

A SONG IN THE NIGHT
Elizabeth, Mary, Zechariah
December 12, 2017

1 Star Slide

We've all attended or watched musicals?
Name me one.

Musicals are great.
Something happens, and then one of the characters breaks out into song from
a deep well of emotion.
We readily suspend belief (as if people do that in real life)
because of we're drawn by the incredible power of song.

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In real life we have our own way of bursting forth in song.

I remember when I got pregnant.
I was doing my happy dance and singing my song.
I wanted to share the news.
Had I had Facebook back in the day,
I would have been posting with exclamation points.

And then childbirth happened.
And then sleepless night happened.
And then the child turned 2.
And then the agony of watching children struggle in life and sometimes fail.

You got into the school you really wanted.
And then homework happened.

You got the new job you wanted.
And then you got to know the new boss.

Do we sing with as much gusto?
Or have we stopped singing altogether?

This morning we're going to attend a Broadway musical,
directed by God the Father,
and recorded by Luke the gospel writer.

Something happens, and the character is the story burst forth in song from
a deep well of emotion!
Now Luke recorded it in prose – but like the Psalms –
the lyrical words demand a melody!

In each case, a divine harmonic chord is heard unexpectedly
in the midst of the discordant world.

Like this . . .

Let's say Nico is playing around at the piano, pretending to be Willie.
I'd expect to hear this that's dissonance – discordant
But what if I suddenly heard this?

Chord

Do you think I'd stop what I was doing and go over to see what's up?

That's what happens to our characters.

They're going about their business in the noisy discordant world,
when they hear a divine harmonic chord that fills their soul with awe,
and they burst forth in song.

We're going to listen to their songs, but then we're going to ask . . .
How did their joyful song play out in real time?

And then we're going to ask the biggest question of all. . .

Had they *known* how their joyful song was going to turn out,
Would they have sung as heartily?
Would they have sung at all?
Did they stop singing?

And of course, the real question behind the question is,
How about you and me?

Let's go to the book.

Elizabeth and Mary

The Acevado family read a story this morning about Elizabeth,
who was pregnant with John the Baptist,
and about Mary, who was pregnant with Jesus.

Elizabeth, upon hearing the divine harmonic chord of the Holy Spirit
bursts forth in song,

Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!

The baby John in her womb hears the divine harmonic chord of the unborn Jesus,
and does his happy dance right in the womb.

And Mary, upon hearing the divine harmonic chord sung by Elizabeth,
bursts forth into her own song.

You can hear the orchestra's crescendo as Mary bursts into song . . .

2 A famous song that has come to be known as the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-56)

“My soul glorifies the Lord

and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.

3 His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.

He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.

4 He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors.”

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Mary anticipates that FNALLY there will be relief from the oppressive domination of Rome.

Now, were this on Broadway, I can just hear Mary and Elizabeth, each having their song,
launching into a duet as their two songs weaving together
Can't you hear it – wonderful stuff!

Zechariah

But then there's another character in Luke's story who also hears
that unexpected divine melodic chord in the discordant world.
His name is Zechariah, an elderly priest and husband of Elizabeth.

Before Elizabeth became pregnant with John, they were childless and quite elderly,
despite their most earnest – and *unanswered* – prayers.

So one day Zechariah is going about his business, performing his priestly work,
when the angel Gabriel appears playing a divine melodic chord.

Luke 1:14-17

“Don't be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard.
Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John.
He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth,
for he will be great in the sight of the Lord.

Wow! That's really good news!

We expect Zechariah, upon hearing this divine harmonic chord,
to burst forth in song!

But there's no song.

Instead . . . an expression of cynicism.

“How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.”

I've lived with the reality of unanswered prayer too long.

I stopped believing in fairy tale endings a long time ago.

I've accepted reality square in the face and adjusted all my expectations accordingly.

To him the divine melodic chord of the angel Gabriel was just more noise.

But the angel Gabriel, seems taken aback that Zechariah's cynicism.

The angel said to him, “I am Gabriel.

I stand in the presence of God,

and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news.

And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens,

because you did not believe my words,

which will come true at their appointed time.” Luke 1:19-20

Zechariah's cynicism, which kept him from singing,
would now keep him from speaking.

BUT – and this is SOO much like God.
The punishment would also be the cure.

What immediately came to my mind was our brother Justin.
He's in prison for a crime he committed.
So, yes, it's his punishment.

But . . . it is also his cure.

