



*City sidewalks, busy sidewalks, dressed in holiday style,
in there air there's a feeling of Christmas...*

We have the privilege of living right smack in the middle of the city. Our apartment is close to the busiest road in town, which makes it the busiest street in the entire country. If we open a window or step outside the apartment we're greeted to the sounds of car horns, ambulance sirens, bus brakes and the annoying repetitive chimes of the trash truck (it sounds just like an ice cream truck, but it is definitely not an ice cream truck). We don't even have to open our window to hear sounds of someone somewhere in our building doing repairs on their apartment, so that our concrete walls are reverberating from a hammer drill whacking holes in the walls. From within there is the sound of our dogs barking at all the other noises around us.

But for all the noises bombarding us, our Christmas does seem a little quieter than what it should be. We don't hear the "sounds of Christmas", other than the Christmas music we play in our own home. Our sidewalks are always busy, but they certainly aren't dressed in holiday style. With the exception of a few stores decorated for New Years, there is no indication this is any different from any other time of year. We certainly can't count on our surroundings to induce any sorts of "feelings of Christmas." However, in that there is a comfort in knowing why we are actually celebrating this holiday.

Renee' recently had a conversation with a couple of the girls she is discipling. They were asking her questions about Christmas: how and why do we celebrate. One of the girls started talking about the fact that she thought Christmas was about family. She got this from watching American Christmas TV shows and movies. Renee' took the opportunity to explain that this is not really what Christmas is all about at all. Family is important, and we miss our family deeply this time of the year. But the reality is that family is what many people have tried to use to fill the hole left when they remove Christ from their lives, especially at Christmas time.

Our children were surprised recently when we told them that their parents have both (at different times) considered rejecting Christmas celebrations altogether. The celebration of Christmas anywhere can easily become nothing but noise. Even many churches are choosing to forgo celebrating together and have prioritized "family" over worshipping together as the body of Christ. Our Mongolian friends, as new as Christmas is to them, were shocked by this.

It is so easy, in America (and even Mongolia) to drown out the silence and the humility which is probably the real sound of Christmas. Rather than reject the entire holiday, we have chosen to redeem the opportunity to quieten our hearts to hear the sounds of God speaking to us through the Christ child.

Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, spent the nine months leading up to the birth of his son in silence. He couldn't speak (and probably couldn't hear, as well). This was the result of a rather arrogant unbelieving request for more signs and evidence from an angel



who had just told him that he and his aged wife will soon be with child. Zechariah couldn't believe it. He requested proof and evidence before he would believe it to be true. God's reply was simple. He provided evidence and struck Zechariah mute until all that the angel had foretold would come to pass.

In the silence, Zechariah thought and learned and, in time, understood.

Often, for us, God will speak through the words of a carol to highlight an important truth to meditate on throughout the season. This year, it is the following:

What kind of king would leave his throne
In heaven to make this earth his home
While men seek fame and great renown
In lowliness our King comes down

The humility of God is absolutely mind blowing. Incomprehensible. The God of eternity humbled himself to the point that he could be held in the arms a teen-aged girl. The calloused hands of a carpenter counted the fingers of God Himself in the form of a newborn. How can the God who spoke a word and flung stars into place be the same One who "made himself nothing" and "was born in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:7).

After nine months of silence, Zechariah saw the truth, and when his mute lips spoke for the first time he didn't spend much time talking about his own son (Luke 1:76). Rather he prophesied about the One who was coming "to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." (Luke 1:77-79)

In the silence God spoke, Zechariah believed and saw the promise, and soon the King would be born in a Manger Throne.

You left the sound of angel's praise
To come for men with unkind ways
And by this baby's helplessness
The power of nations is laid to rest

So join us this Christmas and the coming year in making this King central, not only in our celebrations, but our lives and helping others to see Him as the King, as well. Join us in listening for His voice, not just in the busy-ness, but in the quiet. Join us as we seek to turn our hearts back to the One who was born to die.

For His Renown,
Bernie, Renee', Jonathan and Cori

In the same spirit of this letter, we encourage you to listen to our friend [Scott Dotta's](#) song "This Christmas" . [Download and listen to](#) a melody and words that help to set aside the noise and remind us that we're truly free.