

Luke 2:1-20  
Christmas Eve 2018

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

### It Came Upon the Midnight Clear!

All hope seemed lost  
Good times slowly slipped away  
Alone in the dark  
Wondering if you'll live to see another day  
It came upon a midnight clear  
Minds a blur  
Doesn't quite work right anymore  
Nothing can help  
Pick me up off this cold, dusty floor  
It came upon a midnight clear  
Times are tough  
Traffics been slow  
Longing for light  
For life to once more grow  
It came upon a midnight clear  
What more can go wrong  
Just about to break  
Hearts been torn in two  
Despair been keeping me awake  
It came upon a midnight clear  
Does anyone care?  
Trying hard to believe  
That there's good news to be had  
On this Christmas Eve  
It came upon a midnight clear

A knock on the door  
A smile and warm embrace  
A glimmer of hope  
In these tiny morsels of grace  
It came upon a midnight clear  
One small gesture of love  
Will go a long way  
You'll never know how much  
It might brighten someone's day  
It came upon a midnight clear  
Opened my eyes to see  
Hope for tomorrow  
Opened my ears to hear  
Angelic songs of joy to cast aside my sorrow  
It came upon a midnight clear

The inspiration of that poem came shortly after watching a movie aptly titled, *Midnight Clear* (IMDbPro, 2006) and is in part based on the struggles, pain, muck and mire of life several of the characters find themselves in on Christmas Eve. The main character is Lefty, played by Stephen Baldwin, who loses his job on Christmas Eve due to his battle with the bottle and time lost from work attending hearings to keep shared custody with his wife amid their divorce. Lefty is down to his last few dollars, living in his car and wondering if life is worth it anymore. We encounter several other characters traversing life's roadway, which often has twists and turns, steep hills and dark valleys, potholes, and roadblocks along the way. As the darkness of that Christmas Eve night closes in there is one thing each character seems to long for – hope.

Hope to bring light to the darkness they are experiencing. You can almost hear the words of John 1:5, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it” fluttering somewhere in the background as the movie plays out. These are the same words we will read shortly as we light our candles and proclaim that very same incarnational promise. Hope is found in the light of the world born on that first midnight clear.

Yet, the more I thought about it the words of that poem may very well apply to many of our lives as we gather here this evening or have experienced over the past year. Lost jobs. Unemployment. Trapped by an addiction. Mounting college debt. An aging parent battling dementia. Depression and despair. All alone and feeling no one cares. Is life worth living you even ask? Heart still wounded from a special someone who tore it all apart. Children who no longer visit or call you on the phone. Wars and fires blaze. Tsunamis and hurricanes still rage. Fears of what’s to come in the world that seems to have come undone.

Take it one step further and the words of that poem could also apply to our birth narrative as told by Luke. A pregnant young woman and her fiancée traversing a long and dusty road mandated by a ruler wielding power by instilling fear and leveling oppressive taxes upon the people of the land. Might all hope been lost when they could find no place to stay. Alone on the ground where the

sheep and cattle probably lay. The agony of childbirth tears through a midnight clear. Until finally, a sweet baby boy does appear. Lowly shepherds are tending their flock. Startled and scared they are sent on their way wondering if anyone would believe the words of good news and great joy the Spirit will soon lead them to say after seeing that child asleep on the hay.

Like life, this story is full of twists and turns. Peaks and valleys. It's a bit messy in so many ways. But on this midnight clear hope draws near. Hope for you and me and hope for all the world to see. A star to guide us along the way. Love to bring light to the darkest of day.

I don't know what it is you come with tonight. But, on this midnight clear there is hope. God is near. In fact, Jesus is here. In the songs that we sing. The words that we hear. The bread and wine we will share. The lights that are aglow. In the stillness of the night, the word made flesh is in sight. There is hope for tomorrow. You are not alone. You are not alone. You are cherished deeply by the God up above who came down to earth to reveal God's great love. There is hope on this midnight clear. Hope that casts aside fear and hope for the coming New Year!