

## **Ponder the Joy**

Luke 1:46-56

### ***Singing Loud for All to Hear***

Singing is so much a part of the season. Whether you have a singing voice or not, just about everyone is good for a Christmas carol or two. Nothing says Christmas like a Christmas carol.

The residents at the nursing home I visited this week were quick to comment on all the carolers that had been through the past couple of weeks. Our grandson, Henry was proud to report that his preschool class had done some caroling at an office building next door to his preschool.

You have probably seen the movie *Elf* starring Will Farrell. It's a favorite during Christmas.

Farrell's character Buddy was the one who coined the expression, "*The best way to spread Christmas Cheer, is singing loud for all to hear.*"

Composer John Rutter puts it this way, "*What sweeter music can we bring, than a carol for to sing the birth of this heavenly King. Awake the voice. Awake the strings!*"

### ***My Soul Glorifies the Lord***

We come by our singing at Christmas quite honestly.

Mary also raised her voice in song. We find her doing just that in our scripture for today from Luke 1:46-56.

The *Magnificat*, as it is often called, is a song in praise of God.

"*My soul glorifies the Lord,*" sang Mary. And as some versions put it, "*My soul magnifies the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God my Savior.*" (Luke 1:46-47)

*Mary's Song*, as it is often called, is styled like that of a Psalm.

It has been compared to *Hannah's Prayer* in I Samuel 2. Hannah's prayer also gives thanks to God and, in this case, gives thanks to God for the birth of her son, Samuel.

Just like Mary, Hannah was content to dedicate her son to the Lord.

Mary's was a voice of sincerity. Praise that comes from a sincere heart is a "*joyful noise*" to the Lord every time.

We don't know what kind of voice Mary had, but it really doesn't matter, does it? Mary would not be denied and neither should we. She would sing praise to the Lord come what may.

Whether we possess a voice ready for the concert hall or one simply making a "*joyful noise*," a voice lifted in praise to God always delights him.

A voice that praises God always makes beautiful music.

The past couple of weeks we have talked about what caused Mary to sing as she did.

If you remember the angel, Gabriel, approached Mary with the news that she would give birth to "*the Son of the Most High*." The fact that she was a virgin made it a miracle of miracles.

You will also remember that Gabriel reported that Mary's relative Elizabeth was also to give birth. Even though Elizabeth was well-beyond the age of childbearing, she too would give birth to a very special child. Her son would grow to be the one who would "*prepare the way for the Lord*."

Upon hearing all of this, Mary went with haste to the Judean hill country to visit Elizabeth. She couldn't contain herself. She had to see for herself and upon seeing for herself she couldn't help but sing her song of praise.

### **The Support of Family**

I think it's interesting that Mary sought out a family member during this time in her life. As uncertain as things were and as weighty as they had become, Mary sought the support and encouragement of family.

There's nothing quite like the support of family. God puts us in family to share not only the joys, but the stresses of life.

It's no coincidence that we flock to family at Christmas. That's another one of those things we come by honestly at Christmas.

I encourage you to seek the love and support of family this Christmas.

For some of you, that means taking the first step. It very well might mean offering forgiveness. You might even have to swallow some pride.

That's the way it is when it comes to family. I'll be praying for you in this regard.

### **The Highroad of Faith**

As we have said often during this sermon series, Mary was left with a lot to ponder. After all, God was working in some surprising, extraordinary ways and because of that Mary had every reason to be thankful, every reason to rejoice in the Lord.

As it is with us when the Lord is moving, Mary had some decisions to make. For Mary, there were plenty of things to consider.

She was an unwed mother who ran the risk of being shunned by those around her. I'm sure she had to be concerned about what was in store for her and her unborn son.

We too worry about what's around the corner.

Mary could have focused on the all the negative, but instead took the highroad of faith. She took God at his word. Mary remained obedient to God and what he wanted and because of that she emerged full of joy.

There's a word for us here. Joy follows obedience every time.

### **A Word about Joy**

I have heard it said that "*joy is the by-product of an obedient life.*" And if that's the case, then Mary was awfully obedient. The song she sang was full of joy because of things God was doing in her life.

That gives us pause to consider our own joy or the lack thereof.

Are you more about Christmas cheer or figuring that life is one "*bah-humbug*" after another?

The thing about joy is that you can't manufacture it. It comes from the heart.

There is a distinct difference between joy and happiness. Happiness is much more circumstantial. Joy, on the other hand, flows from deep within.

I love the old song, *“There’s within my heart a melody Jesus whispers sweet and low. Fear not, I am with thee, peace be still in all of life’s ebb and flow. Jesus, Jesus, Jesus—sweetest name I know. Fills my every longing, keeps me singing as I go.”*

It is possible to be unhappy about something and still be joyful. My joy and yours, for that matter, is wholly dependent upon what God is doing within us, rather than upon all that’s going on around us.

As with Mary, it comes to us to decide. Will we let the things of God inform, if not form, our dispositions, or will let our circumstances do that?

For Mary, the blessings of God won out every time.

How joyful are you this Advent? Is yours the highroad of faith or do you find yourself more mired in the things that swirl around you?

Set your sights on God and you won’t be disappointed.

### **Joy Is the Order of the Day**

For centuries Advent, much like Lent, was a season of repentance, sacrifice, and simplicity.

It is anything but that now and we are left to wonder how we got to where are today. The excesses of Christmas are something else.

Even though Advent was always a season of repentance, it was also a season of joy, recognizing that Christians are never a people without joy.

That’s where the pink candle of Advent Wreath comes in. I get the question all the time. What’s the meaning of that pink candle? Where in the world did that come from?

Purple is the color of royalty, repentance, and suffering and is used both during Advent and Lent. We see it in three of the four candles of the Advent Wreath.

Pink, on the other hand, is the color of rejoicing. Years ago the church wanted to communicate the joy of Christmas by using a pink candle during Advent, even though it was still a time of penance.

This third Sunday of Advent is given over to praising God. Joy is the order of the day.

Just like Mary, we have every reason to be thankful, every reason to joy in the Lord, every reason to sing.

*“The Mighty One has done great things. . . Holy is his name.”*

Christ’s coming changed everything.

There would be mercy for the faithful, strength for the lowly, and support for the downtrodden. These were the things Mary sang about. Christ’s coming was good news.

### **A Song to Sing**

You and I have a song to sing, just like Mary.

*“My soul magnifies the Lord,”* she sang. Hers was a song of good news and so is ours. Christ is born and it comes to us to spread that news.

Buddy of *Elf* fame has it right, *“The best way to spread Christmas cheer is singing loud for all to hear.”*

Clearly that has everything to do with the carols we sing, but at a much deeper level it has to do with the melodies we sing as we go about our daily lives.

In a way we sing out the good news about Christ every time we help somebody out, every time we offer a listening ear, and every time we show some degree of support.

### **What’s Your Song of Joy?**

Let me give you a little home work. I’m going to ask you take on the mantle of composer.

What’s your song of joy? How are you expressing your thanks to God?

Go ahead and write it down. If you want, go ahead and sing. After all, it’s Christmas.