

December 16, 2018

"A Fragmented World Redeemed by Song"

St. Lucas UCC, St. Louis MO

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An Advent Service of Hymns and Carols

The Third Sunday in Advent

The Scripture instructs us to *"be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves making melody in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Ephesians 5:19-20, NRSV).

The songbook of Christmas is rich with the message of God's love and mercy. This cantata includes Scripture. There are hymns we are invited to sing as a congregation and the Choir will sing selections to illuminate the theme that comes to us in a question:

What does God do with a fragmented world? God moves in mystery and hope, sending messengers who come bearing God's mercy to the world.

I. Prophets

What does God do with a fragmented world? God sends messengers of hope and redemption into the world, even into a world as broken as ancient Israel. After Babylon had destroyed its walls and destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem, they hauled the people off into exile. What do you do when a whole system of meaning, a whole way of understanding faith is swept away? What does God do? God sings in the human heart, as God sang in the heart of the priestly writer, who wrote these words after the Exile to remind the world's inhabitants that the creation is good: *"In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void, and darkness covered the face of the deep. While a wind from God swept over the face of the waters, then God said, "Let there be light, and there was light. And God saw that light was good, and God separated light from the darkness, and God called the light day and the darkness he called night and there was evening and there was morning the first day. And when day had followed day had followed day, God saw everything that God had made, and indeed, it was very good."* (Genesis 1:1-5, 31a)

Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence #166

II. Angels

What does God do with a fragmented world? A broken world in which people who claim the name of God in Christ often promulgate hate against people, even other believers, who are not like them. What does God do with such a world? God puts a

song in our hearts. God sings what I John sings, *"No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God lives in us and God's love is perfected in us."* (I John 4:12)

Angels from the Realms of Glory #190

III. Shepherds

What does God do with a fragmented world? A world broken up by tribal and national and ethnic rivalries. A world in which people abuse its resources, denude its forests, pollute its air and its waters. What does God do? God sings in the heart the song that the psalmist sang. *"The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for God has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers."* (Psalms 24:1)

What does God do with a fragmented world? He visits the lowly and the poor with the extravagant good news, *"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"* (Luke 2:14)

A Thousand Joys

St. Lucas Choir

IV. Mary

What does God do with a fragmented world? He finds a way to make a holy partnership with sinful humankind in a world where there is political and military oppression and brutality day after day, age after age. God does not abandon the world. God sings in our hearts, what God sang in the heart of Luke, *"In those days, a decree went out from Emperor Augustus, that all the world should be registered. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn."* (Luke 2:1, 7)

Heaven's Child

St. Lucas Choir

The Visit of the Magi

What does God do with a fragmented world? Where knowledge does not ripen into wisdom, but becomes arrogance? God reminds us of the wise ones who knew better. God sings in our hearts what God sang in Matthew's gospel, *"In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage? On entering the house, the Magi saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid Christ homage. Then opening their treasure chests, they offered him gold, frankincense and myrrh.'"* (Matthew 2:1-2, 11)

What Child is This, Who, Laid to Rest? #180

V. Simeon

What does God do with a fragmented world? He encourages us to see beyond the ordinary in order to catch a glimpse of the extraordinary. God gives us a new way of seeing with sight that looks beyond form and mere appearances. It is a way of

seeing beyond the known with glimpses of the unknown. It is a way of seeing called faith. How does God deal with a fragmented world? God puts a song in our hearts so that by faith we might see what Simeon saw, "*Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God saying, 'for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.'*" (Luke 2:27-28, 31-32)

Come Make a Place

St. Lucas Choir

VI. Isaiah

What does God do with a fragmented world? God encourages the dreamers to see beyond the horizon to the day of redemption that is coming. We live in a world where technology does not always draw us together; where it often makes us arrogant about what we know. And where those without the technology are left out of a global economy. God sings in our hearts what God sang to Isaiah, "*For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces.*" (Isaiah 53:2-3a)

Finale

Jesus, What a Wonderful Child/Emmanuel

St. Lucas Choir

Note: The text is adapted from reflections share by Tom Troeger, professor at Iliff Theological Seminary