

This is week two on our Advent series, 'Carols'. Last week we looked at the carol, 'O holy night', and thought of the lines, 'a thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices. For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn'. We recognised that one day with Jesus can change everything.

You may have noticed around at your street that Christmas trees [Pic of tree] are beginning to go up. Christmas is one of those times that you either love or loathe. On Wednesday night some of us were at an event in Glasgow where 2 ½ thousand people spent a couple of hours singing, praying and worshipping. Many of those people had their hands raised in worship and, as I was thinking about today, it struck me that that's not the usual response to Christmas carols. Somehow, even subconsciously, we treat carols differently to other Christian music. But if worship was the response of Angels, Shepherds and wise men then surely it should be our response as well. And so during this series, as we look at these different carols, my prayer is that we will begin to hear something new, a truth that God has placed in the very lyrics of these songs.

Today, in week two, we are going to be looking at the carol, O Come All Ye Faithful. Now, it was originally written in Latin and it was given the title, Adeste Fideles. It was written by John Francis Wade, who was an 18th century hymn writer. There are some interesting theories about it though - the hymn has been interpreted as a Jacobite birth ode to Bonnie Prince Charlie. This is because Wade fled to France after the Jacobite uprising of 1745. Later music books written by Wade were often decorated with Jacobite floral imagery and there are claims that the carol contains a code which is decipherable only by 'the faithful', with Bethlehem being a common Jacobite cipher for England.

It was translated into English in 1841 by Frederick Oakeley. And that's where we get 'O Come All Ye Faithful'. It is a carol that has stood the test of time and has been sung throughout the intervening years.

O Come All Ye Faithful  
Joyful and triumphant,  
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem.  
Come and behold Him,  
Born the King of Angels;  
O come, let us adore Him,  
O come, let us adore Him,  
O come, let us adore Him,  
Christ the Lord.

Now, maybe you're a little bit like me and you hear this song and it's a little bit daunting actually. That first line kind of gets me sometimes:

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant!

And the reason is because many times, especially during this Christmas season, I can feel anything but faithful, joyful or triumphant.

Maybe you feel that your faith is lacking. Maybe God has called you to something and it's harder than you expected, and now you're wondering if God really called you. Maybe it's another issue and you are facing something that is making you question your faith.

Triumphant is not really a word we use much in church these days and I suspect that's because most of us more often feel defeated than triumphant.

Maybe it is joy you lack. I don't know about you but, even at this time of year, joy can vanish pretty quickly for me. **You arrive at the** checkout at the supermarket and there are two queues. You look at them and decide which one you're going to join. I always pick the wrong one! I don't know if you can relate to that, but I end up in the line with the person who takes out the **cheque-book**. Then they can't find a pen. Then they have to look for their card and then they've got to put all away in the bag. And then the next man in line has every **voucher** known to humankind every one of which has to be scanned to see if it's still in date and valid. And then you get the person who's picked up the one item that has no price or **bar code**. The assistant calls for a price check but we all know that it's so busy there is nobody free to do a price check. By that time my joy has disappeared.

So, we may not feel faithful, joyful or triumphant but I think that is to look at this first line wrongly. Who is it that Jesus calls? It's not exactly the faithful, joyful and triumphant of the world that he calls. **Look at what** Jesus says in Matthew chapter 11:28-30 28 "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*"

So, Jesus called people who were weary and burdened.

Then in Matthew **chapter 9 in:12-13** Jesus says: "*It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.*"

So we could re-write the first line of the song a little and make it say, O come all you sinners, you weary and you burdened, Come now to Bethlehem. But what happened to those people who were weary and burdened and aware of their sin? Jesus never left them like that, and he still doesn't. **2 Corinthians** 5:17 tells us - *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*

IF anyone is in Christ – if you have chosen to believe in and follow Jesus you are 'in Christ' and have been made a 'new creation'. We don't always feel that way but this is about more than feelings. It is about believing that what God says in his word is true – not just sometimes, or for other people, but for you. So, if you believe in Jesus today I want you to say with me, "I am a new creation."

So, if the sinful, weary and burdened come to Jesus and he gives new life, then what does that new life look like? What does Jesus help us to become? Well there are three things that I want to talk about today although I'm sure there are many more.

**The first is: Jesus helps us to become more faithful.**

In fact, in **Hebrews 12:2**, the Bible says:

*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, who is the author and the perfecter of our faith.*

So, our faith comes from the one who authors it, it's Jesus. God even gives us the faith to believe in the first place. He gives it to us and then he goes about the work of perfecting it. How? Glad you asked! **Romans 10:17**, it says:

*Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.*

**Hearing God's** word builds our faith. When we hear God's word it builds our faith. I couldn't count the number of times I've read a passage myself, or heard it read or preached and it has been so pertinent to my life at that time. When that happens we realise that God understands where we are and what we need and it builds our faith.

