



- Week Four - "O Holy Night"

Check-in

How are you? Where have you seen Christ working in your life in the last week? And... what did Santa bring you for Christmas?

Opening Prayer

God of New Beginnings, remind us that we find our worth in you, and we celebrate the birth of Christ as a reminder of your love for us.

Introduction

Well, folks, we have a winner! Our Caroling Christmas Tournament has come to a close and you have declared a champion! "O Holy Night" outlasted "Mary, Did You Know?" in a battle of modern versus classic titans... the most popular from the last 30 years couldn't compete with the classic from the last 3 centuries. So, today, we'll

look at the champion as last carol in our series and wrap up our journey to re-embrace Christ coming into our lives.

Warm-up Question: Who did you vote for? Were you on Team Old School or did you jump on Mary's bandwagon? Let the debate begin.

Scripture & Carol

We've talked about a plea for God to enter into our lives, with week 1's "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." We've talked about our need to respond by encountering the presence of God through adoration, with week 2's "O Come All Ye Faithful." And we've talked about the hopes and fears with which we enter this season, as we explored last week's "O Little Town of Bethlehem." But all those discussions were preparation, and preparation time is over... Christ is here. And so, today, we're going to resolve this melody and talk about the promise that was fulfilled when Christ came into the world, and what that moment means for our lives going forward. Perhaps one song epitomizes this more than any other.

~ O Holy Night

We've spent this series talking about preparing our hearts for Christmas. But, we're there. Preparation time is over. Christmas is here. It's now time to celebrate Christ coming into this world and into our lives...

And this song drives home that celebration and the meaning of Christmas for us. Here's how...

The lyrics start simply by setting the stage, transporting you back to that night 2000 years ago.

*O holy night, the stars are brightly shining...
It is the night of our dear Savior's birth.*

Okay, great, but those were scriptures we covered in previous weeks. We got that part... now what?

Long lay the world in sin and error pining...

Sounds a little like the prophecy we read in week 1. We already covered that... go on.

Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth.

Ooh, that's new... okay, now we're getting somewhere. "Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth." This line gives us the foundation for what it meant for Christ to come into this world and invokes a powerful sentiment: when God came into this world, our souls felt their worth. Christ came into this world to set the captives free and bring the exile home... but why? This line gets at the heart of it. It wasn't because we were helpless and hopeless, though we often are. It doesn't suggest that we're sinful and need redeemed, though that's

probably true, too. Instead, this line suggests that God entered into our world, born as Jesus the Messiah, because we are worthy children of God, because we are so loved that God wanted to be near us, and because Christ wanted *us* to be near to *him*. And thus, at Christmas, we celebrate Christ entering our lives so that we would know we are loved, so that we would embrace the value this gives to our lives, and we feel that worth down into the depth of our souls.

Question 1: This is a much longer conversation and one we've spent entire series on, but it's worth revisiting occasionally. What source, (outside of this value that Christ gives,) do you base your worth upon? What opinion or accomplishment or facet of life do you find determines your self-worth most? What would it take to give it a back seat to the value you have simply because you are loved by God?

That's good stuff and that's not even the end of the first verse. But perhaps your self-worth isn't struggling. Perhaps the next line speaks to you. The author talks about a "weary world." Now, "weary" is a loaded word... it goes beyond just being tired. Weary goes beyond just a lack of sleep because you stayed up all night building the Barbie Dream House that will probably fall apart by New Years. "Weary" means you are tired all the way to your soul, and can come from a plethora of sources. Weariness happens when you've been beat down time and time again. Weariness happens when the rough waves of life crash over you again and again, and you don't know if you can get up. Weariness happens when it feels like the struggles of life have become

too much. And so, we look to this carol for a word about what Christ coming into our lives does for a weary soul.

A thrill of hope...

A “thrill” of hope. This is a beautiful image. Sometimes, we as Christians say we’re hopeful, but it comes a little begrudgingly. We profess to be hopeful, but we keep an attitude of “woe is me.” But the hope we get from Christmas, and a God who loves us so much that *that* God would come into the world to be with us, is a hope that should *thrill* us, a hope that should change our attitudes and lighten our weary souls. It’s okay to be not okay. It’s okay to be sad and it’s okay to mourn. It’s okay to be weary. But there should be a *thrill* in the hope that we experience through the birth of our Savior, and as the song says, should cause us to rejoice!

Question 2: What is currently making you weary? What would God’s hope look like in that situation? What would it take for God’s presence in your life to give you a thrill of hope?

Closing

We close this series with the next line...

For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!

And that's the point, that's the crux of what we celebrate at Christmas. We celebrate a holy night when Christ was born, and with that birth, we no longer have to walk in our darkness. We no longer have to feel unloved, unaccepted, unworthy. We no longer have weary souls with no antidote. There's a light that shines into our lives and shatters our darkness, like the breaking of a new and glorious morning. Our weary souls can rejoice and have that thrill of hope because, like the way the dawn breaks the night, we have the promise of a bright and certain future because of that "O Holy Night" when Christ was born.

Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations.

Close in prayer.