

Let There Be Love

Luke 1:39-55

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Let There Be Light Sermon Series

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Church



C. S. Lewis is perhaps best known for the *Chronicles of Narnia*. In one of the first books of the series, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, readers are introduced to Aslan, a giant lion. “I’d thought I was meeting a man,” one of the characters say. “Is he—is he safe? I should feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.”

“Safe?” comes the reply. “Who ever said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good.”

It doesn’t take long to realize that the *Chronicles of Narnia* are, like the rest of his writing, deeply theological. One of his lesser-known books is *Four Loves*, in which Lewis explores the types of love he believes humans to be capable of.

“Friendship,” he says, “is born at the moment when one [person] says to another, “‘What! You, too! I thought I was the only one...’ What draws people to be friends is that they see the same truth. And, instantly, they stand together.”

“In those days, Mary set out and went with haste,” to visit Elizabeth. Not because she needed to confirm what the angel told her. She already knew it was true. But because, in the midst of the most impossible moments, “What! You, too!” are the holy words our hearts long to hear. Mary and Elizabeth find community and connection in one another, things that ought never be undervalued or overlooked, especially because it is from this community and connection that the Magnificat rises.

Luke’s gospel goes out of its way to let us know the setting behind the song. This song comes from a teenager, a know-nothing girl from a know-nothing town, who will give birth far away from home, in the corner of a stable, and she will lay her baby in a feeding trough, because there is nothing more suitable to be found. No one was willing to make a real place, or real space, for them.

This song comes from that virgin teenager after she visits a barren old woman, both of whom are pregnant, not inexplicably pregnant, but pregnant with the most absurd explanations possible.

“My soul magnifies the Lord,” Mary sings, “And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.” The Magnificat comes from a lowly place, but it is a powerful song.

Back in the 1500s, Martin Luther and his colleagues translated the Bible from Latin, the language of church officials. They translated it into German, the language of their people. The Word of God is for everyone, they believed and so everyone should be able to read it themselves. But when it came to the Magnificat—for awhile, they left that bit in Latin, untranslated. History books tell us it is because the German princes who supported Luther’s struggle with the Roman Church took a rather dim view of the mighty being brought down from their thrones.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor and theologian who was executed by the Nazis called the Magnificat “the most passionate, the wildest, one might even say the most revolutionary hymn ever sung.” Some countries, including India, Guatemala, and Argentina, have, at different times, including as recently as the 1980s, banned the words from being recited in public, including in worship, because of how much it riled up their citizens into believing a different, better, way of life was possible.

The Magnificat is a powerful song. Recently, though, I can’t help but wonder if it was also a beloved lullaby.

Because the reason people have long been so affected by the Magnificat is because whether they are inspired by it or afraid of it, they understand that its power lays in the fact that its words are more than words. They are a promise that no one is ever alone, that no one will ever be alone.

And this includes the rich and well-fed, and those who sit on thrones. For you see, Mary doesn’t sing of inherently bad things for them. She sings of a great equaling. If you are already full, you don’t need more food. If you are high and lofty, bringing you down a bit while lifting up the lowly—that’s not punishing anyone. It’s putting everyone on the same level. It’s a way of ensuring that everyone is welcome, and that everyone is provided for. That’s why the Magnificat really is good news for everyone. Which is why I can only assume it was a wonderful lullaby.

A study published in 2013 by Dr. Jeffery Perlman at New York Presbyterian Hospital, found that music therapy helps prematurely delivered infants eat more and sleep better. Further studies determined that lullabies sung live, in person, influence cardiac and respiratory function, and a statistically significant number of newborns who receive music therapy leave the hospital sooner. Singing to them, they also suggest, has a restorative effect on the mother. Lullabies, it seems, point us towards life in some very real ways.

My friend Jessica, who loves singing, was sung to sleep each night by a lullaby her mother, Joanne, made up just for her. ¹

Jessica says, “She sang it to me even when I was older. Now,” she says, “I sing it to my son, so he remembers the same lesson.”

“You’re growing so quickly,
You’re learning so fast,
Soon all this rocking will be in the past
But meantime I’ll snuggle
You cuddle and coo
And I’ll whisper so softly
How much I love you.”

When life is challenging or heartbreaking or just complicated, Jessica says, she remembers the song and what it promised since long before she even knew what it meant: that she is loved. The Magnificat tells us the same.

The Scripture tells us that Joseph, Jesus’ father, was a carpenter. And, almost always, boys grew up apprenticing with their fathers. Sons of fisherman became fishermen. Sons of scribes became scribes.