As I was thinking about today this passage came up and I want to share it today as an encouragement for someone – it may be that you are really struggling and just managing to hold it together; perhaps you've had bad news; perhaps you are dreading this Christmas season. Whatever it is, your faith is being tried – **Isaiah 43:1-3** *'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. 2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. 3 For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour;* You are called by name by the one who redeemed and saved you. He will protect you, whatever your circumstances.

As we hear God's word, and let it permeate us, he builds our faith.

**The second things is: Jesus helps us to become more joyful.**

Joy is one of the **fruits of the Spirit** mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23 the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

An apple tree produces an apple because it's an apple tree. It's not having to try any harder to produce an apple! It can't just squeeze out an orange or a pear, it doesn't work that way. An apple tree produces apples. And it's that same way with us, our joy comes from a right relation with God, it's not something that we can produce on our own. In fact, that new creation we talked about, the Bible says that when we receive Christ, God puts His Spirit inside of us - the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead. And a fruit of that Spirit living in us is joy. So, we should actually be producing 9 different types of spiritual fruit.

The health and quantity of fruit a tree produces is determined in large part by its roots – if they are deep and strong it is more likely that lots of good fruit will appear. It's the same with us and God – we need to have deep and strong roots with him.

Please understand that joy and happiness are worlds apart. **Happiness depends** on happenings, but joy depends on Jesus.

Happiness depends on happenings; what's going on with me right now, do I really like what's going on with me right now? Do I not like what's going on with me right now? And that determines my state of happiness. But when I let anger or bitterness or some other sin into my life it does affect my joy because it takes me away from Jesus. You can be joyful without being happy. Last week we read in Lamentations and Jeremiah was deeply unhappy at the situation he found himself in. Everything he knew had been destroyed and yet, even in that situation, when he turned his thoughts to God he was able to rejoice. He was able to find joy. The circumstances that made him so miserable hadn't changed, but he had. Perhaps in that supermarket queue I should have been recognising the person behind me who had only two items and let them through before me.

Joy comes from Jesus. That comes from deep within us. That comes from something that's not a part of this world, from something that is placed in you by the living God and put inside of your spirit. And out of that overflow, joy comes out, because happiness depends on happenings, but joy depends on Jesus. We see this in the Christmas story.

Luke 2:8-20 tells us the story of some shepherds. They are out in the hills in the middle of the night when, **all of a sudden**, an angel appears: *An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.*

The birth of Jesus was itself an event that was designed to bring great joy for the people and we can share in that joy today.

So, Jesus helps us to be more faithful and more joyful and, if you are in any way awake, you'll see where **we're going next**. **Jesus helps us to become more triumphant.**

Sometimes we need someone to help us feel triumphant. We can do it ourselves occasionally e.g. passing an exam or getting a promotion. However, even those occasions are better when you have someone with you who has supported and encouraged you to succeed. Someone who has your back.

But here's the thing, many times as Christians we don't remember who it is that has our back, because it is the living God who has our back. How many times in the Bible do we read God saying, "I am with you"? We read a prophecy written about Jesus hundreds of years before His birth, it came out of the text in **Isaiah 9:6-7** *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his*

*government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and for ever.*

**That sounds** pretty triumphant to me. The baby we think of at Christmas is the King of kings and He is the LORD of lords, He is the Alpha, He is the Omega, He's the Beginning and the End, He's the Author of life, He's the Prince of Peace, He's the Author and perfecter of our faith. He is the One who spoke everything into existence. He is the bread of life, He is our salvation, He is the lifter of our head. He's mighty and strong and full of grace. He's the sinner's saviour. He gives strength to the weak and sets the captive free. His promise is trustworthy. His goodness is limitless. His mercy is everlasting. His love never changes. His Word is enough. His grace is sufficient. His reign is righteous. His yoke is easy and His burden is light

And as the song says, He is born the King of angels and we come to adore Him, for He is Christ the Lord. And, he has your back.

We have to understand who it is that fights with us. And my prayer is that as you hear this truth that has been ringing throughout the ages in the lyrics of this song, you are able to respond in faith, joy and triumph.

O Come all ye faithful. Why? Not because we are faithful but because He is.

Come in the joy that he gives as a gift of his Spirit.

Come in triumph, not because of what you've achieved, but because of the one who has your back

So, come all ye faithful, be joyful and triumphant! Come to Bethlehem, and come and see born the King of Angels: O come, let us adore Him, O come let us adore Him, for He is Christ the Lord.