

Natalie W. Bell
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 Third Sunday Advent

A Song of Hope and Joy
Luke 1:39-55

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰ where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴² and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³ And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴ For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be ^[e] a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

Mary's Song of Praise

⁴⁶ *And Mary^[f] said,*

"My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷ *and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,*

⁴⁸ *for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.*

Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,

⁴⁹ *for the Mighty One has done great things for me,*

and holy is his name;

⁵⁰ *indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him*

from generation to generation.

⁵¹ *He has shown strength with his arm;*

he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

⁵² *He has brought down the powerful from their thrones*

and lifted up the lowly;

⁵³ *he has filled the hungry with good things*

and sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴ *He has come to the aid of his child Israel,*

in remembrance of his mercy,

⁵⁵ *according to the promise he made to our ancestors,*

to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

⁵⁶ *And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.*

What's *your favorite Christmas carol?*

Why is it so special to you?

When do you find yourself singing?

Is it only in church?
Probably not, right?

We often find ourselves singing in the shower, in the car,
as we do yardwork, while listening to the radio,
or maybe just dancing around the house!

And what do songs mean to you?

Do you have a favorite love song—
To remind you of your beloved?

I know my family has favorite family songs,

because they remind us of vacations, or time on the lake,
or with relatives at the farm.

Like ‘We are Family’ by Sister Sledge

My grandparents used to host weekly barn dances in the 50s and 60s,
for a small charge you could dance all night to a live band.

Music was a part of every holiday and birthday,
Especially when my grandmother was alive.

My Dad loved all kinds of music,

from classical to country to rock to jazz and pop.

So we have all kinds of songs we play at the holidays on the play list,
As we cook, decorate, and dance.

Some of our pets are even named after favorite songs,

Like Jim Croce’s ***Bad, Bad Leroy Brown***,

My brother’s dog is named...Leroy Brown.

Singing is an act of ***joy, celebration, and connection with others.***

It brings up all kinds of memories, doesn’t it?

But singing can also be an act of ***lament or remembrance.***

Think of beloved songs at a funeral,

To remind you of a loved one, and their legacy.

Singing can even be an ***act of resistance.***

The civil rights movement had many powerful songs.

Slaves were known to sing spirituals, with themes of justice, and hope.
 Hope in the midst of despair.
 Light in the midst of darkness.
 When they sang they were praising God,
 AND protesting those who locked them out of worship,
 but couldn't keep them away from God's promises.

Civil rights leaders knew that singing songs like "We Shall Overcome,"
 Was an act of resistance, and hope---
 in a society that didn't support justice.

Did you know that songs helped to bring down the Berlin Wall?

For several months preceding the fall of the Berlin wall,
 the citizens of Leipzig in East Germany,
 gathered on Monday evenings by candlelight around St. Nikolai church –
 the church where Bach composed so many cantatas.
 And they sang, and over two months their numbers grew from a little more than a
 thousand people to more than three hundred thousand,
 over half the citizens of the city,
 singing songs of hope and protest and justice,
 carrying candles, and chanting 'no violence'.
 Until their songs actually shook the powers of their nation, and changed the world.
 The wall....came down.

The authorities didn't crack down on them like they had other protests,
 because it was so unexpected!

Later, when someone asked one of the officers of the East German secret police,
 why they did not crush this protest like they had so many others,
 the officer replied, "***We had no contingency plan for song.***"!

<https://www.davidlose.net/2015/12/advent-4-c-singing-as-an-act-of-resistance/>

Do WE use songs like that?

What if Mary and Elizabeth were doing just that?

What if they understood their situation as one of protest, and hope?

I mean, they knew just how ***ridiculous their situations were – two women,***
 one too old to bear a child,

and one so young and not yet married, yet called to bear the Savior of the World!

They knew how little they mattered in the world,

Women, from the hill country of Judea,

far away from power and influence.
And they knew about the hardship of life under Roman occupation.

Yet when faced with the challenges of their situation,
they did not retreat, or apologize,
they did not despair---they held out hope,
and they sang.

They sang about their confidence in **God's promise to turn the world upside down.**
They sang about God **lifting up the oppressed**, and bringing down the proud.
About God **filling the hungry**, and sending the rich away empty.
They sang about God's **help for the lowly**, even women, even them.
Because sometimes the most powerful thing you can do is JUST SING.

Mary's Magnificat is one of **four songs in the Bible, sung by only women**,
at key moments in the history of God's people.

Miriam sings at the Exodus in Exodus 15.

Deborah sings in the founding of the nation in Judges 5.

Hannah sings during a time of oppression and challenge in 1 Samuel 1.

And **Mary** sings amidst the Roman occupation about the coming Savior.

All these songs are about God's liberating power.

They are all about **God doing a new thing.**

They all speak about **us being partners in God's plan** for the world.

In Mary's Magnificat, Mary speaks about the power of hope,

And good news for those who are oppressed.

And she speaks about **God's action—in PAST tense.**

Did you notice the verbs in her song?

This is an already/not-yet description.

God has **already acted** to bring about liberation,
even though it is **not yet fully realized.**

Listen to her:

*the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name;*

⁵⁰ *indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him....*

⁵¹ *He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud*

⁵² *He has brought down the powerful ...
and lifted up the lowly;*
⁵³ *he has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty.*
⁵⁴ *He has come to the aid of his child*

I wonder, *what kind of songs will YOU sing* this Christmas season?
What songs are welling up within your heart?
How can you sing to God?
How can you sing about God's work in the world?

How can you sing about hope?
How can you sing about *light—in the darkness?*

There's a great hymn that describes the power of song, called
How Can I Keep from Singing?
Do you know it?

*My life flows on in endless song;
Above earth's lamentation,
I hear the sweet, though far-off hymn
That hails a new creation*

*No storm can shake my inmost calm
While to that refuge clinging
Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth
How can I keep from singing?*

Sometimes we can't help but sing.

Friends, hear the Good News of the Gospel today—
We are people of hope, and people of song, just like Mary.
May we use our voices and our lives, to sing of God's promise and liberation.
And for that, all God's people can say together, Amen.