

Heaven and Nature Sing
Psalm 98 & Luke 2:8-20

O Sing to God a new song.
Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth.
Break forth into joyous song, sing with the lyre, with melody, with trumpets and horn.
Let the sea roar and
Let the floods clap their hands.

Over and over the Psalmist urges musical expression of praise. ...From *all* of creation!
There seems to be a song for everything!

And then Luke shares the song of the angels:
Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace.

Finally, in the reading, shepherds return to their fields “glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen”. I expect they took the Psalmist’s counsel to heart, lifting voice and instrument to convey their joy.

Shepherds and angels and oceans.
Heaven and nature do, indeed, sing.

So do we. In fact, I’m not going to take a lot of time with words this morning just so we CAN sing the carols that have become favorites to many of us.
But I would like to take a brief look at this “joyous song” into which we “break forth” this time each year.

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Many of us love Christmas carols.  
    The familiar tunes,  
        The familiar words...  
            The familiar *feeling*  
                that envelopes us as we mingle our voices with others.

It’s that *feeling*, I propose, that captures each of us strongest of all.

The familiarity of Christmas carols is evocative of  
    our long-gone childhoods,  
        our families of origin who don’t often gather as they once did,  
            our first churches that shaped us ever after.

*These songs are more than sung proclamations of the Christmas story –  
    They are all the Christmases of our history,  
    They are bearers of emotional memory.  
        And they carry us back.*

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This year I have been particularly remembering my elementary school chorus. Each year we sang the same song for our Christmas Concert finale. Luckily for you, the song is not in our New Century hymnal; but if you’re curious it’s #136 in the Pilgrim Hymnal.

I LOVED singing that song. When I finally got to 3rd grade and joined the bell choir as well as chorus, I got to RING the song as well as sing it. It was heaven; and to me, it was a necessary part of Christmas.

So I think of that carol and remember elementary school, my music teacher, ringing bells and how special I felt during those concerts. One song carries all of that and more, for me.

But mention that particular song to my mother, and she reminds me how she and my brother got *extremely tired* of listening to me practice it non-stop! But they remember...

What do these carols make you remember?

How do they remind you of the meaning of Christmas?

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Our carols carry so much that helps us remember who we are, who we were, and hopefully, who we are becoming in Christ. These carols reveal Christmas past, Christmas present and Christmas yet to come better than any Dickens ghost! And in these feelings of warmth and family and friendship and home, we are manifesting the warmth of Christ born in our midst. Through familiar music we are bringing forth worship and praise in celebration of the one who gives us the gift of home and comfort.. who IS our ultimate home and comfort.

But there is always a new tune and more lyrics to be added to our lives. The Psalmist charges:  
“O sing to God a *new* song, for God has done marvelous things!”

Because God does continue doing marvelous things for us: Emmanuel is born once more today.

As the shepherds returned to their fields, this is a season for us to return home –home to familiar ground and memories, while praising God and letting others hear of the new things we have seen.

The familiar carols take us back and give us foundation, roots; and they comfort us with the familiar. While a new song always calls out to us, challenging us to try the unknown and hear Christ’s voice in a different tune.

Listen. Listen to the carols old and new. Make new memories and hold Christmas – hold Christ – in you.  
And sing!

Joy to the world!

Christ is born and heaven and nature sing.

So do I.            So do we.

Let it be.