Greetings, DGCC Family.

During this time of Advent, I thought we would take a break from our walk through the Biblical books in order and instead focus on some themes related to the season. We will resume our journey through the Bible in the new year with a look at the book of Acts, which is where we left off.

For this week, I’d like to look at some of our favorite Christmas carols, and the Biblical truths that inspired them. Consider for today the opening stanza of a well-known, and loved, carol:

“Angels we have heard in high, sweetly singing o’er the plains. And the mountains in reply, echoing their joyous strains.”

I love the imagery here and the combination of New Testament and Old Testament themes. The New Testament theme comes from the first announcement of the birth of the Messiah that was the proclamation of the angels to the shepherds of the field:

“And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.’ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.’ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about’” (Luke 2:8-15).

The personal messengers of the Most High appear in glory to the most low, signaling that the Kingdom of God turns things upside down, and in doing so, will restore Creation to its intended order.

And then we get to the line of the carol, “and the mountains in reply, echoing their joyous strains. Here I am reminded of Old Testament themes regarding Creation, such as that found in Psalm 98:

“Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy…” (v. 8).

We are reminded that at the birth of our Savior, Creation itself entered a jubilant state such that even the mountains themselves sang with joy and gladness.
May it be so with you this Christmas season, as we anticipate the Christ child, God’s Son entering human history and human existence.

Tomorrow: A song for the faithful.

IHS,
Pastor Lou

**December 6**
Grace and peace to you this day.

Some words from my favorite spiritual:

“Down in a lowly manger, our humble Christ was born. And brought us all salvation, that blessed Christmas morn. Go, tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere. Go, tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born.”

Once again, we get a combination of New and Old Testament themes. From the Gospel of Luke:

“So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them” (2:4-7).

Recall that mangers were used not only as watering troughs for farm animals, but they were also used for the slaughter of lambs. A lamb would be wrapped in cloths to calm it and then placed in a manger to calm it further, as if putting it to bed. By placing Jesus in a manger, God is signaling here quite intently the Son’s ultimate purpose.

In this lyric, the New Testament message of the birth of Christ in “a lowly manger” is combined with the Old Testament admonition to shout this news from the mountaintops. From the prophet Isaiah:

“You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, ‘Here is your God!’” (40:9-10).

Maybe in modern times we’re not exactly called to shout from the mountaintops, but my prayer this Advent season is that our lives, and our love, shout for us. Let our service and our love of the Lord shout loudly and clearly that “Jesus Christ is born.”

Tomorrow: A Latin lesson.

IHS, Pastor Lou
Greetings, DGCC Family.

The refrain from the carol “Angels We Have Heard on High” is this:

“Gloria in excelsis Deo.” I have no idea why the lyricist chose to write this refrain in Latin, but it certainly has a certain poetry and lyrical quality to it. Its English translation is: “Glory to God in the highest.” The phrase “in the highest” refers to God’s throne in Heaven, often referred to as His “sanctuary.” Once again, in this simple refrain, we see a combination of Old and New Testament themes.

For example, consider this from Psalm 150:

“Praise the Lord! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens!” (v. 1).

And this well-known passage from the Gospel of Luke, as we saw on Monday, when the heavenly host appear to the shepherds of the field:

“Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” (2:13-14).

Here the angels themselves are reaching all the way back to the Old Testament and beyond, giving all glory to the Father first and foremost.

When you think about it, isn’t that our purpose as well? To glorify the Father, follow the Son, and be led by the Spirit? Once again, my prayer for you this Advent Season is that in all we do, in all we say, and in all we think, that we give “glory to God in the highest heaven.”

Tomorrow: Joy comes into the world.

IHS,

Pastor Lou
December 8

Happy Advent, everyone.

One of my all-time favorite songs is “Joy to the World.” The opening line is this:

“Jeremiah was a bullfrog, was a good friend of mine…”

Just kidding, though that old song from the band Three Dog Night is one of my favorite “classic” rock tunes. But, for today, we’ll set that one aside and instead focus on the Christmas carol “Joy to the World.” The first stanza is this:

Joy to the world, the Lord is come
Let Earth receive her King
Let every heart prepare Him room
And Heaven and nature sing
And Heaven and nature sing
And Heaven, and Heaven, and nature sing.

As in the last three devotionals, once again, we see a combination of New and Old Testament themes that repeat themselves in so many of our favorite carols. To start with, the phrase “Joy to the world” reminds us of God’s love for all of Creation, including, of course, you and me. From John 3:16:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

This is a well-known passage that may have gotten diluted a bit in modern times. In understanding that God so loved the world, meaning He loved it without bounds and with deep affection, we are to understand that God loved His Creation perfectly, including our place in it. And in that perfect state, our place ultimately is in eternity with Him.

Second, once again we see this theme combined and interwoven with the theme of God’s Creation, both heaven and nature, singing His praises. From the book of 1 Chronicles:

“Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let them say among the nations, ‘The Lord reigns!’ Let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them! Let the trees of the forest sing, let them sing for joy before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth” (16:31-33).

This Advent season, as we sing carols of the season, take the time to close your eyes and imagine the rejoicing of the heavenly host, the trees of the forest, and the mountains themselves singing along with us: “Joy to the world, the Lord is come!”

IHS, Pastor Lou
December 9

Happy Friday, everyone! Here’s your musical devotional for the week. Turn up the volume and enjoy!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7r3VVMUhAxU

IHS,

Pastor Lou