

John Sampson
"Love Is Born A"
Preached at KVCC
December 24, 2018

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, our rock, and our redeemer.

Amen.

Merry Christmas!

Alleluia!

The Christ is born!

Tonight we celebrate the birth of God's greatest gift to her children.

Tonight we celebrate and remember the birth of Jesus the one we call the Christ. We remember how he was born in a manger, under the songs of angels, and amidst the grunts and groans of the farm animals that surrounded his family that star-filled night. We hear this story from the writings of our spiritual ancestors, from the readings of the prophets and the gospel writers.

But we also hear the story of Jesus' birth in the carols we sing together tonight, and in the anthems that our choirs share with us. We hear the story of the nativity processed through the life experiences of composers and musicians who never knew Jesus in the flesh, who never physically stood at the side of the manger, and who never looked in to see a newborn baby sleeping in peace. We hear the story of the birth of the Christ told once again by people just like you and me.

So, what's your favorite Christmas carol?

What's the carol you find yourself singing out of the blue sometime in July when you're at the beach, or hiking up in the mountains, or maybe when you're vacuuming your living room?

[Carol titles shared]

Those are all good ones.

We had a carol sing at the end of last week. And at one point we were deciding what the next carol would be, and someone, it might have been Lynn said to everyone, "Spoiler alert...they're all the same story."

And he's right.

All of the carols we sing during the Christmas season are about the same story.

They are all about the story of Love.

They're about the love between God and her children.

And they're all about preparing our hearts to receive God's love, and to recognize when it is born among the brokenness of our lives.

This love is expressed in the birth of a child named Jesus. Jesus who will grow up and teach us what God's love for us looks like, and what it looks like to love God back. And he will teach us perhaps the even more difficult lesson of what it looks like to love each other.

I think the reason we don't have just one Christmas carol, other than the fact that Advent and Christmas would become really dull really

quickly, is that each carol we sing during this season shows us a different side of the love we are celebrating tonight.

Out of all of the carols that are contained in our carol books, out of all the carols you shared as your favorites, out of all of the carols that remain unnamed tonight, we opened our worship by singing People Look East.

Now this is a carol that might not be so familiar to many of us; it's not as popular as a Silent Night or a Hark the Herald Angels Sing! But I've loved this carol ever since I first heard it, and wanted to share it with all of you because it's fun to sing, and because it teaches us about love.

The lyrics of People Look East reminds us that to receive Love, to receive the Christ child born this night into our own lives, is not a passive action on our part. It requires work. Yes, God's love

expressed in the birth of Jesus is a gift, but a gift that requires something of us, something of our own hearts.

Just like we have decorated our homes, just as we have erected the symbols of our holiday, of our holy day, just as we have put up our Christmas trees, lit our candles, and hung our wreaths, we must also ready our hearts for Emmanuel, for God among us.

And we do this through acts of compassion and selflessness. Jesus tells us in the gospel of Luke that the spirit of God, the spirit of Love, is on him, because she has anointed him to proclaim good news to the poor. She has sent him to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free. Jesus becomes a reflection of God to the degree that he works acts of love and liberation in the world. We open ourselves to love, and can become reflections of God's dream for all of her children, to the extent that we work acts of love and liberation in our world.

The Christ is not just born a time long ago. His birth is not just a historical artifact. Christ's birth is an ongoing invitation that God is extending to all of her children tonight certainly, but also tomorrow, and the day after that, to do the works of love in our world.

And on this night when we remember the birth of Jesus in a manger, our carol People Look East reminds us that Love comes not just in one form, not just in the form of a vulnerable baby, but also as a guest, and as a rose, as a bird, and as a star, and also as a Lord.

Christmas comes in many forms and our carol asks us to open our eyes and be open to the ways God's love comes to us in unexpected ways, and from surprising directions.

Where is love looking to be born in your life right now?

How is the love of God unexpectedly showing up in the ordinariness of your day-to-day comings and goings?

How you answer these questions will give you the first lyrics to a carol you can write based on your own experience of love. It might not be a carol as popular as Silent Night, or Hark the Herald Angels Sing, but it might just be a carol that you find yourself singing unexpectedly on day in July as you mow your grass, or find yourself hiking up Haystack, or looking out over the ocean while sitting on the beach, or even vacuuming your living room.

Because your carol will be about that same old story that all the other carols ever written are about.

It will be about love.

God's love for you, your love for God, and about our love for each other.

Merry Christmas!

Alleluia!

The Christ is born!

Amen.