

Luke 1:26–56
Advent I midweek
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
December 6, 2023

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

Music is the most powerful medium for conveying a message. If you can set words to music, you'll remember those words far more readily than if you just memorize a text in a monotone sort of way. That's why you can remember jingles from commercials you saw as a child, or the opening song of your favorite t.v. show, or show tunes from different musicals. You see the power of music especially as Christmas approaches. Once you start hearing Christmas music, it's like you're transported somewhere else, to a different state of being. For those with positive memories of Christmas this can be a wonderful experience. For those who have suffered trauma around Christmas time, this can be horrible. But whether for good or bad, nobody can deny the power of both secular and Christian Christmas music. Music is the most powerful medium for conveying a message. Advertisers, politicians, and entertainers know this and they use it to their advantage.

The Church knows this as well. Music is the most powerful medium for conveying a message. That's why we put texts and paraphrases of Scripture to music to sing at home, as a congregation, or in the choir. When biblical truths are tied to music, they sink into your mind and your heart more easily and they stay there longer. Many pastors experience this when visiting elderly shut-ins with dementia or Alzheimer's. These people might not be able to remember the name of their spouse or the names of their children, or even their own name; what year it is, or anything really. And yet they remember songs from their childhood, their favorite hymns, and the liturgy. Music has the power to plant God's Word into your soul and keep it there. That's why

good and appropriate church music, hymnody, and the liturgy are so vital for the Christian. There's no vehicle more powerful for conveying the Gospel.

For our midweek Advent services this year, we're going to look at some Christmas carols. These are not the carols you would typically hear on the radio, or even associate with Christmas, but these are some of the oldest carols the church has—Christmas carols that *are* God's Word and have been set to music throughout the ages. You know the Nativity account from the Gospel of Luke. That's the one you hear on Christmas Eve and in "A Charlie Brown Christmas." It's a famous piece of literature in nearly every language it's been translated into. "And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed." Luke 2 is the Christmas story. For our midweek Advent services, we'll be looking at the canticles from the Gospel of Luke leading up to and following the Christmas story, the song of Mary, the Song of Zechariah, the song of the angels, and the song of Simeon. All these hymns of Scripture are sung by major characters of the Christmas story in Luke 1 and 2, almost like putting on a Christmas pageant. This year, we'll meditate on this early Christmas music as we prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of Christ.

The first hymn that shows up in the Gospel according to St. Luke is the Magnificat, or the song of Mary. This canticle is sung at every Vespers service, so you'll be hearing it each Wednesday night for the next few weeks. You know the story well. The Angel Gabriel was sent to the Virgin Mary, who was engaged to Joseph. "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" In Latin, that greeting is "Ave, Maria!" The Angel Gabriel told Mary that she, though a virgin, would have a son and call his name Jesus. The Holy Spirit would come upon her and the power of the Most High would overshadow her, so that the child to be born would be called holy—the Son of God.

At that same visitation, the Angel Gabriel also told Mary that her relative Elizabeth, otherwise barren, had conceived a son in her old age. “For nothing will be impossible with God.” The creator and preserver of all things is able to open and close wombs, to kill and make alive, to create and destroy. God has the power to work miracles and He does that for Elizabeth by opening her womb, and for Mary by giving her a child by the Holy Spirit, apart from any relations with a man. Mary went right away to visit her relative Elizabeth. At the moment Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, baby John the Baptist leaped in her womb. He knew He was in the presence of the living God, who is Jesus in the womb of His mother, Mary. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and said to Mary: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb” Mary was blessed not just because of the baby in her womb, but because of who that baby is: the Son of Mary is also the Son of God. Mary was blessed because she believed there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the LORD. All who listen to God’s Word and take it to heart are blessed.

Mary then sang the song we are contemplating this evening, the Magnificat. “My soul magnifies the Lord.” In Latin, the first word is “magnificat,” which means “magnifies.” “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has looked on the humble estate of His servant.” Mary praises God because He is everything and she is nothing. In comparison to God we are nothing. God is great and magnificent beyond anything you could ever imagine. The heavens of heavens cannot contain Him. He is before all things, eternal, without beginning or end. In comparison to that, you are nothing, a little speck of dust on a little speck of dust within a cloud of dust in a universe that is mostly a great void. You are here for a moment and then gone like a mist. He is at all times and places.

And yet the LORD humbled Himself by becoming a man. There's no way to adequately describe this holy mystery of our faith. The incarnation brings together such huge disparities our mind can hardly begin to grasp it. It's like thinking of what is infinitely large and what is infinitely small and then trying to bring them together. God created the entire universe, bigger than you could imagine, and then He entered that universe as a tiny embryo, as a child in Mary's womb, as a little boy, born in a stable and laid in a manger, as a human being just like you, prone to suffering, shame, and death. That's what we're looking forward to celebrating at Christmas. God became man to suffer and die for your sin and for the sin of the whole world, and then to rise again from the dead to live and reign forever. And you, as small and insignificant as you are, will be there with Him. This is the song of our salvation, passed on from generation to generation by those who fear the LORD. It was promised to our fathers and it is passed on to our children. In His mercy, God humbles Himself to come and save little old you. This is truly magnificent! Beyond expression!

The LORD scatters the proud in the imaginations of their hearts. He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate. He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich He has sent empty away. "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you" (James 4:10). Draw near to God with an accurate understanding of who He is in all His power and glory. Draw near to God with an accurate understanding of who you are in your weakness and sin. Draw near to God with the true knowledge that He humbled Himself that you might be exalted. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you as He always has and still does, at Christmas and at all times. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.