

**The First Christmas Carol**  
**Luke 1:46-55**

Friends do you have a favorite Christmas carol? Or a favorite rendition of a particular Christmas carol? Maybe a favorite collection of Christmas carols?

Our family used to have a Christmas tradition when we lived in Ontario. When we would drive up to Ottawa from Toronto to visit my parents over Christmas we would always listen to “A Very Veggie Christmas” and sing along with Bob and Larry and the rest of the Veggie Tales gang.

And I don’t know of any other holiday or celebration which has been the cause for more singing and song writing than Christmas.

I mean think about it – you hear Christmas music going for almost an entire month before the holiday, in the stores, on the radio, on TV.

And there’s no shortage of Christmas albums, any singer or band who wants to can cash in on producing a Christmas song.

I mean when was the last time George Michael last had a regular Top 40 hit? But every Christmas we get to listen to his song “Last Christmas I gave you my heart...”

What other holiday generates this much music and song?

And sometimes we’re struck by the incongruity of those who are singing the Christmas music - artists whose lives and lifestyles do not indicate they are followers of Jesus Christ in any recognizable manner are singing words of profound spiritual meaning and deep faith.

“Hail the heaven born prince of peace, Hail the Son of righteousness”

“Christ the Savior is born”

“O Come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!”

And so friends, whether you love it or hate it – can you imagine a Christmas without music, without song, without carols?

Something very significant would be missing wouldn't it.

I mean we can imagine a Christmas without presents or gifts. While it would be a bit sparse perhaps, the gift giving and present getting can often obscure the celebration of Jesus birth.

After all whose birthday do you celebrate where you get the majority of presents, and the not the birthday boy?

And those of us who live in northern countries always dream of a white Christmas – but there was no snow in Bethlehem on the night Jesus was born

So while it might not be very picturesque a Christmas without snow can't ruin the **real meaning** of the holiday, can it?

But a Christmas without music, without singing, friends if that happened something fundamental would be missing that strikes at the very heart of celebrating Jesus birth.

Because friends, the “why” behind the whole Christmas season is that “God so loved the world, he sent his one and only son!”

The birth of Jesus Christ - so that He might come and live among us, become like us, redeem our sinful human nature and offer his life in our place as a sacrifice for our wrongdoing... is such an act of selfless, unconditional love that when we apprehend it something happens to us.

God's amazing love fills us with joy! And friends, joy is something that can't be contained. It bursts forth from us, taking the most direct route out of our bodies - it bursts forth out of our mouths!

And whether or not you can carry a tune, or sing in harmony doesn't matter – that's why the bible says “make a joyful noise!” You just have to let it out – you can't keep it in.

Don't believe me? Tell me what did you do when you were watching Sidney Crosby scored the Olympic gold medal goal in overtime?

You let out a cheer, a shout of joy.  
So friends a Christmas without music, without singing would mean a Christmas that had no joy and that is simply impossible!

Because the fact is that the birth of Jesus Christ is part of the ultimate expression of God's amazing love, a love which produces a joy that must be expressed.

And friends, even as God was initiating the events which would lead to the birth of Jesus Christ it was so evident that this was an act of his love - that joy burst forth in song.

And so in our scripture passage today we see that joy bursting out of both Elizabeth and Mary in prophecy and song. The very first Christmas carol!

And if we were to arrange this carol according our current song writing methods you might say that Elizabeth wrote and sang the chorus and Mary wrote and sang the verse.

Now Mary has come to visit Elizabeth to see if what the angel has told her is true – and so as soon as she walks in the door and says “hello Elizabeth”

And before any further greetings can take place Elizabeth bursts out in joy and “sings” the chorus – which is really the catchy memorable part of any song

*Blessed are you among women,  
blessed is the child you will bear!  
But why am I so favored,  
that the mother of my Lord should come to me?  
As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears,  
the baby in my womb leaped for joy.  
Blessed is she who has believed  
that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!”*

It's probably sound more lyrical and catchy when Elizabeth spoke it Aramaic or Hebrew... but you get the picture.

So what inspired this joyful outburst? Elizabeth didn't have any details about Mary yet.

Elizabeth doesn't know anything about an angel visiting Mary to tell her she would give birth to the Messiah – there wasn't any Facebook or Twitter, not even email or a phone.

