

Bruce Vantine's
**CORNERSTONE
CHORALE AND BRASS**

P.O. Box 249, Florissant, Missouri 63032
(314) 838-4383 e-mail: bvantine@charter.net
www.cornerstonechorale.org



“The hopes and fears of all the years...”

[*“O Little Town of Bethlehem”* – Text: Phillips Brooks, 1835-1893]

For many of us, the name “Bethlehem” brings to mind a quaint greeting card scene with a bright star in the heavens, angels singing, joyful shepherds, gentle animals, and “Mary, Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger.” [Luke 2:16] “Sleep in heavenly peace,” wrote Joseph Mohr (1792-1849) in the final line of “Silent Night,” the beloved carol by Franz Gruber (1787-1863).

The Christmas season may help us to set aside some of our worries as it brings wonderful music, festive worship services, decorations and magical lights, opportunities to be with family and friends, and often a healthy dose of memories and nostalgia. “Sleep in heavenly peace.”

Peace, however, is illusive. One needs only to look at recent events in places with names like *Sandy Hook, Ferguson, Paris* and *San Bernardino* to recall the conflict, violence and chaos. It's understandable that our confidence is shaken, as is our hope for a peaceful future.

Christmas is *not* just a lovely holiday card vignette, but rather a grateful recognition that the baby Jesus is born into this messy world of ours – that *“the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”* [John 1:5]

As the familiar carol, “O Little Town of Bethlehem,” reminds us:

*Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting light.
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.*

In our country and around the world it seems that a restless fear is growing. We need, of course, to take precautions, to be supportive of those who protect us, and to be watchful in order to protect ourselves.

However, some among us are expressing a rekindled strain of hatred and prejudice which threatens to undermine stability as much as the terrorist acts themselves. Author Dean Koontz writes:

“When men in power [feel threatened and] decide that things need to be rebalanced at any cost, the violence is never brief and never really directed solely at the imbalance that supposedly inspired it. *The rule of law becomes the rule of violence. Revenge becomes a synonym for justice.* No city is safe from such horror, no nation, no time in all of history.”

When we are afraid, the natural impulse is to lash out and react in anger – to react with hatred and without due thought as to the human or political and economic consequences.

Vilifying all Muslims or refugees because of the actions of a few radical extremists may make us feel more secure, but it stands in opposition to Judeo – Christian values, not to mention American values.

“Hate crimes against Muslim Americans and Islamic mosques across the U.S. have tripled in the wake of the terrorist attacks in

Paris and San Bernardino, CA, with dozens occurring within just a month,” according to Eric Lichtblau of *The New York Times*.

Christ's message is hard, for it calls us to be *peacemakers*. “It is *not* enough to pray for peace. [We] have to think for it,...suffer for it... and endure a lot for it.” [The Rev. Dr. Wm. Sloane Coffin, Jr., *The Riverside Church, New York, NY*]

“The Christ Child is a scandal, a cause for stumbling. The scandal is not how he came into this world, but that he came healing the sick, preaching good news to the poor,” ushering in a time of *hope* “in which God's power is expressed in compassion for outcasts and sinners. God's victory over evil is won on a cross. This is the scandal of the Gospel.” [The Rev. Andrew M. Weyermann, “Advent Invitations”, *Creative Communications for the Parish, 1987*]

As the liturgical year moves into Epiphany, may we *resist* impulses that pull us into *darkness*, and instead *follow the path* that would lead us into the *light*.

*O holy Child of Bethlehem,
Descend to us we pray;
Cast out our sin and enter in,
Be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell;
O, come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Immanuel!*

Best wishes for
a wonderful and peaceful
new year!

Bruce Vantine
January 2016

2016 Cornerstone Southern Tour: October 12 – November 6