

Send Us To Share Hope That Christ Comes

Bishop Susan Candeia



Throughout the season of Advent we have been praying

Restore us, O God; let your face shine upon us, that we may be saved. (Psalm 80:3).

We have prayed for restoration because we have been battered and broken by a relentless pandemic, by grief and loss, by fear and anger, unable to celebrate this season in the same ways as we have in the past. We have prayed that God's face would shine upon us so that we could see light and hope in the midst of the darkness, the unknown, the longing for

some sense of "normal" again. We have prayed that we may be saved, for literally thousands have died and we are weary of living in exile physically separated from those we love.

As we come to the end of this Advent season and prepare for Christmas, we know that what restores us, what enables us to see God's face shine upon us, what saves us is the coming of the one born of Mary who is named Jesus, Son of the Most High, Emmanuel (God with us.) This coming isn't a magic wand that makes everything wonderful again. This coming is a hope that changes us, changes the world and turns it toward true restoration and salvation.

A tradition in my family growing up was to watch the movie *White Christmas*. Singers Bob Wallace (Bing Crosby) and Phil Davis (Danny Kaye) join sister act Betty (Rosemary Clooney) and Judy Haynes (Vera-Ellen) to perform a Christmas show in rural Vermont. There they run into General Waverly, their commander in World War II, who, they learn, is having financial difficulties; his quaint country inn is failing. There has been no snow! So the four entertainers plan a yuletide miracle: a fun-filled musical extravaganza that's sure to put Waverly and his business in the black! It is a wonderful story of love and loyalty, of family and friends, with music and dancing, plus some humorous scenes thrown in to make it thoroughly entertaining. All the men who were in the general's command show up with their families on Christmas Eve and of course, it begins to snow! It is a classic, feel good movie with a happy ending.

But we know that even if we had a white Christmas (which is very unlikely this year), we don't get that kind of "happy ending." The realities of Christmas Eve rarely live up to the hype of those feel good Christmas movies. Christ is not born to give us a happy ending but to give us hope because the world is about to change. That is the song that Mary sings once she receives the news that she will bear this child.

^{46b} *My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,* ⁴⁷ *my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,*
⁴⁸ *for you, Lord, have looked with favor on your lowly servant.*

From this day all generations will call me blessed:

⁴⁹ *you, the Almighty, have done great things for me and holy is your name.*

⁵⁰ *You have mercy on those who fear you, from generation to generation.*

⁵¹ *You have shown strength with your arm and scattered the proud in their conceit,*

⁵² *casting down the mighty from their thrones and lifting up the lowly.*

⁵³ *You have filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.*

⁵⁴ *You have come to the aid of your servant Israel, to remember the promise of mercy,*

⁵⁵ *the promise made to our forebears, to Abraham and his children forever.*

(Luke 1:46-55)

What would it look like to share this kind of hope? In the midst of everything that is going on in these days could we dare to not only sing but also live the words of the hymn, *Canticle of the Turning*?

My soul cries out with a joyful shout that the God of my heart is great and my spirit sings of the wondrous things that you bring to the ones who wait . . . my heart shall sing of the day you bring. Let the fires of your justice burn. Wipe away all tears, for the dawn draws near, and the world is about to turn."

What if that is what the world heard from us in our words, our actions, our behavior? What if the joy we felt this Christmas for a world that is about to turn flowed from us out to our neighbors as we wiped away tears, as we worked for justice? That is the hope I share with you today.

Let us pray:

Holy One, whose face shines with grace and mercy for your creation, stir up our spirits to announce to the world as the angels did, "Do not be afraid, for see, we are bringing good news of great joy for all people, for to you is born a Savior." Move us beyond wishful thinking and a focus on what makes us feel good to a commitment to justice and love of neighbor. Help us to embrace and participate in the salvation and healing that you bring. May your face continue to shine upon us as enter into the celebration of the birth of Christ.
Amen.

Mantra for the Week:

In the midst of very different celebrations of Christmas, whether alone or with family and friends, out looking at lights or at home with a candle lit, take a few moments each day to breath and center yourself in the one who does indeed come and repeat this mantra:

My spirit rejoices in God my Savior. My spirit rejoices in God my Savior. My spirit rejoices in God my Savior.