

In 1741, in Dublin, Ireland --- there is a man --- he is 56 years old --- recovering from a second stroke that has left the left side of his face and his left arm paralyzed --- he is depressed --- he is living on the estate of a friend. On Aug 22, 1741 the man went to his quarters --- on the table was a manuscript --- he read it --- he went to work --- he didn't emerge until Sept 14 --- when he did, he held up the pages he'd added to the manuscript and said, "I have seen the face of God!"

That man was George Frideric Handel and he had written The Messiah in 24 days --- an oratorio in three parts with 53 solos and choruses. Servants who checked on him over those 24 days said they heard him weeping and praying. Handel's benefactor at the time was Charles Jennens. The manuscript that Handel had found on his table was Jennens' compilation of scriptures that foretold Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection.

The first performance of the Messiah was on April 13 of the next year. Handel was able to conduct and play the organ. At that time a sacred work could not be sung in a theater --- that would be sacrilegious. But, if a woman sang a solo in church that would be considered theater and that was also sacrilegious! The Messiah was sung in a theater with the proceeds going to charity which made the performance acceptable. It took place in a theater for 600 people. Since they expected 700 people, the ladies were asked to not wear the hoops in their skirts and the men not to wear their swords.

Also, at this time in history, printed Bibles were rare and people were illiterate. Jennens and Handel hoped to tell the story of Jesus' life in scripture and music. The Messiah is scriptural, every word from Isaiah speaks of preparation --- be ready --- prepare for the advent of the Messiah --- look to your God, change your ways. "Make straight in the desert a highway." In Bible times, a desert is a symbol of a personal wilderness and desolation. Today, we may experience the same personal wilderness and desolation of mind, body or spirit as Handel. But because God broke into history by taking human form in Jesus --- the way has been prepared, Jesus' life has made straight the way through our deserts to the one who loves us. To accomplish this --- God sends a baby --- the advent of Hope in the world.

Whether we anticipate our relationship with God to be nourished through the life of Christ or we neglect that relationship --- God has done the work to make the path to him straight --- if we experience a crooked path or a rough path, in all things we have Immanuel - "God with us."

Blessings to all,
In love,
Wink