

Christmass
St. Luke 2:1-20
December 24, 2016
St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

Have yourself a Merry Christmass!

The third most popular Christmass song in the last five years is, 'Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmass.' It has been performed by variety of artists including Ella Fitzgerald, Bing Crosby, Doris Day, James Taylor, Josh Groban, Michael Buble` and Frank Sinatra, among many others. The original version appeared in a 1944 movie entitled, "Meet me in St. Louis" and was performed by Judy Garland. The song was considered melancholy, and was rewritten for the latter performers to make it more palatable for the season. The original brought many soldiers to tears when they heard it. The lyrics fit the times, even though the movie script had nothing to do with World War II:

Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmass

[From meet me in St. Louis- performed by Judy Garland]

"Have yourself a merry little Christmass
Let your heart be light
Next year all our troubles will be out of sight
Have yourself a merry little Christmass
Make the yuletide gay
Next year all our troubles will be miles away
Once again as in olden days
Happy golden days of yore
Faithful friends who are dear to us
Will be near to us once more
Someday soon we all will be together
If the fates allow
Until then we'll have to muddle through somehow

So have yourself a merry little Christmass now”

I love the original version. It is wrapped in powerful emotion about Christmass past. Christmass is an emotional time. It is a time when our time in life has become full, just as our hearts our full in this season. The song emotes hope, that even if things aren't perfect now, next year, Christmass has the potential to be better, more hopeful, with our troubles either far away or behind us. Yet even in the recognition that the future may be brighter, the song invites us to make the best of the Christmass we have now.

The first Christmass was also fraught with troubles that were close at hand. There was the matter of being miles from home, away from family and friends. Then there was the problem of *no room at the inn*. The Holy Family—Joseph & Mary—were homeless, with nowhere but animal quarters to find shelter. And there were the soldiers of the wicked despot Herod who were searching to kill all the children under age two throughout the region of Bethlehem, (*where they supposed him to be born*) in a vain attempt to secure his throne. If you think you had your troubles when you started your family, imagine what they went through for a few minutes tonight. If you thought your Christmass was problematic this year, remember the first Christmass long ago. The words “*next year all our troubles will be miles away*,” evokes a new meaning when we remember the Holy Family fled to Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod.

Yet even in the midst of the hardship they faced, there was great joy in that humble cave in Bethlehem where Jesus was born and God came into the world to be among us. [*Yes, we know that it was a cave and not the Medieval stable envisioned by artists unfamiliar with how animals were*

sheltered in Israel in the first century.] Angels gave praise in the heavens. The shepherds [who the text noted lived out in the fields in the cold and dark night with their animals] came in from their flocks and fields to see this promise of God fulfilled, this good news for the lowly and humble, the ordinary and yes, the extraordinary too: "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.

And from afar, three wise men came to see him, led by a star, a shiny, bright Christmass star, the first to lead human beings to the Christ in this world. The light of God shown brightly on this scene, for the first time in history, like a spotlight from heaven to light up the dark night of winter, we know so well in these parts at this time of year, and like the spotlight shining down upon the crèche scene in this church tonight. The first Christmass was not unlike this night. Cold and dark.

Yet in the bleak mid-winter, in the cold and darkness came a light to enlighten the world. In this humble place was born a child who would change everything in history to come after him, down to this day. Love came down and dwelt among us. Christmass is all about love. Ask Hallmark.

Love trumps darkness and dispels it. Love shines brightly in our hearts and in our memories. I remember the love my Dad showed my family each year at this time. My dad went to sea and worked as a Chief engineer aboard a sea going tug boat.

My dad never failed to come home for even one Christmas when I was growing up. It was something special he did for me and my mother, no matter where he was, when his boat tied up, he came home to be with us, even if it was only for Christmas day. Now, I don't expect to see him this Christmas. He has been gone these last 15 years. Someday soon, I believe and anticipate the promise of the song tonight, we all will be together once again. Faithful friends and family from happy days of yore are not forgotten, but live on in our hearts as we celebrate the season with them and our current friends and family, once more.

Good News is still preached in cities and towns across the world. Families gather tonight to reread the story of the birth of Christ, as we did a few moments ago. So have yourself a Merry Little Christmas now:

*"Faithful friends who are dear to us
Will be near to us once more
Someday soon we all will be together
If the fates allow
Until then we'll have to muddle through somehow
So have yourself a merry little Christmas now..."*

So as you gather together tonight and tomorrow with friends and family who are dear to you from near and far, remember the promise also that those who for what ever reason can not be with you, someday soon we all will be together, if the fates or God will allow. I believe that with all my heart! Merry Christmas now! AMEN

