

**Singing All the Way**  
Isaiah 35 & Luke 1:46b-50

*Third Sunday of Advent/ 15<sup>th</sup> December 2019*

The sounds of Advent and Christmas fill our worship this morning. Today, countless churches are having similar services of music, lessons and carols, cantatas, musical pageants. Last weekend and this weekend throughout Baltimore, and DC, and the suburbs there have been many performances of Handel's *Messiah* (there's a performance this afternoon here in Catonsville). It is fitting that music fills this space and our souls in this season of active waiting and holy joy. The Third Sunday of Advent is known as *Gaudete*, Latin for "Rejoice." The focus is on the reasons for Mary's joy.

There's a deep, intimate connection between the coming of God's salvation, the experience of salvation and redemption, and the need to express it all with music, especially song. Consider *A Christmas Carol*, the story of Scrooge's redemption, which is serious, but also lyrical; it's full of light and joy. Dickens didn't call it *A Christmas Story*, but a *Carol*. It's meant to sing and cause us to sing. The English writer and lay theologian G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936), writing in 1906, said of Dickens' ghost story, "The story sings from end to end like a happy man going home..."<sup>1</sup>

We know the power of music to touch us deeply. Often, only music can access the depths of the soul, a soul that stirs and turns and dances with joy, moved to song by the news of the angels, "To you is born...a savior, the Messiah, the Lord" (Lk. 2:11). And the chorus of heaven sang, "Glory—Glory! Glory! Glory!—to God in the highest!" (Lk. 2:14).

Centuries ago, the prophet Isaiah spoke about a highway, a "Holy Way" that will stretch from the exile and bondage of Babylon through the wilderness back home to Zion. A super highway will carry God's people to salvation. "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness" (Is. 35:10).

When Mary learned from Gabriel that she will carry God's salvation into the world, that she will become the "way," conveying salvation into the world, she burst into a song of praise and protest. *Magnificat!* "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Lk 1:47). Mary sings because God has decided to act decisively on behalf of the powerless, lifting up the lowly, filling the hungry with good things, tearing the mighty from their thrones.

In the carol "Canticle of the Turning" (which we will sing shortly), set to an Irish folk tune, Rory Cooney beautifully weds melody and the message of Mary's song. Cooney shares that this notion of "turning" refers to the revolutionary message of Jesus, as well as a call to turn or "repent" *metanoia*, meaning a complete change of self, of mind, of heart. It's about turning around and turning away from the gods of this world, the Caesars who think they are in power, and walk in another direction. "So the "revolution" is both interior (a change of heart/self) and corporate and visible (a new way of living together). It is, in fact, against the prevailing set of values in society, a revolution. "But I want to emphasize," Cooney says, "that it is a peaceful

revolution, a revolution of action, persuasion, and justice.” In the spirit of Miriam of Egypt, Hannah, and Mary of Nazareth, “‘Canticle of the Turning’ invites us to sing around the fire in the darkness while we await the new world’s dawn.”<sup>2</sup>

And the contemporary Roman Catholic composer Marty Haugen captures a similar sentiment in his Advent carol, “Awake! Awake, and Greet the New Morn.” The birth of Christ is the birth of a new dawn which causes the world to sing. In fact, Haugen imagines—I love this!—Christ comes to us singing all the way, “To us, to all in sorrow and fear, Emmanuel comes asinging; his humble song is quiet and near, yet fills the earth with its singing; music to heal the broken soul and hymns of lovingkindness. The thunder of his anthems rolls to shatter all hatred and violence. ...Then shall the mute break forth in song, the lame shall leap in wonder, the weak be raised above the strong, and weapons be broken asunder.”<sup>3</sup> May it be so.

And so, no more words. Let us sing!

Following the sermon we sang “Canticle of the Turning.” A recording with text may be found [here](#).

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<sup>1</sup> G. K. Chesterton, (1874-1936), *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1906), 173.

<sup>2</sup> Rory Cooney commenting on the writing of “Canticle of the Turning.”  
<http://rorycooney.blogspot.com/2014/08/songstories-36-canticle-of-turning-gia.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Text and Music by Marty Haugen, GIA Publications, 1983, *Glory to God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), hymn #107.