

December 24, 2012  
Sermon by Rev. Gloria G. Hopewell, D.Min.

As I sat this morning listening to Kings College Lessons and Carols and watching the snowflakes fall, an old Christmas carol came to mind. It isn't sung much these days. The words go like this:

There's a song in the air  
There's a star in the sky  
There's a mother's sweet prayer  
and a baby's low cry

That song is in the air tonight. Though our skies are overcast, that star is in the heavens tonight, and the waves of sound and light surround us. Can you hear the song? Can you see the star?

Scientists tell us that the flutter of butterfly wings can affect the weather thousands of miles away. We also know that the light from distant planets takes millions of years to reach us. So on this night of mystery, it seems very possible that the crystal notes of the angels' songs over the shepherds' field in Bethlehem and the rays of light from the star that hovered over the stable long ago could, indeed, reverberate throughout our universe this night.

For on this night of wonder, the veil separating the heavens and earth, the divine and the mortal, becomes almost transparent so that we can nearly touch the holy.

Those angelic melodies build to a crescendo of joyous sound as they roll through the time zones adding layer upon layer of anthems and organs and bells. The light grows brighter as the candles and tree lights in churches and homes gather strength to illuminate every village and town and city--and the corners of every heart.

These gospel readings, these carols, draw us in this night—not just as a memorial to the birth of Jesus but as an event that happens over and over again. Despite the trials and disappointments of the world in which we live, we are drawn again and again—to this place and to churches throughout our city and nation and world.

For the song and the starlight are about hope—hope for today and hope for tomorrow—the triumph of love over power and peace, compassion and gentleness for all people. And we the church, are a part of that hope and love—receiving it and passing it on.

We, and people in all ages, hold onto the gift and the hope that God's realm will one day be fulfilled just as God has always intended for creation. The reality of that hope is this. This celebration does not end tomorrow. It is a new beginning each year. A new beginning in our faith journeys that offers each of us the possibility of truly receiving the gift of Christ's birth. And accepting that it is a gift that calls out for our response. It demands that we take the warmth that surges through us this night and let it shape us and our faith and our very lives. It demands that we, each one of us, be a part of bringing about God's realm.

The stories we hear, the carols we sing this night, proclaim a message that is impossible and

irrational to our reasoning minds. And yet, there is that breathless hope that is born/reborn over and over again. In just a minute or two we will repeat our own tradition of light and song. The lights will be dimmed, the small candles lighted. For just a moment, only the Christ candle will glow in the darkness. Then, as we sing, the flame will pass from hand to hand, from person to person until the sanctuary is illuminated. And in the peace of this silent night, may we be filled with awe and wonder.

The song and the light go on and on and on offering each of us the wondrous gift of Christ's birth. The Incarnation. Emmanuel. God with us. Let it grasp you and hold you. Then grasp onto the mystery and the wonder yourself and do not let go. Nurture the flame to keep it alight. But know that this peace and this gentle candlelight cannot remain silent or enclosed within our hearts or even these four walls. The light is for the world and it must burst forth into the brilliance of angel song and star-filled sky. Our voices must join the rejoicing of the heavenly host spreading the Good Tidings of great joy to all people. For we know that the true light has come—the light that shall not be overcome by darkness. May the memory of the magic of this night warm you when you are cold, feed you when you hunger, and give you the will and the spirit to serve in Christ's name. Always.

Amen and amen.