Where else could he have the time to let the transforming power of God
change him into a man of peace.

Where else could he get an education in Bible and theology from Princeton Seminary,
with all the time in the world to study and pray,
at the tax payer's expense?

So it was for Zechariah.

His enforced silence was a punishment for cynicism, but it also became his teacher.

In the silence that he had time to reflect,
and apparently time to learn to sing!

When the child was born,

the family members were disagreeing about what to name the child.

Zechariah motioned for a piece of paper and wrote:

His name is John!

Immediately his mouth was opened

and his tongue set free

and NOW he burst into the song he'd been rehearsing in his mind for 9 months . . .

6

**"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come to his people and redeemed them.**

**He has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David**

...

**And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,
to give his people the knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins,
because of the tender mercy of our God.**

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And so the characters in our musical Elizabeth, Mary and Zechariah
sang their exuberant songs of joy --

.....And then life happened.

Would Elizabeth, Zechariah and Mary have sung as jubilantly had they known
how the next 30 years would play out?

Did Elizabeth and Zechariah expect his son John to be a wild man who
lived in the wilderness and dined on honey and locust?

Did they expect their son to be beheaded
by a narcissistic ruler and his vindictive wife?

Would they have sung so heartily had they known?

How about you?

If you had known how challenging raising that child would be . . .

If you had known how difficult your marriage would be

If you had known how strenuous that school or job would be . . .

Would you still have burst into song so heartily?

How about Mary?

Certainly, while singing her triumphant Magnificat she didn't anticipate what Simeon
would prophesy.

“This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel ...
And a sword will pierce your own soul too.

Certainly, she didn't anticipate her own frustration with her son's lack of initiative
as she tries to prompt him to show his stuff at the marriage of Cana.

Certainly, she didn't anticipate going to Jesus with his brothers to bring him home
because he seemed out of his mind,
and wasn't measuring up to her Messianic expectations.

Certainly, she did expect to see him die as a criminal on a cross.

Even after the emotional roller coaster ride of the resurrection,
she watched in her waning years, one disciple after another be martyred for their faith.

Would she have sung so heartily had she known?
Would she still be singing?

Having faced the harsh realities of life, are *you* still singing?
Or like the Israelites in Babylon,
Have you hung up your harps on the willow tree,
refusing to sing the songs of Zion anymore.

May I introduce you this morning to Vedran Smailovic,
The cellist of Sarajevo, Adagio: <https://youtu.be/XMbvcp480Y4>
My prayer is that in knowing him,
we will understand why we **MUST** keep singing.

The capital city of Sarajevo underwent the longest siege of a capital city in modern warfare,
from 1992 to 1996.

Smailovic watched with horror and grief as nearly 14,000 people were killed
and over 100,000 homes and buildings were damaged or destroyed.

He was not a doctor, or politician or soldier.
by many standards, he was essentially *powerless* to address the devastation.
Smailovic was a musician,
an accomplished cellist with the Sarajevo Philharmonic Orchestra.

In the wake of the bombing,
Smailovic did the one thing he knew how to do well.
He took his cello to the most devastated sites in the city and began playing

For 22 straight days, the cellist played the same song,
the hauntingly melancholy Adagio in G Minor by Tomaso Albinoni

VIDEO and return to Blank Slide

His music captured both lament and pain, but also hope
His song embodied a bold confrontation to the powers of evil,
proclaiming that no evil act of violence
could thwart the spirit of people determined to live in freedom.

So do I think that Elizabeth, Zechariah and Mary would have kept singing?
My answer is YES.
Are they stills singing?
A DEFINITE YES?

And I ask,
Isn't this the holy calling of the saints of God?
Yes.
Isn't this the holy calling of the church of Jesus Christ?
A DEFINITE YES!

Like the cellist, we have no rightful claim to political power or military might.
The church is neither politician nor soldier,
But the church has the power of a song in the night.
We have the power of melodic defiance.
Our task is neither to fight nor become cynical when
faced with the discordant realities of life,
but to sing.

WT comes up -- Closing

So I ask you today, "Have you stopped singing?"
Church, "Have we stopped singing?"

I love our closing song.
It says, no matter what happens,
Let me be found singing when the evening comes.

When it doesn't make sense, keep singing
When the world around you is falling apart, keep singing.
When darkness seems to have prevailed, keep singing.

It is the song in the night that changes the world.

STAND

I want you to imagine that the Father has stepped up to the podium with baton in hand.
Will you sing?