

The First Christmas Carol

Luke 1:39-55 | Fourth Sunday of Advent | December 22, 2024 | Pastor John Klawiter , preaching

Grace and peace to you my friends in Christ,

My son was at his guitar lesson recently when his teacher suggested that to truly play the piece well, he should learn it by heart (**SLIDE of guitar**).

This expression was new to my son, so Chris, the teacher, said that learning something by “heart” meant that it becomes part of you—that you can own the dynamic changes and tempo. That learning it by heart means it’s part of your soul.

It’s more than just strictly memorizing the music—it’s learning it so deeply that you feel it in your heart.

I hadn’t thought of it like that before.

Yet, to know it by heart means that you could improvise, or provide more emotional range because you’re not worrying about whether you’ll hit the right note.

You know songs by heart.

Jesus Loves Me, for example (**SLIDE of Jesus loves me**). One of the first songs we teach—so today, in many ways, is our way of teaching that song to Adaline on her baptism.

It’s a simple, yet foundational message.

Jesus loves me, this I know—we state a basic understanding or promise from God.

And how do we know this? For the Bible tells me so.

It’s the story that Mary knows. The scriptures promise that a Messiah will come.

What does Mary, the mother of Jesus, do when she is affirmed by Elizabeth that this scary news is actually really really good news?

She sings.

Singing was a foundational way for her to express her joy at the upcoming birth.

As she tells Elizabeth the good news, she’s also processing what it means to her people, culturally, to know a savior will be born.

Sermon Transcript

God looks with favor on the lowly servant. God brings the powerful down from their thrones. Filled the hungry with good things.

And God, most importantly, is fulfilling the promises made to Abraham.

God doesn't break promises.

That feels like something worth singing about.

A modern question we sang a few minutes ago, "Mary did you know?"

Judging from her sung response, the answer is yes, this child that she's delivered, will soon deliver you. ... but could she have even fathomed what that actually meant?

I think not.

Mary's song with Elizabeth isn't an empty love song filled with fake platitudes, this is a statement of faith.

It's the first Christmas carol.

What about you? What Christmas carols do you know by heart? What songs do YOU love to sing? Maybe we're singing it today, hopefully we are on Tuesday.

On Wednesday, a bunch of us went over to sing Christmas carols with—not to—the residents at the Birchwood Arbors (**SLIDE of Christmas carolers**, show both pictures).

These aren't just beloved songs that we sang together.

Christmas carols, like Mary's song, proclaim the story of our faith.

Each of us, when we catch ourselves humming Hark the Herald Angels Sing or O Little Town of Bethlehem are sharing more than holiday cheer.

We are preaching. We are sharing the good news. Do you like to sing Christmas carols? Then you are doing holy work—you are a messenger of God.

Each of these songs is a mini sermon if you listen to the words.

"Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled"—do you realize what that means??? No longer do we, as humans, have to feel the burden of our sin. We don't have to try to prove to God that we are worthy, that we have sacrificed enough, that we've done enough.

Sermon Transcript

Through the birth of Christ, we are reconciled with God. Alleluia!!!

“The Hopes and Fears of all the years... are met in thee tonight”—the birth of Jesus is an answer to prayer, he is the one we’ve been waiting for all of these years.

And my favorite, Joy to the World.

The LORD has come... let every heart, prepare a room for him! Think about THAT double meaning—who doesn’t have a room? Mary and Joseph—so we are invited to prepare him, the baby Jesus, a room.

Literally.

But also, through his birth, we open our hearts. We prepare him room, right here! We make space for Christ. We sing it by heart—it’s part of us, it’s part our story, through song.

This is the last Sunday before Christmas—we will gather again in two days for Christmas Eve worship, perhaps you’ll join us here or you’ll be on a journey to other lands with other loved ones.

Why?

Because Christmas is about more than the presents and winter break. Christmas is gathering to hear the story—a story that you know by heart, or that you’re starting to learn.

This story is meant to be shared. Because this story changes lives. It heals broken hearts. It cares deeply for the world around it. It’s a story that guides us when all seems lost.

Do you hear what I hear? This manger, filled with **this Child, this child, sleeping through the night will bring us goodness and light**. Holy Cow, that’s GREAT NEWS!!!

Thank God for the gift of our voices to proclaim the story with boldness.

Go tell it on the Mountain—or the plains of Minnesota and the streets of Forest Lake—over the hills and everywhere.

Come Tuesday, the news we will declare: **That Jesus Christ is born**. Amen.