

## Ten Strange Sounds of Christmas

This morning I want to talk with you about the sounds we hear at Christmas. When we think of the sounds of Christmas we are usually thinking of Christmas carols and songs, sleighbells ringing, children's choirs singing. Of course there are some other sounds of Christmas – people yelling and screaming at each other, horns honking, cash registers opening and closing. Last Sunday we talked about three strange signs of Christmas. This morning I want to talk about ten strange sounds of Christmas. Turn with me to Luke 2 and let's listen to the strange sounds of Christmas. Luke 2:1-8

**1. The sound of a crowded city.** “O little town of Bethlehem how still we see thee lie...” I love the song and that was perhaps the case later that night, but think for a moment about the circumstances of that holy night. The people that were gathering in the little town of Bethlehem were gathering there at the order of the Roman Caesar. They were gathering because the Roman occupiers forced them to be part of a census in order to more effectively levee a tax on them. That being the case, you can imagine the sounds of Bethlehem on that first Christmas night. Gripping, unhappy, disgruntled, frustrated people trying to find a place to stay. Being taxed, being forced to travel all this distance and then having to stand in a long line to register, having to pay the tax. Imagine tempers flaring, language growing rougher and louder as the evening wore on.

It's important that we hear the sound of the city because it reminds us that little has changed through the centuries because the hearts of men and women haven't changed. They are still lost, searching, angry, greedy, needing a Savior! And they are still overlooking or refusing to see and accept the only Savior who can change their life for eternity – the Savior who was born in a stable amidst all the busy sounds of that crowded little town called Bethlehem.

**2. The sound of rejection.** This is the sound we hear as Mary and Joseph are turned away at the Inn. No room. Think of that: Jesus is rejected before he is even born. Some of you can identify with that. John said he came to his own and his own received him not. And consider as well, Bethlehem was the ancestral city of both Mary and Joseph. You would have thought someone in town – some cousin or aunt or uncle would have given them a room, but the sound of rejection was heard in more places

than just the inn. Perhaps not even the extended family wanted the scandal of this unplanned pregnancy under their roof.

Maybe you can identify with Jesus and the rejection he experienced. Perhaps you were rejected at birth, perhaps by a parent or a grandparent. Maybe you've been rejected by a friend or a spouse in recent days. The sound of rejection on this first Christmas reminds all of us who have experienced rejection at some point in our life, at some level, that Jesus knows what it feels like. He knows what you are experiencing, what you are going through and he stands with open arms to receive you and to mend the brokenness of rejection.

The prophet Isaiah spoke of Jesus hundreds of years before his birth when he said of the Messiah, "**He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.**" **Isaiah 53:3**. For you that have known rejection, even from birth perhaps, believe me when I tell you there is one that cares and understands. He was acquainted with sorrow, with rejection, with grief. Wounded, bruised, rejected, in our stead, bearing our sin so we could be accepted and made whole by our Heavenly Father.

**3. The sound of labor and birth in a stable.** We've cleaned up that nativity scene quite a bit over the years. Everyone in the nativity scene looks far too neat and clean, too sterile and serene. Have you ever seen a stable where animals are kept? Have you ever smelled a stable where animals are kept? There is no more humble place you could think of for the birth of a king, especially this king.

The pictures painted by the artists over the centuries have tried to reflect the holiness of Mary and the baby and the spiritual reality of what happened in that stable on that special night. However, there were no halos glowing around their heads that night. Jesus didn't prop himself up in the manger and bless his parents. Ever seen a mother who has just given birth? She doesn't look like Mary looks in most of the paintings and pictures and nativity scenes I've seen. Have you ever seen a new born baby? They don't usually look like Jesus looks in most pictures and nativity scenes.

What is my point? That we need to remember this is a real event with real people. I think the first sounds of Christmas were Mary's cries of pain as she labored to deliver her baby boy. God became flesh and was born of a woman, in all the process

and pain, and the struggle and blood of childbirth. Jesus was born just like every other baby was born. No halos, no silent night, all likely wasn't calm. It was frightening, urgent, intense. It was childbirth.

It's important, these sounds, for they remind us of who Jesus is. He is God in flesh appearing, allowing all of us to see Him, to know Him. Jesus comes to reveal the Father to us. We know God, we have seen God because we know Jesus and we have seen Him. Incredible isn't it? And yet to all who will receive him and believe upon him he gives power to become the sons and daughters of God.

