

From the Pastor: Mary's Magnificat ...



We sing it as part of the Vesper service: "My soul proclaims your greatness, O God, and my spirit rejoices in you..." Arden W. Mead suggests that Mary's Magnificat is the world's oldest Christmas carol. It predates the angels' Gloria in Excelsis Deo by a good six months, and the earliest non-biblical carol, Of the Father's Love Begotten, won't show up until around the year 400 A.D.. Along with the oldest carol in the world, we may have here also the oldest Christmas custom ever: The Virgin Mary went caroling!

Think about it for a moment. Look it up in Luke 1:

--Six months before, the angel Gabriel confronted Zechariah the priest with the glad announcement, "Your prayer is heard." The upshot of that confrontation was silence--Zechariah was left unable to speak (or sing).

--Now Gabriel has gone to Nazareth to confront Mary with the message of the Annunciation, concluding with the news that "your relative is also with child."

--Then the Magnificat (the song that begins with 'My soul proclaims'). The Virgin Mary went caroling, traveling some 60 miles (which would have been longer in those days and under those conditions) to visit Elizabeth.

--Mary's greeting brought response: "The baby leapt in my womb at your greeting," Elizabeth exulted--because Elizabeth knew.

And so, Mary remained with her aged cousin for three months. What did she do during that time? Did they go shopping? Were there baby showers? Did they have sewing bees? None of this is revealed to us. The only thing the Bible sees fit to say is that Mary went caroling.

She sang the message the angel had sung to her:

--"My spirit rejoices in God my Savior" corresponds to the angel's announcement that the baby's name would be precisely that, Jesus.

--"The Almighty has done great things for me" --of course, for Gabriel had said, "He shall be great."

--"And holy is his name." = "The child born of you will be called holy."

And she previewed the song of the angels yet to come:

--"Glory to God in the highest." (Another way of saying God is magnified)

--"And peace to God's people on earth."

Well, the main thrust of Mary's carol is that God is aware of us in our needs ... and in our sin ... and that God comes: to correct us when we get haughty or proud, and lift us up when we've been knocked down; to deflate us when we're overblown, and fill us when we're empty.

So...Go caroling this Christmas (with the Breakfast Club if you'd like). Or, if you don't sing, go visiting. Seek out someone who would be cheered by your showing up ... and show up! Go with a song in your heart. Perhaps, like Mary, you will receive as well as give. Perhaps the Holy Spirit will be at work in you (and the people you visit) as the Spirit once worked through the visit of Mary and Elizabeth.

In the midst of all you have to do, take time to share the joy with someone who may need it, for that is the oldest Christmas custom of all. The Virgin Mary went caroling.

Blessings and Joy!! *Pastor Karen*