But, a different kind of social media had let Elizabeth know what was going on. Another little birdie had “twittered” to Elizabeth and inspired this prophecy - The Holy Spirit.

And this chorus is heart of the first Christmas Carol because what Elizabeth says confirms to Mary that her experience with the angel was genuine. What the angel said was true, it was going to happen.

God was finally sending the long awaited and long promised Messiah – and she would have the honor of bringing Him into the world.

What Joy!

Now the conception of a child is usually a cause for great joy, and when its not we know that something isn't right, that something has gone wrong.

Maybe it's the circumstances into which the child will come – born into poverty, born in a place torn by war, famine, disease.

Maybe the conception of the child was not the result of the intimacy that comes when a man and a woman pledge a lifelong commitment to each other.

Maybe it was the result of a bad decision, lust or even rape... and these things happen friends because sin and evil have affected our world and twisted that which God intended to be good.

I'm sure we've all known a situation where a pregnancy was not the cause for the great joy that it's supposed to be.

But ironically - it's this fact which makes Mary even more joyful about her upcoming pregnancy.

Because the angel told Mary that her son would save people from sin, from evil.

What a cause for great joy! And so Mary bursts out and sings the verse of the first Christmas Carol.

And while the chorus of a song might be the heartbeat – the verse of a song gives its context – the chorus can only live within the body of verses which make up the song.

And so Elizabeth's chorus, confirming that the Mary will give birth to the Messiah, lives with-in the body of the verse which Mary sings.

In other words friends God's action of sending his son - which is the ultimate expression of his love towards us is - defined by the content of Mary's song.

Because Friends "love," even God's love needs to be defined.

Love isn't really truly love until feelings translate into actions, otherwise it is simply sentimentality. It's all fine to say God loves us but what actions can we point to that prove it.

Well according to Mary's song God is....

a God who extends mercy from generation to generation

a God who opposes the proud and arrogant but lifts up those who are humble

a God who gives to those who realize they need His provision but will not cater to those who think they don't need anything

a God who remembers to help those who belong to Him

a God who keeps his promises

And so Mary's song describes the actions which proves God has always been a loving God and that his decision to send his Son through her is the completion of a plan which has been in the making for a long time.

Mary's song lets us know that God's love is more than just warm fuzzy sentimentality,

It teaches us that God accepts us as we are, but He loves us too much to leave us that way.

Friends, its not just us who sees that the birth of a child isn't always a cause for joy - God sees it too!

In fact God sees how each of us who are born into this world are affected by sin and evil in various ways, and he has always acted loving towards us in spite of it.

Look at Mary's descriptions of God's past actions

God extends mercy: He doesn't give us what we deserve.

God opposes the proud and arrogant: If God allowed a proud person to succeed they will stay trapped in their pride. Only coming to their limits will show them their folly so they can turn from it.

God gives to the empty-handed: For those who realize they need forgiveness and mercy God gives it.

And friends isn't this exactly how Jesus ministry continued as well

Didn't Jesus say - it is not the healthy who need a doctor, I have come for the sick.

Didn't Jesus oppose the self-righteous Pharisees

Didn't Jesus say to the woman who was caught in adultery - I don't condemn you, but go and leave your life of sin

And didn't Jesus put our sinfulness to death on the cross as a demonstration that God forgives us of our sin and won't leave

us sinners but promises to give us new life in the Holy Spirit instead.

And didn't the Apostle Peter on the day when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the church say that the promise of repenting and believing in Jesus and receiving the Holy Spirit was for you and for your children?"

From generation to generation God has shown His amazing love.

And thanks to the first Christmas carol we know exactly what God's love means and exactly what He has done to put his love into action and prove it to us.

And so the celebration of this action comes around again each year to remind us and help us encounter God's amazing love once again –

So we can receive God's mercy and grace  
So we can realize our need for God's forgiveness

And so we can be amazed at how far God would go to achieve it

And so that in believing all this we will be filled anew with the promised Holy Spirit

And so we will experience Joy! Joy that we can't hold in!

Joy that grows and builds inside us until we simply have to let it out and sing!

Sing for joy, Shout for joy – friends our Lord has come  
How can we keep from singing?

Amen.