The sound of Christmas is the sound of God becoming flesh, identifying with us in our pain, in our loneliness, in our rejection, our isolation, our struggles, our frustration, our weariness, our fears, identifying with us in our struggle against temptation and sin for he was tempted in all points like us, yet he never sinned. This sound of Christmas is the sound of God being born in flesh and blood like us, wrapped in swaddling clothes and placed in a manger.

**4. The sound of God's silence being broken.** For 400 years there had been no prophet, no prophetic voice, only silence. Then rather than speaking through a prophet, God decides to speak himself. The writer of Hebrews declares, **"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various way, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being..."** Hebrews 1:1-3.

Think of it. God decides to speak and chooses to break the silence, not with the voice of a prophet but rather with the cries of an infant. The sound of Christmas is the sound of God's own voice, no longer masked as thunder crashing on Sinai's mountain top, no longer speaking through the mouths of the prophets. This time, God speaks and reveals himself in a way so we all can see and hear and receive from him.

John says, **"He made his dwelling among us and we have seen his glory."** **John 1:14.** It's not just the special people, the spiritual, the prophets. We have all been invited to come to him and see his glory. **"No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only who is at the Father's side, has made him known."** **John 1:18.**

Jesus has come to make God known to us. We don't have to wonder what he is

like. He has appeared and spoken to us by his Son. The silence has been broken and we have beheld his glory, the glory seen in a manger. God in flesh appearing.

**5. The sound of good news announced to the outcast.** Luke tells of the announcement of great joy being made to the shepherds in the fields near Bethlehem. We talked about this last Sunday. These were not the sweet little boys of our nativity scenes, but a rough bunch of men working on the hills. They were second class citizens and yet it was to these toughened men that the announcement came.

The common folks had little to be glad about in those days, oppressed by the Romans, oppressed by the wealthy and powerful, looked down upon by many, but the angels came with good news, for them and “for all the people.” The sound of Christmas includes the sound of joy for all the people. Every race, color, every person. Joy to the world the Lord is come. A savior is born and we don’t have to die in our sins. That is good, good news.

**6. The sound of praise.** Luke tell us on that holy night the heavens were filled with the sounds of the angels praising God. **“Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.’” Luke 2:13-14**

It wasn’t just the angels that were praising God. Luke speaks of more sounds of praise on that night. After seeing Jesus in the manger, the bible says, **“The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.” Luke 2:20**

The shepherds were praising God as they left the scene at the manger. You can’t look into the manger without giving praise to God, realizing the sacrifice that was being made. Bro. McQueen used to say, “Jesus left the ivory palaces of heaven and came to this sin cursed and benighted world to give his life as a redeeming sacrifice for sin.” Imagine. God so loved us. Us! That he sent his only son that whosoever believes in him would not perish but have everlasting life.

The songwriter said, “that God should love a sinner such as I...how wonderful is love like this.” Christmas should be a time of praise and thanksgiving and rejoicing. What God has accomplished by his unspeakable gift. We are filled with praise and adoration when we consider what he has done for us.

**7. The sound of a sigh.** One of the strange sounds of Christmas includes the sound of a sigh because the long wait is almost over. The bible speaks of Simeon waiting for the coming of the Messiah. Long ago the Lord spoke to him that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah, the Christ. Years had passed and he was now growing quite old. No doubt he was tired, wondering when the promise would be fulfilled, if this long wait would ever come to an end.

Some of you know what it's like to wait, for hours, for days, weeks, months, even years. You've waited for days in a hospital waiting room, wondering when the answer would come, when healing would be manifested. You've waited by the phone for news, wondering if God had answered your prayers. You've waited as the months and years have gone by. When will the answer come? Christmas reminds us, we can trust the Lord. His word is true. The waiting will soon be over because he will fulfill his word.

Simeon had waited a lifetime and then one day, moved by the Holy Spirit the bible says, he hurried to the temple court and began to watch as one by one the people filed in. Young, old, singles and families. Who would it be? And then Mary and Joseph walked by, carrying the infant Jesus in their arms and Simeon knew. He rushed to them and took the child from Mary's arms. Can you imagine the thoughts going through their minds as they hear Simeon say, "At last. At last. I've waited a lifetime for this moment. Now Lord, let your servant depart in peace. My eyes have seen your salvation, a light for revelation to the gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

Christmas reminds us an answer is coming, the wait will soon be over. Just continue to trust God and his word. He is faithful.

