

“Night of the Father’s Love”

Isaiah 40.3-5; Psalm 24.7-10; Luke 1.13, 16-17; Luke 1.26-33; Matthew 1.18-21; Matthew 2.1-2, 10-11

to accompany selections from the cantata “Night of the Father’s Love” by Pepper Choplin

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What does it mean, “Prepare the way of the Lord”? What does it mean, “The glory of the Lord shall be revealed”? What does it mean, “Lift up your heads, O gates, that the King of glory may come in”? What do you mean by these ancient words? Why do you sing this song? “God’s glory will descend, rise up and welcome in the coming of the Lord”? What inspires you to sing so joyfully? You make it sound as if something wonderful is about to happen in this God-forsaken world. Is that not what this world is? I see suffering and misery and sickness and death everywhere. I see poverty and despair. I see thieves and cutthroats, rapists and murderers. I see dishonesty in the marketplace, deceit between friends, corruption in government, corruption in religion, the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer; who can we really trust? So many people in debt. So many people trying to escape from their problems through alcohol or food or sex or drugs. So many people filled with anger and rage. So many people confused, lost, hopeless. So much war. So much hate. So much wrong with the world.

And you sing of the coming of the Lord? “God with us, He will dwell”? Why would God come *here*? What hope is there for this sorry world? You say “the deaf will hear, the blind will see Him clear, the mute will find their voice, the lame will leap for joy” – and I cry, *no!* God won’t come here. He gave up on us long ago. You are being way too idealistic. God doesn’t care about us. Doesn’t the suffering of the world make that obvious? There’s nothing to hope for. Nothing to wait for. God won’t come here.

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Waiting, listening – for what? *Something* must be causing you to sing these songs. I’m not good at waiting. I want peace, *now*. I want solutions to the problems of this world, *now*. I want the darkness to end, *now*. I don’t want to wait any longer. If there really is a God, why didn’t he do something long ago? Why make us wait so many decades, so many *centuries*? I don’t understand how you can sing about this “Emmanuel” when there is still so much wrong with the world. Doesn’t the very existence of suffering and evil prove that there is no God? That there’s nothing to wait for? Nothing to hope for?

I wish I understood how you have it in your hearts to sing so joyfully. You sound like you really *believe* that something good is going to come out of this sorry mess. Or that something good is going to *happen* to this sorry mess. Where do you get that belief? Where do you get that faith? That hope?

Something's stirring in your hearts; something must be helping you to see things that I can't see. You talked about "open hearts." You said something about prayer. I gave up on prayer long ago. I asked God to fix the wrongs in the world, and he didn't fix 'em. Why pray to a God who doesn't answer pray? I think you're deluded. There's nothing to hope for. Nothing to wait for. God isn't going to come *here*.

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I just don't understand. You're telling me that God sent angels to *three different people*. That God had special messages for each of them. Do you realize how far-fetched this sounds? I mean, really. When was the last time an angel visited *you*? I suppose you're going to tell me that's the point. These angel visits, they were *special*. Because what God is doing is *special*. I hear you, all right. You called it "a beautiful sound." You talked about the "Savior" that Mary is carrying, that "holy Child" inside her womb. "The Lord has heard your prayer"; "you have found favor with God"; "now the Lord is with you." I hear the words. You sing them with conviction in your hearts. You sound as if you really believe them to be true. And I ask you: *how*? *How* do you believe these things to be true? Has an angel visited *you*?

I'm sorry. That wasn't fair. It's just – I have a hard time believing that God could really do something like what you're describing. That God *would* do something like what you're describing. You seem to have a faith that I don't have. You seem to have a *hope* that I don't have. I wish I could see the world with your eyes. I wish I could see past the suffering and the darkness, the misery and the despair. I wish I could believe that God really could, really *would*, come to us, in the way that you are describing.

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The light shines in the darkness. I see it now! The star, the light, the glorious radiance that is cause for great celebration! The dark sky is illuminated by stars, one shining brighter than all the rest. It's tempting to look at this world and see nothing but darkness, despair, dismay. But there is a *light* shining brightly. Why didn't I see it? Why *couldn't* I see it? It was there, prophets and angels pointing to it, you were singing about it, but I was blind. Now I see, and what a wonder I see! *I see God*, here in our midst, *God*, come to this earth, showing us the way out of darkness, into his glorious light. Yes, there's misery and suffering and evil in this world, any fool can see that, but *God is doing something about it* – *that's* the song that you're singing! It's so tempting to wallow in a pit of despair, stubbornly refusing to see that there's *more* going on here than what meets the eye, *more* that God's up to than is immediately obvious. There's a *glorious restoration* at work, and you and I – *we get to experience it!*

All we need to do is follow the star. Acknowledging that it exists isn't enough. Saying that it's beautiful isn't enough. We have to *go towards it*. God went to a lot of trouble to come all the way down here, but there's another step that *we* have to do. *We have to follow that star*. Get up, off our duffs, out of our misery, *come to Jesus*. Worship and bow down. Offer our gifts. Pledge our lives in service to him. He's come all this way, *so that we can come to him*. Seeking the king ... *worshiping* the king ... *serving* the king ... to the end of our days. Every time someone chooses to make that journey, to follow the star, to bow down and worship, to offers their gifts ... this world gets a little bit brighter.

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