

**Order of Service: The Sounds of Christmas**  
Senses of Christmas Advent Series  
Jubilee Mennonite Church

December 23, 2018: **10:00 AM—Dainties to Follow**

**Prelude:** Stable soundscape

Opening Song:

**Words of welcome/**setting up the sounds of the season [soundscape continues underneath?]

Elfrieda: Words of welcome, notions of how we hear, what we hear, etc; opening prayer

*“Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God”? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.” (Isaiah 40:27–28, NRSV)*

Light Candle 1

**Preselected Song(s) [Donna]**

**The word of anticipation:** Matthew 1:18-23 (reader [TBD] lights 2<sup>nd</sup> candle) [Brief meditation] (Bryce)

The sounds of Christmas have been with us ever since Halloween. To induce us into the buying frenzy the season requires, most public spaces have been spreading holiday cheer for quite some time now. With voices and bands right out of the era of the making of popular culture—Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra and the rest underscore our holidays with their stylings of the classics. Every pop star worth their salt seems to publish their versions sooner or later. Personally I am partial to a more than healthy dose of Handel’s Messiah, a piece I grew up singing in its entirety since I was in Junior High (a 85 year tradition in my home congregation). Begun before instruments were allowed in church, the Messiah at Oak Grove was originally accompanied by an octet of voices who hummed and sung the instrumentals. That and a good dollop of John Denver and the Muppets singing Christmas tunes puts me right in the Christmas spirit. Christmas eve for me is being trundled in the back of an early 80’s Honda for the 5 to 8 hour drive to Indiana and my Grandmothers (depending on the weather), with the little drummer boy seemingly on repeat on the AM radio.

When we think of the sounds of Christmas, we are taken the cultural niceties of the season. Yet, the real sounds of the season are not always that nice. The voice of those waiting in anticipation for their glimpse of God’s salvation, wondering aloud how long O Lord. The peculiar tone of the prophets proclaiming in the wilderness: “Repent for the time is near.” The wonder-filled promises given in dreams where the unbelievable is asked to be accepted and lived into to. The sounds of Christmas include the cries of long humanity waiting for the world to change, a frightened family invited into faith that God will provide, the mundane sounds of the stable in which Incarnation born. If you read long enough in Matthew’s advent story, you will even hear the inconceivable wailing of the massacre of the innocents as Herod tries to hold onto power the only way he knows how. In short, the sounds of Christmas—real Christmas are the sounds of life and living. Sometime sweet, sometimes scary, loud and raucous to the clarion call to prepare ye the way of the Lord. We know this, because we have our own groans and cries of anticipation too. Still, God comes into the soundscape of the whole of life, noisy as it is, discordant though it may be, and provides the music of the spheres.

Even as we have our personal playlists of the season (and these days, who doesn't), we are invited to hear again the still small voice: even now I am here; even yet I am coming; even still, all things in Christ are made new, whole, and complete in God's good time.

**Songs of longing: 3-4** (select 1-2 verses ONLY)

**Heralding the birth:** Luke 2:8-14 (reader [TBD] lights 3<sup>rd</sup> candle) [Brief meditation] (Bryce)

Have you ever considered the angel's opening line? Each and every time, it's the same when they have to deal with humanity: "wait a minute: do not be afraid—this is *GOOD* news". What patience it must take to deliver even the best news to we fearful souls. Its quite a process: first you have to make your appearance, then you have to calm people down from hysteria sufficiently to say what must be said, and only then might you be able to see the light dawn on the uncomprehending that this might be something we want to hear. Whether as a solo or a whole multitude, encountering the pronouncement of "God is here, and his salvation is at hand" has to take some getting used to.

I wonder how often we are like Ebenezer Scrooge are disinclined to hear, and less given to listening, dismissing what we hear as "You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato. There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!" in encountering the warning ghost of his partner Marley. We are given to sound, logical explanations of things, and disinclined to listening too long to that which fails to the suit our ears. Perhaps do we miss the announcements of God with us that ring in our time and place, that would seek to excite even our weary hearts? Perhaps so. Leaning again on Mr. Dickens, I wonder whether it can be said of us that we keep Christmas well, noting the occasion to hear again the glad tidings of great joy, and not a holiday bound with tradition and wrapped in familiarity to be trotted out, appreciated, and then tucked away like our favorite Christmas Sweetener. Are we afraid of what we might hear? How might we miss the angels of today, inviting us to that which God is doing now?

Christmas must be about opening ourselves to the ways of God in the here and now every bit as much it was then. God, grant us the courage to encounter the song that is sung by the choirs of today, and the keenness to stop in awe, knowing glory when we find it.

**Songs of celebration: 3-4** Select 1-2 verses; default first 2

**Listening for God with us:** Revelation 21:1-5A (reader [TBD] lights 4<sup>th</sup> candle) [Brief meditation] (Bryce)

“See, I am making all things new.” That is the promise. That is the hope. That is our song, in this season and every season. As unchangeable as the seasons seem, and as impossibly immovable the troubles of our lives and our world are with us, and they are real, and they are myriad, that is the pronouncement, the hope we must keep before us. It is a matter of faith; try though we might to prove that this is real, that the world of the kingdom remains under construction even yet, that the way of God holds promise to us even here, even yet. The way of faith is the way of hope as that the world is about to turn.

Which cannot be taken lightly. Hope is an all too rare commodity. We look at our world, look at our problems, look at our lives, and we struggle to know what is about to happen, let alone to be able to rest in a meaningful hope that it is good. Yet, time and again that is exactly what we are invited to: to hope in God, to keep the vision of a new heaven and new earth ringing forth, even when the din of the insolvable problems seem so massive. We have whole generations convinced that hope is beyond them in facing the realities of the changing world and altering environment. We know our lives can sometimes seem unchanging, unchangeable.

Yet hear this: God has dwelt, is dwelling, and will dwell among the people. God’s hope rises even beyond the certainties of the day. God’s reconciling vision promises that there is no place we can be where God is not. This is the Good News; that God has come and dwelt among us, and hope remains alive. May the sweet sound of the everlasting song fill our ears, enliven our hearts, and set us marching yet again to the beat of God’s future forever more. Merry Christmas is a declaration of hope; May it be so for you, now and always. Amen.

**Songs of anticipation: 3** Select 1-2 verses

**Offering: Special Music** (Eleanor Reimer)

**Sharing what we have heard/Prayer:** Elfrieda Schroeder

**Church News:** Elfrieda Schroeder

**Sending Song**