



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for December 15, 2019
“Christmas Outside the Box: Worship”
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Luke 1:46-55

Sing the Song of Christmas

Buddy expresses it well for all of us when he declares in the movie *Elf* that *“the best way to spread Christmas cheer is singing loud for all to hear.”*

If you remember, Buddy wasn’t all that great of a singer, but he sure brought a lot of cheer.

That’s the way singing can be this time of year. The songs of this season have a way of touching our hearts. We have sung them for years and they never lose their luster. They certainly help us celebrate.

In a very real way, we sing our way through the season.

WVEZ-FM 106.9 got an early start on things when it started playing Christmas music fulltime on November 4th.

Pastor and author, Ellsworth Kalas, writes, *“No song sings as well as Christmas.”*

We come by all of this quite honestly. Luke has four separate songs that are sung in his account of Christ’s birth. Mary sings, Zechariah sings, the angels sing, and Simeon sings.

It is to Mary’s song that we turn our attention today.

Mary Visits Elizabeth

Upon hearing that she would give birth to *“the Son of the Most High,”* Mary visited her relative Elizabeth who was also pregnant. The scripture doesn’t tell us how the two were related, we just know they were.

Of course, Elizabeth’s pregnancy was miraculous in its own right. She was quite old and thought to be barren. We know Elizabeth as the mother of John the Baptist. As the two got together, the baby in Elizabeth’s womb leapt as if in recognition of the Anointed One that was in his midst.

Elizabeth, full of the Holy Spirit, was quick to exclaim, *“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!”* (Luke 1:42) *Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!”* (Luke 1:45)

Upon hearing Elizabeth's words of encouragement, Mary began to sing. There's nothing like a song to express what we are feeling. That's why singing is so important to our worship.

Mary's Song

Mary's song essentially acknowledged the mighty work of God. Mary knew that God was doing a wonderful thing. He was up to something great and she just couldn't contain herself.

The song Mary sang is titled "*The Magnificat*," which is the Latin word for "*glorifies*." Mary was all about glorifying God. We should be as well.

The Westminster Catechism states, "*The chief aim of man is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.*" Mary was all about that.

As Mary sang, she rejoiced in the firm knowledge that God was her Savior. She expressed thanks that God was mindful of her, even though she was of humble estate. Mary was well-assured that God was doing great things.

Mary called God, "*the Mighty One*." His work didn't just extend to her, but to others as well, particularly those who like her were of humble means. Mary sang about God's mercy. She sang about rulers being brought down and the humble being lifted up. She sang about the hungry being filled and the rich being sent away empty. Mary sang about the help God offers his faithful servants.

Mary's song is a song for all the ages. It speaks about God good work from "*generation to generation*," including our own.

Great Things

Mary could do know other but sing about the great things God was doing in her life. I hope you are able to sing a similar song. This Christmas, how about considering the great things God is doing in your life? God loves you and is doing a great work in you.

If anything, let me encourage you to leave yourself open not only to God's love, but to the wonderful plan he has for your life. "*The Mighty One*" has done great things and continues to do great things.

With faith claim that for your life, for the life of your family, for the lives of those around you, and for the life of this church.

God is still in the business of doing great things.

- He is able to transform our lives like no one else can.
- He is able to bring hope where hope is in short supply.
- He is able to heal where hearts are broken.
- He is able to strengthen where we find ourselves weighed down beyond measure.
- He is able to save, even when we figure we're not worth saving.

God is "*mighty to save*," and is worthy of our praise and worship.

Christmas outside the Box

We have been going to this box the Sundays of Advent. The first Sunday of Advent we talked about rolling up ourselves and getting involved in the community. Last week Ashlee talked about offering our time to one another with an interest of building relationships. This week we're talking about giving God his due by worshipping his holy name.

I have here my cell phone. It is not a whole lot different than the one you have. I spend a lot a time looking at this screen and I figure you do as well. This screen and other screens just like it, distract us to no end. Some people even make a practice of looking at their screens while driving. It's called "*distracted driving*" and the consequences can be disastrous.

It's a good thing not to be so distracted all the time, particularly when it comes to our relationship with God. It's hard to worship God when we're distracted. And all of us will have to agree that this season of all seasons has a way of distracting us to no end. We'd do well to put down our phones, literally, and spend time connecting with God. I can think of no better trade off—less phone time, more God time.

We'd do well to put down our phones, figuratively, by seeking to get everything else out of the way so we might find ourselves at a much better place to notice what God is doing, and upon noticing what God is doing, finding ourselves glorifying his holy name.

If we're going to do Christmas outside the box, we'd do well to worship God at every opportunity, and if that involves singing then go ahead. Let your songs fly to the heavens.

Take Time to Be Holy

I read every morning from the daily devotional *Jesus Calling* by Sarah Young. Hear what she writes this week about the worship of God.

Young writes as if Jesus himself is speaking right to us.

"Take time to be holy. The word holy doesn't mean goody-goody; it means set apart for sacred use. That is what these sacred moments in my Presence are accomplishing within you.

As you focus your mind and heart on me, you are being transformed: re-created into the one I designed you to be. This process requires blocks of time and attention set aside for communion with me.

The benefits of this practice are limitless. Emotional and physical healing is enhanced by your soaking in the light of my Presence.

You experience a nearness to me that strengthens your faith and fills you with peace.

You open yourself up to receive the many blessings that I have prepared for you.

You become a cleansed temple of my Holy Spirit, who is able to do in and through you "immeasurably more than you can ask or imagine.

These are just a few of the benefits of being still in my Presence."

So then, in the midst of all that swirls about us this season, in the midst of all we have to do or, better put, *think* we have to do, let's resolve to put the distractions aside and worship the Lord.

Let's sing to the Lord "*songs*" that glorify his name. You don't have to be a trained vocalist, only one who wants to please him.

Express Yourself before God

Express yourself however God leads.

If it is praying, God simply wants you to express what wells up deep within. If it is sitting silently in his presence, let God hear from your heart. And if it is singing, go ahead, and let the song rip. It will please God to no end, in the very same way Mary pleased God with her singing.

God bless us all as we seek to do Christmas outside the box.