities, and on and on. So many people who are so different all from each other. But if they all focus on the Lord, it won't matter how different they are in other ways. The shepherds who came to see Jesus were very different from the wise men. But still they equally honoured the Lord.

There is something we are going to do tonight that is similar. We are going to sing songs to and about the Lord. Each of us has a different voice. And if we all sang our own song, it would make quite a racket. But when we unite in singing together it brings our hearts together as well. When we worship the Lord, our differences don't

pull us apart, and we can rejoice that the good news we are celebrating is good news that can be shared with all people, no matter who they may be.

If you know anything at all about the history of religion, you know that it has not always been used to unite people. In fact in many eras it has divided and turned people to hatred. So how do we actually do the work of becoming united, as one, through looking to the same Lord and God?

There is a passage in the Teaching of the New Church that describes a group or choir of angels, all working together, and it can illustrate a useful approach:

Wonderful to say, although there were a great many, they nevertheless all thought and spoke as a one, thus they all represented as a one; and this because no one was desirous to do anything from himself, still less to preside over the rest and lead the choir; for whoever does this is of himself instantly dissociated. But they allowed themselves to be led mutually by each other, thus all individually and collectively by the Lord. All the good who come into the other life are brought into such harmonious agreements....

Thus the entirety of heaven, which consists of myriads of myriads, can act as a one by being in mutual love; for thereby they allow themselves to be led by the Lord. (*Secrets of Heaven* §3350)

The two points that I want to reflect on are that no one person led the group, they allowed themselves to be led by each other; and that in allowing themselves to be led by mutual love, they were each led by the Lord.

Imagine for a moment what we are about to do tonight: we will be singing Christmas songs. And it is true that in our case we will need some backing music to guide us. But no one person in this room will be dominating the music. Instead, each of us will hear the people around us, and try to fit our own voice into that chorus of voices. We sometimes think that to be united someone has to force everyone into conformity. But that is not how it works. And in fact, not even the Lord works that way. Instead, He calls us to hear the voices around us, and to adjust our voice accordingly, so that we can all be singing the same tune.

Doing this well takes immense humility and innocence. The humility to notice someone who is vastly different from yourself, and yet wondering, how could this person influence me for the better? Instead of thinking how they ought to be more like me, how might I become more like them? And the innocence to trust that there is a place for us in the choir, that the Lord has given us a voice and a place and that we are created with something to contribute to the whole that no one else can provide. The innocence to believe, without any pride or arrogance, that the whole will be better for having my voice be part of it, regardless of how I may view my own abilities.

Interestingly, that passage points out that when we are led by this mutual love, in other words this love that is shared and reciprocal, we all do end up being led by the same person: by the Lord Himself. To let ourselves be led by love for others is the same as being led by the Lord. The Lord was born into this world, in part, to give us that one visible focal point of love, a focal point that can bring all people's to Himself, so that we could be ever more united in love for one another, and to be led as a flock, and in fact many flocks, by a single shepherd.