

# ***“The Ultimate Advent Playlist”***

**Sunday, December 11, 2016**

**Third Sunday of Advent**

**#3 in series: *AWAITING THE ALREADY***

 **(Luke 1:46-56, NRSV)**

## **Mary’s Song of Praise**

And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of  
his servant. Surely, from now on all generations  
will call me blessed;  
for the Mighty One has done great things for  
me, and holy is his name.

His mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.  
He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of  
their hearts.

He has brought down the powerful from their  
thrones, and lifted up the lowly;  
he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
according to the promise he made to our  
ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants  
forever.”

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

This is the Word of God for the people of God.

*Thanks, be to God.*

**[2<sup>ND</sup> Service: Affirmation of Faith]**

**[MESSAGE]**

Luke’s gospel brings us a whole new perspective on the  
Nativity Story; it is the version we know best.

Remember, Mark wrote with a sense of urgency and  
with a very lean narrative style; kind of the  
Reader’s Digests version of the story.

Matthew hit us with an ominous tone, pointing out fear and brokenness in the world; his is a suspense novelist's approach.

Next week we will hear John's highly poetic version; it is a more Shakespearean tale.

Luke's version is more like a Broadway musical.

Nearly every major character in Luke's story bursts into song at some point.

When something happens to someone, they sing about it and the songs advance the storyline forward.

Now, I realize that the Bible indicates that these people "said" these things; however, their poetic expression and the structure of their "*speech*" is better suited to a song.

In fact, some of these have been set to melodies, like Mary's *Magnificat* and *The Canticle of Simeon*.

These are songs that emerge from the person's deep well of emotion, accompanied by great joy and awe.

I believe that music has the power to move the listener to connect to the emotions of the artist.

Great music can make you laugh or cry or hurt as the music rises and falls.

Luke uses the power of musical style to connect his readers with the deep emotions that surround the time and the people who are part of this momentous event in history.

To hear the music of Luke, we must be open to experience – be willing to be moved by the music.

It is a challenge for us to cancel the noise of deadlines and to-do lists and listen for the glorious sounds of angels and the faint music of a baby's cry.

**Let us pray**...Lord, this morning we gather to hear the music that is your story. Help us to be open to the joy and wonder found in this story today. In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen.**

We only read Mary's Song this morning, but there are three show-stopping numbers in Luke's story:

**Zechariah's Song**, a hymn of praise that emerges from nine months of silence and bursts forth at the birth of his son John;

**Mary's Magnificat**, a hymn of joy and obedience in response to Elizabeth's greeting;

and, of course, the big production starring the angel choir from heaven – ***"Gloria in excelsis Deo"***.

Let's take a moment to look at each one of these.

Although **Zechariah's Song** begins in verse 68, its origin is found way back in verse 5.

Long story short: Zechariah is an elderly and faithful Temple priest married to Elizabeth.

They have long wanted children but Elizabeth can't, so they live their lives with no hope of being parents.

Along comes Angel Gabriel to tell Zack that Elizabeth is pregnant, thanks to their prayers.

Zack is understandably skeptical and asks Gabe how he can be sure of this.

The Angel says, *“I am standing in the presence of God and God sent me to tell you this and God doesn’t kid around about stuff like this.*

*Because you doubted me you will be unable to speak at all for the next nine months; maybe in your silence you will learn something.”*

Now, we can criticize Zechariah if we want, but think about it for a minute.

Isn’t his reaction similar to our own disbelief and skepticism every time December rolls around?

Can you honestly say you never thought:

“Peace on Earth? You’ve got to be kidding me. There’s nothing like that around these days.”

“This is the season of hope? I can barely keep my life together! Where’s the hope?”

“Joy and gladness? Really? How is that possible for me?”

It’s true – Amid the chaos and frustration of our lives, when the good news of Jesus comes to us, we have a hard time believing it.

It is just too extraordinary, too far-fetched.

We may even say, “*How will I know that this is so? How could this be?*”

The silence imposed by the angel turns out to be a blessing rather than a curse.

Without his voice, Zechariah is unable to do his job, he cannot engage others, and he is forced to spend time with himself thinking about God’s promise.

When his son John is born, Zechariah’s voice returns and he offers a song of praise to God that could only have grown from his time of contemplation.

His silence is a great teacher and there is a lesson for us to learn here too.

How important are all the things you think you must do to prepare for Christmas?

What if you were intentional about creating times of stillness and silence this year?

What if you put as much effort into quiet times with God as you devoted to shopping, cooking, and all your other “to-do’s”?

To appreciate this song, we must be still and listen.

**Mary’s song** is memorable because it is at once personal *and* universal.

Her words move us because they are so innocent and filled with joy, yet they are impossibly trusting.

Though the song begins with Mary’s personal story, it soon changes; it becomes less about what God has done *for* Mary, and more about what God will do **through** Mary.

*The Magnificat* underscores the nature of miracles in the Bible.

Whenever something miraculous happens in the Bible, it is rarely for the benefit of the person receiving the miracle.

When someone in the Bible is blessed, it is so that they might become a blessing for others.



This is the difference between how the Angel Gabriel responds to Zechariah and then Mary.

They are both skeptical at the angel's announcement of unexpected pregnancies in unusual circumstances.

When Zechariah asks for proof, he gets his voice taken away.

When Mary also asks for proof, she is told that her cousin Elizabeth will be a sign of proof for her.

This connects this family forever to the same divine story: The birth of a great prophet in John and the Messiah in Jesus.

Elizabeth is blessed so that she might be a blessing to Mary; Mary is blessed to be a blessing to the whole world for generations to come.

We find Mary's song nearly every year in the Advent season because it is so important to the story.

It's beautiful verses sing of a theme that is vital to us as we wait for a Jesus who is already here.

We have been given the gift of Jesus so that we might bear that gift to others in need.

We can be there to offer encouragement to the weary and assurance to the skeptical.

Others are waiting for the Jesus who is already here with us.

**Finally**, there is the big production number, as angels descend from the heavens to sing: ***“Gloria!”***

We first notice that this song begins like the other two: with a word of comfort –  
***“Do not be afraid.”***

This theme also echoes what we heard in Matthew last week.

Fear seems to play a big role in the culture of First Century Palestine; we might also realize that fear is often common in our own culture.

The angels’ song reverberates across the centuries to reassure us: ***“Do not be afraid.”***

Luke’s version of the Christmas story provides songs that strengthen the soul amid suffering.

This is also the holy task to which God calls the church.

In a broken and chaotic world, the church is neither politician nor soldier; our task is neither to fight nor to cower.

Our task is to **sing** – to claim the songs of peace, comfort, and courage; daring to perform them where the world needs to hear them.

Secular voices will say that the church is weak, or powerless, or irrelevant today.

I say that the church offers the very thing that the world needs to fight against an endless cycle of self-destructive behavior – **a subversive, surprising song.**

Our song has lyrics that speak of self-giving love rather than self-addicted agendas.

Our song has a melody that counters the sound of war chants and the clanging of swords.

Our song pulses with the rhythms and sacred harmonies of God's unconditional love and grace-filled forgiveness.

It is true that we wait in a broken world for Jesus, who is already here, and the realization of his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

We may be tempted to hide in fear of the brokenness, but the angel tells us:

***“Do not be afraid!”***

The church has a song to perform, and we each have instruments to play.

God is standing at the podium, baton in hand; just follow.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**