

# Advent Carol Service 1991

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[ 0 : 00 ] Intermittent, self-contained, meaningless events. We live for the next fix, the next cigarette, the next crust of bread, the next drink.

All of which are totally satisfying for something less than about one minute. And sometimes an afterglow that lasts a day, and sometimes a hangover that lasts a week.

But there is our disjointed little life, a series of unrelated events strung together in a string that is liable to break at any moment.

Well, tonight in music and scripture, we want to paint for you a large picture. To put your life in a frame that gives it meaning.

To write a story into which your life enters and exits. As part of a far greater story. To weave the thread of your life into a tapestry of incomparable glory.

[ 1 : 10 ] And in the congregation there are those who are waiting to be born. And in the congregation there are those who are waiting to die. And everything in between.

And we come in the first of the scriptures to the very counsel of God. And in the counsel of God, the angels and the prophets are all assembled.

And God the Lord says to them, comfort, comfort my people. Make them strong. And the purpose of this service is in obedience to God.

To bring comfort to you. To make you strong. And as Isaiah accounts. Gives the account of this counsel of God with his angels and prophets.

He tells them, the warfare is ended. A great procession has been mounted. And these are a people in exile among the Babylonians.

[ 2 : 15 ] Where the processions of their gods were glamorous and noisy. And full of life and vitality. But God says there's going to be an infinitely greater procession.

And he says of that procession. That it will be across valleys that will be lifted up. And hills that will be cut down.

And the glory of the Lord will be apparent. And the people in exile will return to their home. And that will be glorious indeed. And he said, tell them.

Cry out and tell them. That their lives. That flesh is but grass. But that the word of God abides forever.

And we bring the little speck of flesh that is you or me. In this service. Up against the abiding word of God.

[ 3 : 16 ] And he says, get to the highest mountains. And from the highest mountains. Shout glad tidings of good news. To all my people.

Tell them that the king is come. In great glory. To dwell among his people. And because in Hebrew there is a close connection between the word king and the word shepherd.

The lesson ends with the beautiful picture of a shepherd who leads his flock. A shepherd who gathers the young lambs in his arm.

And you have an altogether beautiful picture of God comforting his people. And it is that hope which he gives to a people in exile.

That is to sustain them. And then you move on to the second picture. Read for us and drawn from Zechariah. And Zechariah says there is going to be a new Jerusalem.

[ 4 : 22 ] An altogether new city. Where now lie only the ruins. And you are going to be restored to that city. And to that city will come the king who is the Lord of lords.

God himself will come and dwell among you. And you the same God who brought his people out of captivity in Egypt.

This same God will bring his people out of exile in Babylon. And this same God will ultimately bring to his people the salvation which is theirs through Jesus Christ.

And that's the picture of the great city. And then the passage around which so much of the reading and the music has been built is a lovely picture of a wilderness that blooms.

Of a desert that flowers. Of weak hands that are strengthened. Of feeble knees that are confirmed. Of blind eyes that are open. Of ears that are stopped being made to hear.

[ 5 : 34 ] Of lame men leaping with heart like hearts. Of a highway where no one can mistake what is the way to which we are called to go. And singing and sorrow shall be no more.

Singing will exult. And all the loveliness of the loveliest of music will lift up the hearts of God's people. And then as you hear this.

This wonderfully, you know, hopelessly beyond the whole sum total of all our imagination put together. Well how shall this come to be?

And how will we know? And where will it come from? And then is the lovely story of a peasant girl. A virgin.

One whose Hebrew name is Miriam. Meaning the exalted one. And this girl shall bear a child in her virginity.

[ 6 : 46 ] And he will be the son of the most high. And he will be the fulfillment of the line of David. Great David's greater son.

And he will reign. And so you can ask of the scriptures again. But how will we know him? Among all the peoples of the earth.

And among all the seasons and generations of history. How will we know him? Well the scriptures come and tell us. That there will be a wilderness.

