

A Word on Wednesday from Pastor Tonia

"O Holy Night" 12/21/22

*"Do not be afraid; for see - I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people:
to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior,
who is the Messiah, the Lord. (Luke 1:10b-11)*

It was a *Silent Night*. All was calm and all was bright. The shepherds were young boys with cherub-like faces, the sheep clean and well behaved. There in a stable, the stall didn't stink. Mary didn't cry out in pain and Joseph had everything under control. And *The Little Drummer Boy* drummed.

It Came Upon a Midnight Clear, looking like a Hallmark Christmas movie. Probably missing something in translation, for God comes to us where we are. There was a chill in the air, the fear of having a baby - alone, in a stable of all things. There was wondering and pain, and it smelled. Mary was in a place she couldn't imagine, a stable. And yet, here she laid her babe, *Away in A Manger*.

On this *Silent Night*, the cattle were lowing, while the poor babe slept, and the shepherds were counting their sheep. Suddenly the night was split and to them, *Hark, the Herald Angels Sing*, "Glory to the newborn king. "Do not be afraid," the men were told, for God would be bringing to all people good news of great joy.

Mary had also been told to fear not, so had Joseph. This same message is given to us also, here today, in our real world. To those dealing with inflation, those overworked and underpaid; those looking for a job or needing a meal; to those facing unemployment or an empty cupboard, a dwindling bank account, or a blanket in a doorway; to those enduring a bad diagnosis, or a lonely existence; to those fearing Covid or the flu, to those not trusting the medical community or the government; to those looking for acceptance, to those doubting God, ignoring His house, upset by the why and the how. How do we let nothing dismay us?

The shepherds, men of no account, were comforted and told a gift had been given, even to them. *O Little Town of Bethlehem*, that is where you will find Him. *O Come All Ye Faithful*, they were told, come and adore Him, Jesus, Lord at His birth.

These same words of comfort, this very promise is also delivered to us, in the telling of the story of how the wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace was born in a stable.

On that *First Noel*, God came to all of us as a babe, born in the dark of night - in a stable. Coming to us. To laugh with us. To cry with us. To help us carry our heavy loads. To dance with us. To sit on the lake shore. To walk the lonesome valley. To climb the crooked trail. To slide down the grassy hill. God walks with those who mourn and with those who rejoice. *O Joy to the World*, wherever we live at this moment, the Lord has come to be with us in our here and now.

We are stressed to *Deck the Halls*. It's all about *O Christmas Tree*. We are preoccupied with getting the perfect gift to put under the tree. Forgetting in our mad rush, the perfect gift has already been given. God gave the perfect gift in that lonely stable, on that dark night.

The perfect gift of hope, peace, joy, love, and forgiveness was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. With faith this gift is opened, and one will never want to return it, will never tire of it, for it is new every day, constant, steadfast, everlasting. Unto us this night, a Child is born, a Son is given. *O Holy Night*.

Please pray with me. God of the perfect gift, we thank You. We lift our voices and sing praises to You in carols filled with reminders of Your love, with words of joy and glad tidings, with hearts filled with love, and with gifts given to show how much we care. Bless this coming Christmas, give safe travels, bless the food and fellowship we share, bless the laughter and the tears, bless the children and us, also. Thank You for giving to us Your heart of love, a babe laid in a manger. **Amen. Merry Christmas!**