

## ADVENT REFLECTION

# DEVOUT AND EXPECTANT DELIGHT

O little town of Bethlehem,  
How still we see thee lie!  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep  
The silent stars go by;  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth  
The everlasting Light:  
The hopes and fears of all the years  
Are met in thee tonight.

I had my first organ lesson when I was eight years old. I have played or directed choirs at Sunday Masses since I was twelve years old. The music of Christmas rings in my head for months as I plan, organize, practice, conduct and prepare all that my parish will need to celebrate the great feast every December. But this year is different.

My wonderfully devoted choir members have not sung together since the Fourth Sunday of Lent. My entire career has been one of encouraging people to participate in the liturgy by singing with all their hearts, until this year when I had to ask them to remain silent. The strangeness of it all has been disorienting. But in the midst of it all, those hymns and songs of our faith which have been such a part of my ministry keep coming back to remind me of the deep truths contained in them. The power of texts combined with tunes have permeated my interior and are now part of what sustains me in this time of great challenge.

There is a genuine delight in knowing God's beautiful gift of music helps sustain others as well. The delight is not the giddy, bubbling feeling we often associate with the word. Rather, it is a substantial, deep, profound knowledge that goes to the heart of our faith.  
Emmanuel - God with us - is here in the joyful and the trying times.  
Emmanuel - God with us - is present in all phases of each individual's life.  
Emmanuel - God with us - has been present at all times in history whether they were pleasant or challenging. The millennia preceding our place in history have been filled with joy and sadness for all people. This is our time to face the present challenge, and in it to hold fast to the foundations of our faith, to retain the scriptures and songs which have nourished our hearts, to trust that Emmanuel is indeed with us and is the same one of whom Mary sang, "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit finds joy in God my Savior."

Let us take even a few brief moments to savor the beauty of Advent and Christmas, in this unfamiliar year to hear the words of our familiar carols with attentiveness to their message in our time, and to delight in knowing that "The hopes and fears of all the years" have always been, and are indeed in our own difficult time, in the hands of Emmanuel, the God who is always with us.

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