**8. The sound of an ancient promise fulfilled.** In Luke 1:72, Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, spoke of the coming of Christ as a remembering of God's covenant and oath he swore to Abraham, to rescue his people from their enemies. God told Abraham that through his descendants, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. The Messiah was born and God's promise was fulfilled. But it goes beyond that. It goes back further than a promise to Abraham. It goes all the way back to the beginning, to the Garden of Eden, where an interesting promise was made. This time I'm not talking about a promise to a man or woman, but rather a promise made to the serpent. A promise to the deceiver, the devil.

In Genesis 3:14 the Lord spoke to the serpent. He had deceived Adam and Eve and led them to sin against God's instruction. They were then banished from the garden and from the presence of the Lord. Through their sin death came into the world. Verse 16-19 details the curse that consequently fell upon mankind. **"To the woman he said, 'I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you.' To Adam he said, 'Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' 'Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life...by the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken.'" Genesis 3:16-19**

But to the serpent he made this promise, speaking prophetically of the Messiah, **"He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."** Genesis 3:15. It was a prophetic word, speaking of Satan's attempt to destroy God's plan of redemption by striking the Messiah in the crucifixion, referred to as "striking his heel." But Jesus would utterly destroy the devil by crushing his head. And on Christmas day, the first pain began creeping through Satan's forehead! I can imagine him asking one of the demons with him, "Did you see or feel anything? It felt like someone just kicked me in the head!"

The crushing began on that Christmas day. Jesus had come and the ruler of this world would be cast down. "Start counting Satan. It's Christmas and your days are now numbered."

**9. The sound of a hammer.** Here is another strange sound of Christmas. You had to listen carefully. It was soft, faint, distant, but it was there in the background all the same. Disturbing on such a joyful day – the day of Christ's birth. It was the sound of a hammer, striking the heavy nails that would nail Jesus to Calvary's cross.

It was heard on Christmas day because Jesus was born to die. Jesus himself said he came to give his life as a ransom for many (Mat. 20:28). Looking toward his crucifixion, Jesus said, "It was for this very reason I came into the world." (John 12:27). The shadow of the cross fell across that manger scene.

Jesus was only eight days old when Simeon told Mary and Joseph, **"He will be**

**a sign that will be spoken against and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”  
Luke 2:34-35.**

Isaiah saw and heard this sound of Christmas when he said, **“He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, yet he never opened his mouth...he was despised and rejected by men..he was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement for our peace was upon him and by his stripes we are healed.” Isaiah 53:3-5**

Christmas morning, amidst the joy and celebration of newborn life, you could hear the sounds of Calvary – the sound of the hammer falling, the sound of sacrifice as the laying down of his life had already begun. It's Christmas morning and redemption's plan is already in full swing. The sacrifice for our sin is born, wrapped in swaddling clothes and placed in a manger.

**10. The sound of a prison door opening.** Don't let the sound of the hammer spoil your Christmas because there is another sound we hear. Like the sound of the hammer on Christmas morning, this sound too was distant and faint, but it too was oh so real. It is the sound of a prison door opening. It is the sound of keys reluctantly changing hands. It is the sound of prisoners arising with shouts of rejoicing as Jesus, Calvary's sinless Lamb and redemption's sacrifice, becomes the Mighty Warrior who conquers death and opens wide the gates of hell and sets every captive free. He takes the keys of death and the grave from the devil and opens the gates. He breaks every shackle and chain of sin and releases all those who have trusted in him for salvation.

Death is conquered. Life has come. Freedom comes to the captive, recovery of sight to the blind. Listen: the sound of Christmas is the sound of victory and triumph. It is the sound of a Christmas parade. This one is led by Christ the risen Lord and following him in this Christmas victory parade are those who once were casualties of sin but are now made conquerors through the blood of Jesus Christ. Those destined for defeat are now marching victoriously through the grace and mercy of Christ who loved us. Those condemned to death are now free, marching in a celebration of life.

Listen. Can you hear it this morning? It's the sound of victory. It's the sound of Jesus. It's the sound of heaven. The sound of Christmas. The sound of joy for Christ

is come.

And this Christmas, we are listening for one more sound. Not of reindeer on the roof or Santa Claus in the living room. I'm listening for a trumpet sound, for the shout of the archangel, for the voice of Jesus saying, "Enough. Come on home for Christmas this year."

Are you ready? Are you listening to the sounds of Christmas this year? Are you ready to celebrate Christmas at Jesus' house this year? Are you listening for his call? It could be today. It could be this Christmas.

These are some of the strange sounds of Christmas. One of the sounds I didn't mention would be the sound of repentance as we kneel before him and ask for forgiveness and receive his gift of life. Let's rejoice. Christ is come. Satan is defeated. Sin is forgiven, the grave is conquered and we are free through the mercy of Christ our Lord.