

The Music of Christmas

Luke 2:1-20

Music, to one degree or another, is important to almost everyone. Not only do we enjoy different varieties of music, but in many ways music says something about who we are. Tell me what kind of music you enjoy and I will be able to tell you a little bit about you. Music can actually provide a window into our soul. We listen to music that pleases us, that soothes us, that inspires us. Music can have mystical qualities that can touch us to our very core. It can enrapture us. It can bring tears to our eyes. In church we use music as an offering of thanksgiving and praise to God.

In a nutshell, for many of us, music is an important part of our lives. I know it is for me. As a kid I played the trumpet in both the school band and the city band. I have sung in church choirs for over 30 years. One of my musical dreams for about 40 years now has been to learn to play the guitar and/or banjo. How's that for procrastination? Someday.....maybe.....

Music is written on two clefs, the base and the treble. The bass clef represents the human, the earthly. The treble clef represents the divine, the heavenly. In a song, or choral composition, the powerful and the mystical are complemented when the two clefs interweave in complementary consonance. Life is like music. We have an earthly side and we have a divine side. When the bass clef of our lives overly predominates, then God is left out. Conversely, when we try to tune into the treble clef too much, we do so without bringing our humanness before God. Our lives are most fulfilled, I believe, when the two clefs are played out in melodious harmony.

The season of Advent that just concluded and now Christmas are wonderful examples of this metaphor. Advent is a time of preparation. Mary received the news of her impending pregnancy from an angel – treble clef. She responded, “How can this be?” – bass clef. Then the two were brought into harmony. Joseph went through the same process, but in reverse order. When told by Mary that she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit, Joseph resolved to quietly put her out – bass clef. Then the angel appeared to him and told him to not be afraid to take Mary as his wife – treble clef. And Joseph then also brought the earthly and the divine into harmony.

This evening I want us to think carefully about the scene of Jesus' birth, the manger. This is not the stuff of what the crèches on our tables portray, with everyone kneeling and looking angelic. Mary is in an ordinary stable away from the inn. The predominant odor is of animals. There is urine and dung in the straw of the stalls. The animals themselves each have their own distinctive smell. There isn't much light to see by. Mary is in heavy labor. She is sweating, groaning, heaving, clutching, experiencing all the pains of child birth. Joseph is acting as midwife. He wipes Mary's forehead and tries to comfort her with words of reassurance. Mary grabs his hand and squeezes with all the strength she has. The baby begins to emerge. Mary pushes. Joseph's large, rough calloused hands begin to feel the infant Jesus coming out. Soon he is holding him. The air is split with Jesus' first screams of life. Joseph cuts the umbilical cord and begins to wipe the blood and mucus from the tiny baby. Then he wraps Jesus in swaddling clothes and places him in Mary's arms. Folks – this is as bass clef as life gets! The Son of God has entered a very human and down to earth world in a very human way.

But above this strongly played bass clef in Bethlehem is the divine treble clef. The angels are watching. They go to the shepherds, the most bass clef kind of people of the day, smelly social outcasts, and tell them the greatest treble clef news the world has ever heard – the Messiah has arrived! The word begins to spread. Out of this gently played lyric are the beginnings of a great symphonic masterpiece that will carry into the far corners of the world, and reach down through all the ages. God has painfully and routinely arrived. But God will crescendo this birth into the lives of humankind for all eternity.

Tonight I want to challenge us to examine our own lives to see if one of our two clefs is overly predominating, or whether we are in tune and balance between the earthly and the divine, the bass and treble clefs. With regard to Christmas, have we been focusing so much on the bass clef of trees and

shopping and gifts and parties and food that we have lost sight of the overall opus of God's work? On the other hand, have we been forcing ourselves to engage only the treble clef of God's emergence in the world that we have missed out on the impact that it has in our daily lives? And what about beyond Christmas? Is our day-to-day life lived only on the bass clef, nose to the grindstone, working but not enjoying our labors, seeing no further down the road than to the next day? Or are we living so entirely on the treble clef that, with our heads in the clouds, we forget or ignore people and situations around us that need to feel our presence, love, and encouragement offered in the name of our Savior?

My prayer this evening is a simple one – that each of our lives will play out in beautiful harmony, blending the transcendent with the everyday. It is, after all, why God came into the world – to bring the divine into our humanness. It is up to each of us to live our lives on both the treble and bass clefs. It is up to each of us to keep our feet on the ground and deal with life – bass clef, but do so while holding onto the Babe of Bethlehem and the Christ of Calvary in our hearts – treble clef. To do so is to live the music of Christmas, and to live it melodiously and harmoniously every day of the year. Amen? Amen!

- Pastor Richmond B. Stoakes, Carbondale Community United Methodist Church, Christmas Eve 2010