

Coach House Church BEACONS

DRIVING HOME

9TH DECEMBER 2020

This time of year we find ourselves bombarded with Christmas related songs. From the classic "Driving home for Christmas" to Jingle bells, we all have a favourite song that really gets us in the Christmas mood.

But what is the best Christmas song ever written? The Messiah by Handel?, Joy to the world, Silent night, Away in a manger, Jingle bells . . .

Apart from the good songs there are a few odd ones out there too. For me, if it is sung by a chipmunk or a crazy frog its pretty bad. but how about "Santa Clause is coming to town". Surely not I hear you cry, but bear with me ...

The problem is not with Santa, but with the message of the song- "You better watch out, you better not cry, you better not pout etc.". Now when we sing it with a slightly sinister tone it definitely has a different meaning. But one thing i can say is that God is not like Santa Clause. His love is for both the naughty and the nice.

Songs that touch lives, span culture and defy time have found a way to marry the perfect melody and rhythm with the right words. Silent Night shows how the melody and the words seem intimately connected.

The rhythm of Jingle Bells is a horse trotting pulling a sleigh with bells jingling. You want to take a sip of your hot cider and snuggle down in an oversized chair as you listen to these words, "Chestnuts roasting on an open fire."

I think "White Christmas" is probably the most popular Christmas song ever. A song that touches all our emotional buttons like: nostalgia, friends and family, hope, peace and optimism.

But if we were to write the best Christmas song ever written: What message should the best Christmas song ever written present?

Christmas is nearly here. The signs are everywhere. There are Christmas songs that are playing on the radio, decorations all over town and presents under the tree. But do you know what the top five signs that Christmas is near are?

- There are more pine needles on your carpet than on your tree.
- The bank account is smoking along with the turkey and ham.
- Home Alone has been shown for the 13th time.
- A trip to the shops and back is more challenging than climbing Everest .
- And if you've got small kids you're pulling an all-nighter because of the words "Some Assembly Required" is written on a box with a toy in.

Signs point us to the reality that something significant is getting ready to occur. In the bible we have seen that when you place the gift of prophecy and the gift of tongues side by side and compare them, the gift of prophecy seems far more valuable for the church because it more clearly communicates God's truth. But the gift of tongues has value too. It has value to God because it allows the speaker to communicate praise and thanksgiving to God, and it has value to the church when the message is interpreted because we receive encouragement whenever we hear another's praises toward God.

The gift of tongues also has value outside the church. It has value for God's plan to bring people into a saving relationship with Himself. Tongues are a sign. It is like a bright, neon flashing billboard that tells people that something out of the ordinary is going on here, and they had better check it out. Just like the signs let us know how near Christmas is in the calendar, this sign of tongues told people that something was coming soon, and they had better prepare themselves.

Let's delve a bit deeper.

1. Signs can capture our attention.

Usually during this season, our family often has some traveling to see relatives. We will head south down M6 and then onto the M25. Soon after hitting the M25, we will begin to see signs for how far it is to Canterbury. Signs for Canterbury always get our attention. They warn us of impending family. If we didn't pay attention to those signs, we would not be able to get where we are going. And thus facing the wrath of the in-laws whose dinner getting colder on the table will soon be in the dog - if they had one. We need to be the signs, the Beacons if you will to people who don't know the love of Jesus.

2. Signs can change our direction.

That journey that my family and I take covers a lot of territory, and the opportunity for getting lost is always with us. We know the signs to look for as we go along, and so long as we see them and are willing to change our direction according to what they tell us, then we will make it to our eventual destination.

When the angels left the shepherds on that night, they responded with a change of direction. They said, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened" It's interesting to me that they recognised what the real miracle, the real sign was on that night. It was not the angels and their angelic choir that captured their attention. It was the promise of a baby. I fear that many of us would have stayed right where we were looking for another visitation from the angels rather than being obedient to find God's gift to the world. Because of the sign, these shepherds let go of their own plans for that night and for their lives and did what they had been instructed. They traveled to Bethlehem. They changed their direction. If I could convince you with words, I would. I would tell you that it is worth leaving the wilderness behind to find all that God wants to give you. The shepherds left their hillside in the wilderness to find the joy and hope that only Jesus brings. They were willing to allow God to re-direct their lives for the rest of their lives. From that moment on, they were walking on a different pathway with a different destination.

3. Signs can get us to listen.

Listening is important. For the shepherds out on that hillside, listening meant hearing the greatest news that has ever been told. They heard the angel say, "Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11) And then, they went to find that baby in the manger, and they listened to the words that Mary and Joseph told them - words about the angel's visit to each of them and what the angel had told them would be the course and purpose of this child's life. The people in Jerusalem who had gathered for Pentecost, they listened too. It was probably harder for them to hear because there were so many distractions. It was a holiday, a celebration, much like Christmas. The crowds, the commotion, the vendors selling their goods. Above all that, they heard people speaking in their own language and that captured their attention. They thought at first that the 120 were either madmen or drunk. They were getting ready to dismiss the whole thing and walk away. But then, they heard Peter stand up and interpret what was going on. He gave the meaning of the sign that they had heard. The sign had gotten their attention and had brought them to a point where they were willing to listen, but it was the clear words of Peter that they needed to hear.

4. Signs can bring us into the presence of God.

In this passage from Corinthians, Paul says that when a person finally starts to listen to the words that God is saying to him, some dramatic changes start to happen in his life.

"He will be fully persuaded that he is a sinner, convinced by all"

The story that almost every parents tells their children is that if they are not good, then Santa will not like them, and they will not get any presents. This same theory has worked its way into our view of God. A small boy was writing a letter to God about the Christmas presents he badly wanted. "I've been good

for six months now," he wrote. But after a moment's reflection he crossed out "six months" and wrote "three". After a pause that was crossed out and he put "two weeks". There was another pause and that was crossed out too. He got up from the table and went over to the little manger scene that had the figures of Mary and Joseph. He picked up the figure of Mary and went back to his writing and started again: "Dear God, if you ever want to see your mother again"

That boy recognised the same fact that Peter was trying to convey to that crowd in Jerusalem at Pentecost and the same realisation that will happen in any church whenever the truth is declared in understandable language. We are all sinners. We have done things that are wrong. We don't have to be good to get God to like us. God doesn't love or welcome us on the basis of our goodness because none of us are good. We have all failed to measure up to the perfect standard that God has set.

The events that happened on a hillside just outside of Bethlehem resulted in shepherds coming into the presence of God. They bowed at the manger of Jesus. The events that happened in Jerusalem brought the presence of the Holy Spirit into the people that were there on that day. Peter promised the people that responded in repentance that they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38) When a church is healthy, God's Spirit is present in power which results in the conviction, confessing and forsaking of sin. And that becomes the greatest sign to an unbelieving world that something is really going on and that these Christians really have something and we need to go and see it for ourselves.

See, a changed life will be a sign that no one can shut out and that no one can ignore.



JAMIE BAKER



Coach House Church

leadership@coachhousechurch.org // 0161 432 5604

the coach house church, 222 wellington road north, stockport sk4 2qn