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Dear Church Family,

What's your favorite thing about Christmas? Some say Christmas sights: twinkling lights, tinsel decorations, stockings hung over the mantle, and, of course, awful sweaters. Others love Christmas smells: the evergreen effusions of the tree or the mouthwatering waftings of fresh cookies, ginger bread, and hot cocoa. Still others savor Christmas sentiments: the joy of being surrounded by loved ones, the sweet refreshment of time away from work and school, the delight of gift giving, and the feeling of cheer and charity that permeate the air.

What I love most about this season, however, are Christmas songs. Perhaps I have my mother to blame for that. Each year, without fail, she would ring in the holidays with Roger Whittaker's rendition of "Ding Dong Merrily on High." Years later, I would drive home from college through the night while my mother was waiting, her finger on the "play" button of the stereo, for me to walk through the front door. Thankfully, the resonant baritone of Mr. Whittaker was a gateway and not a final destination! For as my love for the gospel grew, my love for the great hymns glorifying Christ's incarnation grew as well.

Do you have a favorite Christmas song? Of all the wonderful advent hymns, none is more precious to me than the 18th century masterpiece, born out of the collaborative genius of Charles Wesley and George Whitfield, "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing." In brilliant prose set to a breathtaking melody, the hymn boldly glories in the humiliation of Christ in his incarnation.

*Christ, by highest heav'n adored, Christ, the everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold Him come, Offspring of the Virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; Hail th' incarnate Deity,
Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel.
Hark the Herald Angels Sing, Glory to the newborn King.*

As you bask in all of the sights, smells, and sentiments of Christmas this year, be sure to bask in the mystery and beauty of Christ's humiliation. Who, though He was the Potentate of Time, stepped out of eternity and into time for you. Though He dwelt in unapproachable light, the Light of the World shined in the darkness for you. Though He was Mighty God, He did not despise the virgin's womb, but took to Himself a true body and soul with all of the miseries and frailties of our humanity for you. Though He owned the cattle on a thousand hills, He chose a cattle's trough for His crib for you. Paul said it best: "Though He was rich, yet for our sake He became poor, so that by His poverty we might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). Though He was the thrice holy, spotless Lamb of God, He took to Himself the sins of His people and bore them on Calvary's cross that the forgiveness, love and blessings of God might flow, "far as the curse is found." God grant that this good news, this gospel, would be our very favorite thing about Christmas.

Your grateful servant,

Jim McCarthy
Senior Minister