¹ The Rev. Jessica Tate, director of NEXT Church (and former David H. C. Read Scholar!) and her mother, Joanne Tate.

The same thing still happens today, though with a little more flexibility. Children of lawyers grow up to be lawyers. Way too many pastor's kids end up as pastors themselves. Daughters of doctors grow up to be doctors. By all rights, Jesus probably should have been a carpenter. Except no where in scripture does he ever hold a hammer or drive a nail; he is much more likely to hold a hand or drive demons away. He cares for the abandoned. He feeds the hungry. He warns the wealthy. He challenges the status quo. He teaches people about the kingdom of God. And maybe, in doing all of that, he's not entirely safe—after all, he'll end up crucified—he may not be safe, but he is good. And he tells everyone the good news they are longing to hear.

Jesus didn't get any of that from his carpenter father. He got all that from his momma, Mary, who sang a lullaby while he was still in the womb.

But maybe, just maybe, she kept singing it to him. And maybe, just maybe, those words settled deeply into that little one nestled sweetly in her arms. Maybe those words were the ones that rang out in his ears as he grew and as he began his ministry. Yes, surely, Jesus was the son of God, but he was also the son of Mary, singer of the Magnificat. And the bible goes to great length to tell us that Mary knew quite a bit about her son.

Remember the wedding feast in Cana? They run out of wine, and Mary informs the servants her son will take care of it. "Mom, stop," I imagine Jesus hissing. "It's too soon."

"Do whatever he tells you," she tells the chief steward. Of course, she knew what he was capable of. She had been singing it to him before he ever even entered this world.

A few weeks ago, I got to see *Dear Evan Hansen*, the story of a teenage boy who struggles with social anxiety. He so yearns to make a connection with his classmates that in the wake of a student's suicide he makes up a story and finds himself in the middle of newfound friends and family. As time goes on, he finds himself drawn deeper and deeper into the lie. Eventually, he is forced to make a decision—will he give himself entirely to his tall tale, or will he tell the truth and risk losing everything he always wanted?

I won't ruin the ending for you. But halfway through the show, before everything comes to a head, at a point when nearly every character finds themselves feeling confused and alone, the song "You Will Be Found" bursts forth as, well, if I understand the tests of them both, it bursts forth as a modern-day Magnificat.

The cast sings:

Have you ever felt like nobody was there?
Have you ever felt forgotten in the middle of nowhere?
Have you ever felt like you could disappear?
Like you could fall and no one would hear?
Someone will come running to take you home.

Even when the dark comes crashing through
When you need someone to carry you
And when you're broken on the ground
You will be found.

So let the sun come streaming in
'Cause you'll reach up and you'll rise again
If you just look around
You will be found.

The words are all different, of course, but the message, it seems to me, is largely the same.

Even when it seems the least likely, even when the entire world has left you on your own, you will be found. That was, and is, the story of Jesus, the story Mary sang because she knew it was coming.

Because Jesus will search for the lost sheep, and Jesus will tell a story about finding a lost coin, and he will reassure us that a lost son, a prodigal son, would be welcome home again, and that even the older brother, lost in his own way, would be welcome at the party as well. What's more, Jesus will find lost children at the border, and reunite them with their parents. He will find women and girls who were sold into slavery and haven't seen their families in years. He will find the husband lost in grief, missing his wife and the life they shared, and point him toward a new way of being in the world. And Jesus will find the exhausted workers, lost in paperwork and deadlines and stress, and remind them that they are worth so much more than that. Because there is no one so lost that Jesus can't find them. You can never be so lost that Jesus can't find you.

His mercy is for those who fear him. He has shown strength with his arm; *Even when the dark comes crashing through; When you need someone to carry you.* He has brought down the powerful and lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry and sent the rich away empty.

And when you're broken on the ground; You will be found. He has helped his servant, because he is full of mercy, and mercy always keeps its promise. *So let the sun come streaming in; 'Cause you'll reach up and you'll rise again; If you just look around; You will be found.*

No matter what your station in life—how mighty or lost and lowly... No matter what you have or what you don't... No matter how full your calendar or how empty your heart... Jesus Christ, the Light of the World; Jesus Christ, the baby born in the manger, is coming to make all things new. He will feed the hungry. He will welcome the lonely. He will teach the wealthy. He will open the doors to all people, so that everyone, absolutely everyone, knows the truth of Christmas: You will be found.

And that is news that is so good, it simply must be sung.