

Homily: Singing a Love Song

Do you like to sing?

Most of us do. We may not sing solos or in a church choir. We may not even sing in public. We may sing in the shower. Sometimes we sing along to songs on the radio, particularly when we're in our car and no one can hear us (though it's fun to watch someone singing in their car!)

I love hearing my wife sing around the house. It usually happens when she's in another room. She sings popular hymns. I love it because when she is singing I know one thing: she's happy. And she's not the only one: I catch myself singing or whistling at times when life is good. I like to sing when I feel like I'm doing what God wants me to do. Do you ever feel that way?

So it's no surprise that singing features prominently in the Christmas story and the lives of those who were righteous and faithful. The Hebrew word we translate as psalm means song. David played stringed instruments and sang, so most the psalms were arranged to be sung with an accompaniment. You can find musical arrangements of the psalms in the back of the hymnal.

The Scripture passages for Christmas Day all feature songs.

Isaiah 52:7-10 tells us, *“Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return of the LORD to Zion. Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem.”* The people who have been in exile, separated from the promised land, receive good news: they're saved and can return home. The prophet knows they'll be filled with joy and they'll be singing. The people make up new songs with lyrics filled with hope because they're delivered from captivity and exile. After a long time away, they can return home in peace. These are great Bible songs sung by every day people like you and me.

Centuries earlier, David invited us to sing. For example, in Psalm 98, he writes, *“O sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things. The LORD ... has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. ... Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth;*

break forth into joyous song and sing praises. Sing praises to the LORD...with the lyre and the sound of melody. With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD. ...let the hills sing together for joy at the presence of the LORD, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.” If that isn't an ode to joy, I don't know what one is!

The writer of Hebrews tells us the source of our joy: Jesus Christ. Born in a manger in Bethlehem, outcast and hunted, he is the King of Kings, the Prince of Peace, our mighty Counselor. Jesus is our Savior, who saves us from sin and death, filling us with peace. Jesus is the Messiah, the one who came to fulfill all of God's promises, delivering his people. And God keeps promises. We have proof in Jesus. That's good news worth singing from the rooftops!

The angel chorus sang God's good news to the shepherds outside Bethlehem, “*Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace and good will to all*” (Luke 2:14, my paraphrase). Can you imagine the sound of that heavenly chorus? No? Guess what? We all get to be part of that chorus on earth every time we sing a song that praises God.

What should we sing? The words of Paul's letter to the church at Colossi tell us, “*with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him*” (Colossians 3:16-17). So sing those Christmas carols, popular Christian songs and the olden, golden hymns you grew up with. Sing whatever you like, anyway you like. Psalm 98 tells us to sing with the lyre, trumpet and horn. It also tells us nature sings to the Lord – hills, mountains, oceans and rivers all join in the chorus of praise. We're to sing with grateful hearts, with a deep joy in knowing God cares for us. So it's not about the lyrics or how well we sing. It's about our attitude when we sing. And, best of all, we get to make up new songs!

What is a new song? When do composers write new songs? When new things happen! New songs are written every day in response to the things we experience in life – love, sadness, anger; all our human emotions. But we have another opportunity. God did something new

when Jesus was born. God began singing a new song to us. The miracle of Christmas is so radical that it keeps shaking us up 2,000 years later. And it continues transforming the world each and every day. God is alive, with us and working in the world. I experienced God's presence and fell in love when I was born again. If you believe Jesus is your Lord and Savior, you did too. That's worth singing about, isn't it?

Who do we sing to? We're singing to God. We're called to join the divine, angelic chorus by inviting Jesus to come into our life. As the Holy Spirit works in, with and through us, we contribute a verse to the divine love song all of creation sings to the Creator. It doesn't matter whether you can carry a tune or not. All that matters is that you sing from your heart. Sing a love song to God. (Guys, it doesn't have to be mushy. God loves a good men's chorus as much as he loves the ladies' sweet songs). Sing a new song of thanks for all God has given you – life, family, faith and all good things in your life. Sing a new song giving thanks for the good news of Christmas.

Will you join the heavenly chorus? Auditions are open. All you need is faith, a belief that Jesus is the Son of God sent to save you and forgive you for your sins. Sing a song of longing, telling God how much you want to turn to back and rely on God's loving mercy. Too hard? Too shy? Not sure how to start? Try this: start quietly, just like you're singing a lullaby to a baby ... in a manger. God is listening. God will hear you. And you will sing a new song, a song of God's love. If you want to experience God's love and join the heavenly chorus, sing with me... *"I Love You, Lord"*

I love you, Lord
And I lift my voice
To worship You
Oh, my soul, rejoice!

Take joy my King
In what You hear
Let it be a sweet, sweet sound
In Your ear.

I pray your heart is filled with a new love song this Christmas. Amen.

Isaiah 52:7-10 (NRSV)

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.” Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return of the LORD to Zion. Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

Psalm 98 (NRSV)

O sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things. His right hand and his holy arm have gotten him victory. The LORD has made known his victory; he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations. He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises. Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody. With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD.

Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who live in it. Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy at the presence of the LORD, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.

Hebrews 1:1-4 (NRSV)

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.