And in the midst of that wilderness. You will hear a great cry. A voice crying in the wilderness. And everyone will go out to hear what that voice has to say.

And that voice will gather all the people of the land around him. Attracted to him. And they will think that he is the one whom God has sent.

[ 7 : 50 ] But he will say to them. No. There is another. On whom the spirit of God descends as a dove. And he is the one who turns to those who will be his disciples.

And points to the lonely figure walking by the sea. And says. Behold. The Lamb of God. And then you may ask.

How are we going to prepare for this? And in order that we might prepare. We will read in due course. A parable. And the parable will cut right through this congregation.

And cut it in half. There will be the wise. And there will be the foolish. And the wise are those who will keep watch.

Who will not be deterred by any distraction. Whose minds will not be drawn away. Whose hopes will not be frustrated. But they will wait.

[ 8 : 58 ] And they will watch. And they will wait for a cry. Which will come in the darkest time of the night. And we celebrate this in the darkest time of the year.

But suddenly in the night. There will come a cry. Which says. Behold he comes. And the wise will be ready. And the foolish will run to their lamps.

And find no oil. They have spent it all. On something else. It's that cry that comes at midnight. That divides the wise from the foolish. At the darkest time. The cry comes. We are urged to be ready for when that cry comes.

And then. You ask the question. Well. What if we have to wait too long? What if time goes by?

[ 10 : 04 ] And what if life comes and life goes? And what if all that we dreamed of. And all that we hoped for. Is never realized.

And our bodies bend with age. And are crippled and diseased. And life oozes out of them. And our life is finished.

What then? What if we fall asleep in death? Before he comes. Then Paul says.

We're not to be sorry. As men without hope. Hope still belongs to us. Because we know. That in that moment. When that cry comes.

The Lord himself will descend. With a cry of command. And a trumpet will sound. And those who are dead. Will meet him in the air. And he will command them.

[ 11 : 02 ] To comfort one another. And so he says. You are to be ready. And you are to wait. Because the promise of God.

Will not fail. And we gather in the darkness. Of this closing year. That we may be reminded. That all the promises of God.

In Christ. Will not fail. And the little fragment. Of our lives. That tiny thread. The little sort of. Faint. Glowing light. Which is our life. All of it. Will have meaning. And all of it. Will be drawn together. And all of it.

Will become part. Of the eternal purpose. Of God. And all will be taken up. Into the redemption. Of God. And Jesus Christ. Will be exalted.

[12:01] And he will be king. And all nations. Will come. And acknowledge him. And we will find. The meaning of our life. Only in that moment.

And at that place. Where we put. Our whole faith. And trust. In Jesus Christ. I met.

A very sad man. This week. Whose world. Has simply come. To pieces. And he couldn't make anything out. Of the fragments.

In which his life lay. His family broken. His fortune broken. His health broken. And all these broken pieces. And he with.

His. Some determination. Decided he was going to put it all together again. And he never will.

[13:02] But you see. What he needs. And what I pray that he may find. And I may find. And you may find. That the purpose. And meaning of our life.

Is not something. Which is extracted. From the mere fact. Of our existence. But that the meaning of our life. Is derived.

From the eternal. Promise of God. And the purpose. He has. To come. And comfort his people. The purpose.

He has. To draw all his people together. Into. A salvation. Which is eternal. Into a hope. Which is irreducible.

Into a life. Which cannot be taken away. And this. Through Jesus Christ. John said.

[13:57] I baptize you with water. There comes one after me. Who will baptize you. With the Holy Spirit. May God grant to you.

In this Advent season. That you. May see your life. Finding its purpose. In him. To whom it is.

Our purpose. That we should worship. And to whom we should give glory. And thankful hearts. And find the meaning of our life.

In the meaning of his life. As he has been sent. By God. To bring. Mitadelcówken. Comfort. To his people. Amen.

Thank you. Thank you.