THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Nu’uanu Congregational Church

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*“Our Joy”* Luke 1:46-55

This past week, one of the commentaries I read noted that Mary sang the passage we just heard. The Magnificat, as these verses are often called, is a song, a hymn. Scholars also believe that the early church sang this song when they worshiped—perhaps as the doxology. So, the theologian I was reading suggested that we should have a hymn sing instead of a sermon.

Well, I’m sorry, but I already have something written for this year. However, it is not a bad idea, and perhaps next year we will because music is a powerful way to express ourselves. Music—and especially singing—is also wonderful way to remember things. Do you remember how you learned to recite your “A, B C’s”—you sang them. One of the things I have found when visiting seniors in nursing homes is that even if we have a hard time talking about current events, most of the time we can sing at least one or two songs from church. Singing can really be a blessing, and today’s passage is a song that rises out of blessing.

In fact, when I did a little research, I found some really interesting information about just what a blessing singing really is. If you want information, I’ve got a web address in the written sermon. All you need to do is Google “What good is singing?” I have found ten beneficial things that comes from singing:

Relieves stress

Stimulates the immune response

Increases our pain threshold (especially group singing)

May improve snoring

Improves lung function

Develops a sense of belonging and connection

Enhances memory in people with dementia

Helps with grief

Improves mental health and mood

Helps improve speaking abilities

*https://www.healthline.com/health/benefits-of-singing#benefits*

We receive all of these benefits when we sing because in addition to exercising our respiratory system, singing stimulates multiple areas of the brain at the same time. (So, in light of all these good reasons I expect all of us to sign-up for choir!)

For Mary, singing this song of praise was a way of proclaiming her faith in God. It was her way of expressing her wonder, amazement, and (most of all) her confidence in God, which seems to know no bounds. Indeed, she opens her song by declaring that her whole soul was rejoicing and magnifying God. Rather than remain a young, ordinary woman, Mary seems to be calling attention to what is happening to her; what God is doing in her life, and she wants others to hear and to be moved and inspired by her song.

Through her sudden burst of song, Mary rejoiced at what she believed God was doing in the world through her life and her cousin, Elizabeth’s life, and through the babies each of them was carrying. New life for the world was going to come into the world through their bodies, through their babies, through their sons.

Although her song begins with her astonished joy of what God was doing for her, Mary also saw this miracle as being new life—a new beginning—for the whole world. We know that because as Mary praises God, she sings of the way God is changing the lives of those who love and honor God.

God is ministering to those who have been hungry, those who have not had the resources or the power to live their lives without want or fear. All those who have been marginalized and trampled on are going to be lifted-up and made whole.

God’s compassion will come to all who call on God’s name, and Mary makes it clear that both she and her listeners are recipients of God’s grace. What is more, every believer throughout all time is covered by this glory; thus, Mary exclaims, “God’s mercy is for those who fear God / from generation to generation.” [v. 50]

However, while she praises God, Mary also sings that there is also a flip side to what God was going to do about those who do *not* call upon God’s name; those who continue in their corruption and their lack of compassion.

Wrapped into Mary’s song of praise for God, there is also a list of things that are *wrong* in her world: the rich and powerful are not fulfilling their obligations to the rest of the people as Scripture has taught, and the prophets have demanded. According to Mary’s song, God is going to act on behalf of those who have been oppressed. God is going to scatter the proud and bring down the powerful.

As she sings, Mary rejoices that these things are going to be corrected. Fate and fortunes are going to be reversed for all who are faithful and call on God’s name.

So, aside from this passage and this Sunday being a great advertisement for joining the choir, I would also like to point to the way in which Mary’s song magnifies God by being bold enough to name the people and the ways in which God’s ways are *not* being honored.

She speaks, or sings, directly to the challenges and the crimes that the people lived with—and this is an important part of her praise because Mary does not ignore the guilty or their institutions—no matter how high or how powerful—in her indictment. As lowly or as unimportant as she says she is—and her youth and being female certainly did make her that—her acceptance of God’s ways and God’s desire for her life makes her bold and courageous, and…*joyful*.

God’s activity in Mary’s life—a young, unmarried woman who is pregnant—this should have made her sad and afraid. Instead, it has made her so filled with joy that she sings a song that we still hear today, a song that sums up the longing of her time…and of ours.

The question becomes: how can we receive the confidence and joy that Mary has in this story? And make no mistake, this is exactly what God wants for us, too. On this third Sunday of Advent, we are being asked to consider how our relationship with God can bring us as much confidence and joy as it brought to Mary. How and where are we to find *our* joy, the same joy Mary found?

As I thought about this, I realized that this whole passage answers that question for us, just as it answered it for Mary two thousand years ago. Our joy is in our commitment to…*sing*. And before anyone thinks about telling me that they are not good at singing, let me remind you that the Bible says we are to make a *joyful* sound. It does not say it has to be pretty!

Yes, we are to sing—and you can take that literally, or as a metaphor for expounding, declaring, announcing, broadcasting…or any other word you can think of that suggests communication or transmission of a message. So let us sing and be joyful.

Let us sing because it causes us to breathe deeply—to receive the holy breath that sustains life and then to breathe it out to others.

Let us sing because this is something we can do anywhere and at any time.

Let us sing because this is something we can do alone.

Let us sing because this is also something we can do together. In fact, ensemble and choir singing implies that we need each other, and that there are parts for other voices, all can find a place, and all can be one with the whole.

Let us sing because singing is the opposite of silence.

Let us sing so that all of the lies and the all of the truths we hold back in fear are finally be exposed.

Let us sing because God gave us something to sing about: a world of beauty, God’s own heart of grace, and each other who may well need to receive or to share the confidence and hope that God gave Mary and Elizabeth so long ago, and holds out to us even today.

Friends, let us sing so that we may also find our joy. Amen.