

O Come All Ye Faithful,
Gloria in Excelcis Deo,
Hark the Herald Angels Sing,
Silent Night,
Joy to the World.

Enjoy the carols.
Enjoy these hymns.
Savor them.

They will be gone by 2:00 tomorrow afternoon.

Maybe you can find a radio station
that plays them all day on Christmas,
but for all the hurry they have to start playing Christmas songs,
sometime after the Fourth of July,
they sure seem in a hurry to be done with them.

You can hear them while you make brunch tomorrow.
You can hear Christmas songs while presents are being unwrapped
(or torn into).
But if you turn the radio on anytime after lunch,
you are taking your chances.

But not here.
Here at St. Mark's,
you can come and hear them next Sunday:
the First Sunday of Christmas.

Some of you know,
if you are deep enough into churchy things,
that there is term sometimes thrown around.
“The Advent Police.”

Which is basically any church person, lay or clergy,
who goes around tsking and rolling their eyes
at festive displays put out before 3:00 on Christmas Eve.
They make sure that Advent is enforced, right up until the last minute!

You might imagine,
I am not among those people.
And yet,
yet, I am grateful for a church
that doesn't decorate until after that service for the 4th Sunday of Advent.
I am grateful for a place,
a lone place,
that is SO out of step with the world around us.

News reports indicated that retailers were delighted
with how early Thanksgiving was.
They got nearly a whole extra week of Christmas shopping out of us.
And we kept shopping.
We, as a culture,
we start shopping those Black Friday deals,
we take care of big gifts on Cyber Monday,
and then we are done...
for about three days.

But you can't stay in your house from Thanksgiving until Christmas.
No, you've got to get out there sometime.
And so you see some things on sale.
And you buy a little there
and a little here.

And it inundates your email box,
and tempting ads appear on Instagram and Facebook.

All it takes is a few clicks
and there's 47 dollars worth of Christmas gifts:
a tie for your brother
and a matching bowtie for you.
(don't worry, I gave it to him on Saturday,
so the cat is already out of the bag).

But none of that happens in here.
In here,
it's not Christmas until about five and a half hours ago.

None of that happens in here:
the shopping
and the stress
and the demands of perfection
laid at the altar of commerce.

None of that happens in here,
but we bring it in here.
We bring **everything** in here.
At least I hope we do.

It's a strange thing,
how out of sync the church is
with the world around us.

But I'm glad for it.
I'm glad that we will be singing Christmas Carols next Sunday.
Not because we need another twelve days of Christmas songs.
Lord knows we DO NOT.
No, I'm glad to be out of sync with the world,
because we ought to be a little out of sync with the world.

A church that worships a God born in a manger,
ought to be a little out of sync with the world.

A church that follows a savior
who said we ought to pray for our enemies,
love those who persecute us,
and turn the other cheek,
ought to be a little out of sync with the world.

Growing up,
I heard that sort of thing all the time.
I heard it
and I hated it.

“Don’t become enamored with the things of this world.”

“Don’t become involved with the things of this world.”

What I really heard was,

“Don’t bring your everyday life into church.”

“Don’t bring all that worldly stuff into church.”

There’s just one problem:

this is the only world we’ve got,
and we live in it.

And if we don’t bring all that worldly stuff in here,
then we can’t really come in here,
at least not wholly,
not honestly,
not with everything we’ve got.

And if we don’t come to church with our whole selves,
then there’s not much point coming at all.

It's laughable to suggest
that God would ask us to leave the world outside those doors.
A God who chose to come and live in the world.

Yes,
the world is profane,
and disgusting,
and broken,
and horribly out of kilter.

AND God was born into a world that is
profane,
and disgusting,
and broken,
and horribly out of kilter.

At Christmas we say that God WAS born,
because we are giving thanks for a thing
that happened a long time ago.

But I wonder if,
at Christmas,
we ought not look around for signs that God IS BEING born,
into the profane
and the disgusting
and the broken
and the horribly out of kilter.

God chose it then,
why in heaven's name
would God say "no" to it now?

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Silent Night,
Joy to the World.

There's even a few more I didn't say.

Sing,
sing out,
sing tonight,
and tomorrow,
and this coming Sunday.
Sing,
sing out.
Sing the rest of your life long.

Silent Night, Holy Night
- Christ the Savior is Born.
Joy to the World,
he comes to make his blessings flow,
far as the curse is found.

The curse is found,
out there,
in that world,
beyond this glowing, jewel box of a church.
The curse,
the brokenness,
the profanity of living in this world.
And we carry it around with us,
all the time
- even Christmastime.
We even bring it with us into this place,
at least I hope we do.

But God came,
was born,
 into a manger,
 into the unlikeliest of circumstances,
was born to make his blessings flow
 - far as the curse is found.

to make his blessings flow
to make even the darkest night shine with holy light.
to fling mercy about like it's nothing,
 though it is dear.

So sing.
Sing out.
Sing tonight,
 and tomorrow
 and Sunday.
Sing,
 far as the curse is found.
Sing your whole life long.
 The wonders of his love.