

Hearing the Full Song

[Galatians 3:23-25; 4:4-7](#)

[John 1:1-18](#)

The world is, in my mind, divided into two kinds of people – those who hear background music and those who don't. I am in the latter group. I can be shopping with Jill and she will start humming a song and ask whether I remember it – and when I ask what made her think of it she says, “They're playing it now – can't you hear it?” and then yes I can discern the melody above my thoughts and the general shop noises. It's the same with movies – it wasn't until I'd watched *Downton Abbey* through twice, and also listened to the sound track, that I realized there are many different themes – not just the signature tune.

I mention this because as we hear the story of the incarnation most of us are hearing the signature tune, whatever that is for you... O Holy Night perhaps or The Angel Gabriel from heaven came... we are hearing just one melody when in fact there are several different themes coming together and interweaving to make a whole. There are the ancient prophecies – most of the ones we hear are from Isaiah – I think Isaiah's theme would be played on brass instruments with occasional pounding timpani and an oboe solo; then the woodwind section would give us Luke's account from Zechariah and Elizabeth being told that they will bear a son, John, in their old age; through Gabriel's visit to Mary and the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem; through to Anna and Simeon blessing him in the temple. Matthew's story is both more mystical and darker – a story of dreams and of conflict – so I'd put that on the horns and the lower strings.

In today's readings we get the final two themes. Paul brings us his perspective as a Pharisee – explaining how Jesus fulfils the law – I imagine his theme being early Klezmer on strings and snare drum with clarinets carrying the haunting melodies of the synagogue. And then

finally the climax, or perhaps the overarching theme – this is like John Williams Star Wars or John Barry’s Out of Africa – the astonishing prelude to John’s Gospel – the cosmic view which brings everything together in a soaring symphonic masterpiece.

We can enjoy the overall beauty of the different themes blending and interweaving together or we can listen for particular stories, particular instruments, particular moments. On this first Sunday after Christmas day we are usually swept up in John’s “In the beginning was the Word...” and we will get there - but first I want us to listen to that quieter but nonetheless important theme which we heard in the reading from Galatians.

This is Paul talking. As a Pharisee he had spent years immersed in the law of Moses, trying to apply to daily life, laws written over a thousand years earlier. As a devout Jew he believed that obedience to the law was the way to be faithful to the covenant with God – he thought law keeping was the same as God loving. Yet once he had met the living, resurrected Christ he realized that he had it backwards – it’s not about law-keeping but about being faithful to the relationship.

And now, in Jesus, God has sent his own son so that all the Jewish people – all those under the law – might become adopted children of God. In Roman society, adoption was a big deal – it was an honor to be adopted into a family of higher social prestige than your own. Adoption wasn’t about the welfare of orphan children but about patronage and status. So through God becoming human in his Son, we humans also get to be adopted into God’s family and given the right to call him Abba just as Jesus did.

In this passage Paul seems to be speaking specifically to Jews. It is important to remember that he saw himself as the apostle to the Gentiles but was constantly dealing with racism. His message was that Jews were still the chosen people but now that the law was seen to be about faith not about keeping rules, Gentiles were also included in the kingdom

without them having to become Jewish first. Which is good news for most of us. According to 23 and Me I have 1% Jewish DNA – certainly not enough to qualify me – I have a lot more Neanderthal than that! but it doesn't matter. DNA is not important. Here's Paul's theme, "because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God." So we are heirs of God's kin-dom. We are sisters and brother of Jesus with the same access to God the Mother-Father through the Spirit.

And now...

John's gospel.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

That just about sums it up doesn't it.

In Greek, the Word was *logos* – the principle of order and knowledge. The Christ is the principle of order – without him not one thing came into being – and knowledge – he was in the beginning with God. And in the beginning, Genesis tells us, "God said, Let there be light.." It was God's word "Let" that brought the universe into being and John tells us that what came into being through the *logos* Word was life and the life was the light of all people.

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth the Spirit of God hovered over the waters.. yet *Ruah Elohim* translated as the Spirit of God is literally breath of God .. and what do we use to say words, but breath... In the beginning, God breathed, God spoke. In the

beginning was the Word. God said let there be Light; the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.

God breathed over the waters of creation just as Mary must have breathed after her waters broke – God breathed and God’s word, God’s infinitely creative Word brought the ever-expanding cosmos into being and then later in the space/time continuum “The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.”

And now I’m skipping back to Paul – “God sent his Son, born of a woman..., so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are [her] children, God has sent the Spirit of her Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.”

And that refrain is echoed in John – “to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.” So we are the heirs of God, brothers and sisters of the Christ, the Word.

This is big, people. Too big for me to wrap my head around. This is a theme that cannot be played by one instrument – it will take the whole orchestra and the angelic chorus to begin to express it. It is the song of the celestial spheres. This is the chorus of praise that rings through eternity. And we have a little part in it. Whenever we call out to God in love and in praise, in worship and adoration, we are taking our place in the great symphony as the sisters and brothers of Jesus – the children of God.

Let us never be afraid to play or sing our part – for every voice counts.