

Archbishop Anne's Christmas Message

2019

“Joy to the world, the Lord is come; let earth receive her King; let every heart prepare Him room and heaven and nature sing, and heaven and nature sing, and heaven and heaven and nature sing.”

There is a beautiful interplay between the heavens and the earth in this much loved hymn we sing at Christmas, “Joy to the World”¹. The heavens ring out the joyful news that the King is coming, while the earth receives it with an invitation to ready itself for this wonderful gift.

This is what Advent is about. We prepare to welcome Our Saviour who is coming, and who even now has ascended to rule the world with truth and grace, to make his blessings flow, and to share the wonders of his love from one end of this beautiful earth to the other, and across the whole universe.

The joy of this wondrous news is too important to say once, and it is repeated over and over again. By the time the final note is sung there is complete harmony between the heavens and the earth held together by God's gift of love.

This is exactly the way God intended the moment of His Son's appearance to be. Perfect harmony between the heavens and the earth.

“Joy to the earth! The Saviour reigns; let us glad songs employ, while fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains repeat the sounding joy, repeat the sounding joy, repeat, repeat the sounding joy.”

The interplay between the heavens and the earth is found in the stories of Jesus' birth. Heavenly messengers have good news to share with ordinary, easily overlooked people going about their daily lives. The heavens ring out and the earth sings in reply.

Zechariah, Mary, and Joseph all have their lives interrupted with extraordinary news from the heavens. For each of them, divine disruption erupts with joy.

Shepherds, abiding on the fringe of society, caring for their flocks, dumbfounded by an angelic chorus from the skies, are the first to receive the word that the Messiah has been born. They get straight to Bethlehem to see “this thing that has happened.”

Magi, those attentive to signs, follow a star that brings them to the place where a child is with his mother and father, and they kneel in wonder, offering the newborn King gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Yet, while complete harmony between the heavens and the earth is God's dream for our world, there seems to be a lag in its realization.

Apparently, the chasm between the rich and poor, the powerful and the marginalized is actually on the increase.

Our children and youth cry out in the streets that we pay attention to the climate crisis threatening their future.

Too many of our young people are dying by suicide because they see a future without hope.

Families are being separated by war and famine, finding themselves behind the barbed wire fences of refugee camps.

The tears and fears of the bereaved and sorrowful, the sick and the suffering could fill a lake with no end to their suffering in sight.

The lion still does not recline alongside the lamb. Swords have yet to be transformed into ploughshares, and tanks into tractors. The thorns of our time's "isms" continue to grow and flourish, pricking and scarring our fragile dreams of peace and justice for the world.

The Saviour who hung on a cross, crowned with those thorns, continues to bear the sin and weight of the world we see before us.

"No more let wrongs and sorrow grow, nor thorns infest the ground; He comes to make His blessings known, far as our sin is found, far as our sin is found, far as, far as our sin is found."

Perhaps this is the anthem we must raise this Christmas, to say in one voice, "No more of this." Enough of the evil infestations of our time! We will be people of action. We will find meaningful ways to put an end to hatred, division, injustice. If we live through the lens of fear, fear is what we will see. So we will attend to the messenger's voice calling through the storm, "Be not afraid!" We will live as a gospel people full of joy and wonder.

We will shout to our world, "People look up! Our God reigns."

"He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove the glories of his righteousness and wonders of his love, and wonders of his love, and wonders, wonders of his love."

I am confident that God's wonderful love will dwell in our hearts and homes this Christmas and in the New Year!

With gratitude and affection,

+ *Anne*



“The Sign” by Abe Kakepetum²

1. The Hymn “Joy to the World” (#154 in Common Praise) draws its inspiration from Psalm 98, 96 and Genesis 3.17 and was written for the second coming of Christ, not in celebration of the birth of Jesus that first Christmas. It is a collaborative effort between Isaac Watts (1674 – 1748) who wrote the words, George Frederic Handel (1685 -1759) who wrote the melody and Lowell Mason (1792- 1872) who adapted the harmony later on, naming the tune we sing today ‘Antioch’.
2. “The Sign” by Indigenous Artist Abe Kakepetum tells the story of the moment the people of the land saw a star that would lead them to the King who was born on that very special night.