

“Starting At the Beginning”  
 Anna Pinckney Straight  
 Old Stone Presbyterian Church ~ Lewisburg, WV  
 December 24, 2017 ~ 7:30

The words from a Christmas Prayer written for the Iona Community:

*“When the world was dark and the city was quiet, you came. You crept in beside us. And no one knew. Only the few who dared to believe that God might do something different. Will you do the same this Christmas, Lord?”<sup>1</sup>*

It is our prayer each year at Christmas. A reflection on where we are, and where we believe God wants us to be.

This year, we are approaching this proposition through Lessons and Carols. Nine Lessons and Carols, to be specific.

We are not the first to do it.

The practice goes back to at least the 19<sup>th</sup> century and became formalized in England, beginning at King’s College in 1918.<sup>2</sup> They began broadcasting the service in the 1928, not even stopping during WWII when heat and glass had been removed from the chapel for safety reasons. In the 1930s the service began its overseas broadcast, and now, each year, millions of people across the globe listen to it, worship with the congregation of King’s College as the word is read and proclaim through text and music.

The service of Nine Lessons and Carols doesn’t stay the same, of course. Every year there are different carols, sometimes even new carols are commissioned for the event. The service is not set in stone, but comes out of a foundation and belief that to truly understand Christmas we must understand something of what has come before. What brings us to this point.

As Kings College says in their bulletin, in this service ‘The main theme is the development of the loving purposes of God ...’ seen ‘through the windows and the words of the Bible’.”

Tonight, we will put our own twist on the Lessons and Carols by pairing each reading with a poem.

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<sup>1</sup> *Cloth for the Cradle*, Iona Community

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.kings.cam.ac.uk/sites/default/files/chapel/carols\\_from\\_kings\\_booklet\\_2017.pdf](http://www.kings.cam.ac.uk/sites/default/files/chapel/carols_from_kings_booklet_2017.pdf)

*“When the world was dark and the city was quiet, you came. You crept in beside us. And no one knew. Only the few who dared to believe that God might do something different. Will you do the same this Christmas, Lord?”*

*Will you come into the darkness of tonight/today's world; not the friendly darkness as when sleep rescues us from tiredness, but the fearful darkness, in which people have stopped believing that war will end or that food will come or that a government will change or that someone cares? Will you come into that darkness and do something different to save your people from death and despair?”*

To truly understand we must start at the beginning, the very beginning. A very good place to start. The words were written by Richard Rodgers for “The Sound of Music,” but I cannot help but attribute them, in my mind, to Fraulein Maria.

The beginning.

To understand why God took on flesh and lived among us, we need to know what happened to Adam and Eve. The faithfulness of Abraham and Sarah. The prophets who called a people back, a people that would not listen, or when they did listen, would quickly set God back to the side.

People who loved festivals more than sharing the abundance of their tables.  
 People who feared injury more than the sin of abandoning neighbor.  
 People who were tired, or grieving, and could not open their eyes to the path God had paved before them.

Unto us God has come. Unto us the Savior is arriving.

*“When the world was dark and the city was quiet, you came. You crept in beside us. And no one knew. Only the few who dared to believe that God might do something different. Will you do the same this Christmas, Lord?”*

*Will you come into the quietness of this city/town, not the friendly quietness as when those who are in love hold hands, but the fearful silence when the phone has not rung, the letter has not come, the friendly voice no longer speaks, the doctor's face says it all?*

*Will you come into that darkness, and do something different, not to distract, but to embrace your people? And will you come into the dark corners and the quiet places of our lives?”*

We turn to the words of Scripture, the Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible because in those words we better understand what it meant for Jesus to be born not in a palace but a place where animals were stored and fed<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.psephizo.com/biblical-studies/jesus-was-not-born-in-a-stable/>

To a people who wanted a warrior, God sent a baby. Not someone who would conquer their enemies but who would teach them the greater way of God's love, grace, and abundance.

And in this world where we seem increasingly unable to engage in dialogue with those with whom we disagree; where our government approves policies almost every day that seem to directly contradict the Biblical witness, we need to go ever deeper into that witness to find our strength, our hope, our light, The Word who can lead us on the faithful way.

*“When the world was dark and the city was quiet, you came. You crept in beside us. And no one knew. Only the few who dared to believe that God might do something different. Will you do the same this Christmas, Lord?”*

*We ask this because the fullness of our lives long for depends on us being as open and vulnerable to you as you were to us when you came, wearing no more than diapers, and trusting human hands to hold their maker.*

*Will you come into our lives, if we open them to you and do something different? When the world was dark and the city was quiet you came. Do the same this Christmas, Lord. Do the same this Christmas.”*

So let us begin. At the beginning.