

Scripture: Matt. & Luke
Christmas stories

The Silent Stars Go By

I am a little boy of perhaps nine or ten. It is a dark, cold December evening, and I am at the Christmas concert at St Johns United church in the village of Golden Lake where I grew up. The old red brick church is a massive structure, and I am only one little person off in one shadowy corner.

We are singing Christmas carols. I am standing in the third pew from the front on the right. I am not a lot higher than the back of the pew. In my hand is a hymn book, and I am struggling with the words of the carols, not entirely sure what they all mean, but singing them with all my heart:

*Joy to the world! The Lord is come!
Let earth receive her king!*

Whatever they mean—and looking at my mom who is jamming away on the organ—I know they are terribly important. They point to a story that has somehow reshaped the world: God cares about us. We are loved. And Christmas is when he gave us his very best so we could discover that, all we heard about his love is true.

It is twenty years later. I am in a small church south of the Lakeshore Dr in West Toronto near my first apartment. It is the

Christmas Sunday service just before Christmas only two more work days and I can blast off out of this city to make my way back to the valley, but today this little church seems so well divine. The lights sway slightly back and forth as if somehow the howling wind outside has crept in through the rafters. We have sung all the familiar carols, and now in this part of the that was filled with a down east hospitality, a young girl is reading the Scripture in her own delightful way:

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of 'erod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east, saying....

I smile. It's not my old home church, nor the same readers that I'm used to, But it doesn't matter. What matters is what is still the same. Everything, really, is still the same: the words of the carols; the Scripture lessons; the baby born to be king. In a world where almost everything has changed over the twenty years that have come and gone, one thing remains unchanged: God cares about us. We are loved. And Christmas is when he gave us his very best so we could discover that all we heard about his love is true.

Another Twenty years come and go. It is almost another Christmas. And believe it or not I'm back in school trying to figure out how to become a minister and I find myself with a little group of fellow students singing Christmas carols in a senior's home in Kingston. We're surrounded by people whose lives are drawing

to a close. They shuffle wearily down the hall, looking for places to sit. Their years have come and gone. Some are not at all sure what is happening. A few are not even sure who they are. But then—they hear the words of the carols. Their faces light up with an unfamiliar joy. They know those words! They know that story! They know about the angels, and they remember the baby who was away in the manger. The only thing that really matters is still true. And it will be so forever: God cares about us. We are loved. And Christmas is when he gave us his very best so we could discover that all we heard about his love is true.

Tonight, it is Christmas Eve again, and I am here. You are here. And here tonight, once again, even though everything has changed this year we are retelling the same story: still the wise men and the shepherds and the angels, and the baby in the manger. Here tonight, even though we are not struggling with a heavy hymnbook as they have been stowed away we still wonder at the words of the carols:

*O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie;
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep, the silent stars go by.*

The words are still the same. The story is still the same. Everything has changed this past year, and yet—nothing has changed: God still cares about us. We are still loved. And Christmas is still that moment in history when God gave us his very best so that we could discover that everything we heard about

his love is true.

I am loved tonight. You are loved tonight. That is why we are here. Nothing has changed.

The only thing that really matters will never change. And the love of God for you and for me is the one thing that will stand unchanged, forever.

“The Word was the source of life,” writes John in his Gospel, “and this life brought light to the whole world.” Then he adds, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out” [John 1:4, 5].

For 2000 years, nothing has ever put it out. Nothing has ever silenced the message of the angels. Nothing ever will.

You are loved tonight. I am loved tonight. The light still shines in the darkness.

Thanks be to God. Let us pray

Father in heaven, thank you tonight that your world, and each of us, has been touched by your love. May we who have been touched also be changed, that your love and your gracious presence would fill our hearts and lives to overflowing.

*O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today.*

Hear us tonight, as we welcome you for the hundredth time, or maybe for the very first time, into every corner of our hearts and lives. Amen.