

There was an equipment malfunction on 12/30/18, so there is no recording of the service. This is the text of the message portion of our worship service.

For most of us, music is inescapable. Not that we are trying to escape it, but it is everywhere; stores, tv shows, movies, the radio, elevators. Music surrounds us on a daily basis. Elena Mannes is a research who has conducted extensive studies on how our brains are affected by music. One of her most interesting findings is that music stimulates more parts of the brain than any other human function. Our brains quite literally light up with music. Music is also very closely tied to our memories. If I asked what your favorite movie was, I bet you could easily recall the score, or a particular scene of the movie accompanied by a specific song. It further proves her point that music can be a useful tool in treating patients with dementia, Alzheimer's, and occasionally used with stroke patients. Music connects our experiences, almost freezing that moment in time.

I would also argue it's not Christmas or Advent without the music. It summons feelings or memories of past Christmases, and it's only around for a limited amount of time. We had a rule in my family – no Christmas music until after thanksgiving. This meant I'd wake up the morning after Thanksgiving to my grandpa playing Mannheim Steamroller or the Boston Pops through his living room speakers. That magical feeling that the Christmas season was finally here.

When Pastor Fred asked me if I would be willing to lead worship today, I thought this was a great opportunity to relish in some of our favorite music before we put it away for another year.

Now, it's no secret I love a good competition, so a head to head vote for your favorite carols only seemed fitting. It also became a joke among the staff when one of my not so favorite carols made the cut. We'll be singing it today, basically as an insurance policy that I most definitely did not stack the vote. Some of our favorites have been favorites for centuries, quite literally. As I monitored the list of winners, I got to thinking what I really knew about the origin of these songs. In between each carol this morning, I'll be giving some brief background about where they come from or some interesting piece of history.

As we sing these songs today, I hope they bring you good memories of great seasons past, but also remind you of the miracle that is Christmas. Christmas songs convey the deep love God has for humanity, and the soul shaking idea that God could dwell among us, the incarnation of God as a tiny helpless baby laid in a bed of hay.

### **Hark the Herald Angels Sing**

Tied for first as our most loved Christmas carol is *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*. The words were first written in 1739 by Charles Wesley who was a leader of the Methodist movement (also the brother of John Wesley) while the tune composed by Mendelson was put together over 100 years later. Interestingly enough, it was to commemorate the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg.

### **O Come All Ye Faithful**

Our congregations other most favorite Christmas carol is *O Come All Ye Faithful*. Originally written in Latin, no less than 4 people are credited writers, the text possibly dating back to 1650ish. Regardless,

Frederick Oakley, and English clergyman in the 1800s released our current version arguing that if congregations had good songs to sing, they would sing well.

### **Silent Night**

*Silent Night* just recently celebrated its 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary on Christmas eve. In 1818, in a small chapel outside of Salzburg, Austria, Father Mohr and a musician, Franz Gruber, performed this carol with a guitar. It's rumored to have been played with a guitar since their organ was broken. *Silent Night* has since been translated into hundreds of languages, and the English version was "smoothed over" in 1859. The Washington Post came out with an article that directly translates from its original German which is an interesting read and somewhat funny read because of the translation.

### **Angels We Have Heard on High**

The chorus for *Angels We Have Heard on High* is derived from a very interesting tradition of French shepherds. It's said on Christmas eve, they would call to one another "Gloria in excelsis deo" much like the angels would have to announce the birth of Christ. It was then later added and adapted to another French hymn to get what we sing today.

### **Lo How a Rose E'er Blooming**

This carol could possibly be the oldest we'll sing today. Originally published in Cologne Germany in 1599, it dates back 100 to 150 years earlier. It wasn't translated into English until about 1900 though, making it relatively new for us.

## God Rest Ye Merry Gentleman

And our last favorite; *God Rest Ye Merry Gentleman* gives our previous carol a run for its money as the oldest with the lyrics dating back to the 1500s, the most well-known version of this carol was published in 1827 in England, and even makes an appearance in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*.

I'm sure we all have stories of why our favorites are our favorites. I'd encourage you to share your stories with each other as we enjoy the last hurrah of these songs until the day after thanksgiving next year, or whatever day is acceptable in your house to play Christmas music.

May we all be moved by these songs that commemorate the birth the Christ child, but also be reminded of Jesus' promise to be with us once again as we enter the new year. Let us now join together in prayer using the words Jesus taught us ... Our father...