



LIFESONG

THE MELODY OF YOUR HEART



REV. JASON J. NELSON
REV. MARK SORENSEN

L I F E S O N G

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FOREWORD

You are loved and pursued by a God who sings. Perhaps you haven't thought of God as a singer, but He does indeed serenade His people (Zeph. 3:17) and has given us, as His creation, the ability to sing as well. Song is the beautiful marriage of emotion and words, heart and mind. Songs allow us to respond to God in greater capacity than words alone muster up. Song is indeed a gift from our Maker.

In the Bible, choruses of individual praise play a crucial role in the Christmas narrative. While visiting her cousin Elizabeth, we find Mary, the mother of Jesus, singing her immediate praise to God for choosing her. There is Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, who at the circumcision of his son praises loudly with great worship towards a God who offers His people salvation and mercy. The heavenly angels all sing "Glory in the Highest" with the announcement of Glory and Peace to all mankind. And lastly Simeon, a devout Jew, when encountering the child Jesus, takes our Savior in his arms and sings words of blessing. All four respond in song to God's unveiling of the Messiah.

These are the original carols, and they allow us to ponder this question: Why are there so many songs in the Christmas story? Perhaps the revelation and the response of the Messiah, Jesus the Christ, requires more than words can satisfy. Perhaps the emotion and joy that soars in these songs give greater opportunity to express the Glory that was found in Jesus.

As we enter into this Christmas season, I would like to invite you to sing your own song to God. Yes, that's right; I want you to write your very own song of praise. What is your LifeSong? What melody rises up from your heart when you contemplate and enjoy the gift of the Messiah in your own life? May the God who sings grant you such an opportunity this Christmas season.

MARK SWAYZE

Director of Contemporary Worship,
The Woodlands UMC

ZECHARIAH

JASON J. NELSON



BEFORE WE START

I love everything about Christmas — the sights, smells and sounds of the season. And I've always been this way — as giddy as a child. I love decorating the tree, putting up lights and hanging stockings while belting out Johnny Mathis' rendition of "It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year." The smell of pine needles, hot apple cider and freshly baked gingerbread cookies makes me happy. Like many of you, I drink as many Starbucks peppermint mochas as I possibly can and play Christmas music in my house, in my car and at the office all the time. I even enjoy...shopping.

I also really enjoy watching my children unwrap their presents, but I especially love reading the story of Jesus' birth with them and then unpacking it from start to finish. This is what we are going to do together over the course of the next four sessions. And today, we're going to begin at the beginning. We're reaching back in history to a time when there was no Christmas and no talk of Advent, when there were no tinsel or lights or peppermint mochas, no stockings hung by the chimney with care and certainly no scent of freshly baked gingerbread cookies in the air. Today, we're going to step into the Gospel of Luke chapter one and enter "the time of Herod, king of Judea."



IN THE WORD | LUKE 1:5-20



VIDEO LESSON | View lesson one, *Unmuted*

- Nobody in this context was singing, “It’s the most wonderful time of the year...”
- When humanity least expects it, God picks up His divine pen once again.
- An angel can appear out of nowhere — out of thin air — and there’s still no guarantee that people will even listen... or believe!
- God has a plan for all of creation and God’s timing, in alignment with God’s plan, is perfect.
- This Christmas, tell everyone WHY “It’s the most wonderful time of the year!”

AFTERWORD

Describe a recent surprise that left you speechless. When was the last time you were surprised by God?

Compare and contrast Zechariah’s context and our context today. In what ways are our lives similar and different?

How do you envision the Good News impacting our culture today? What barriers may this Good News break down within our society?

Even though Zechariah experienced a miracle, why do you believe he defaulted to doubt?

What miracles have you experienced or seen? In spite of this miracle, have you experienced doubt? Explain.

The angel clearly described John’s mission and calling. In what ways might this mission be similar to your own calling? How might John’s ministry be played out in your life?

In a world that is seemingly chaotic, and in light of Free Will, how do you make sense of God’s sovereignty? How have you seen the sovereignty of God in action?

What really makes this “the most wonderful time of the year?”

OTHER WORDS

Sing spiritually. Have an eye to God in every word you sing.

— *John Wesley*

Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.

— *Desmond Tutu*

Sing a song of hope, sing along

God of heaven come down, heaven come down

Just to know that You are near is enough

God of heaven come down, heaven come down

— *Robbie Seay Band*

He who sings scares away his woes.

— *Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra*

WORDS OF HOPE

If possible, light the candle of hope and then sing or reflect on the hymn “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

O come, O come, Emmanuel

And ransom captive Israel

That mourns in lonely exile here

Until the Son of God appear

Rejoice, Rejoice!

Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!

YOUR WORDS

Take time to jot down a few notes, pen a prayer or write a song as an expression of what the Holy Spirit is saying to you.

[illegible]

[illegible]

MARY

MARK SORENSEN



BEFORE WE START

There is a scene in the movie *Evan Almighty* that never sits quite well with me. I think it's because there's a lot of truth in it. Maybe you've seen the movie? It's a modern day story of Noah's Ark. In it, God calls a congressman named Evan to build an ark in Washington, DC. Evan does everything he can to outrun God and get away from true obedience but to no avail. When he realizes that he can't escape God's greater plan, there's this moment where he looks at God and says the words, "This just wasn't in my plans." And what does God do? God laughs. In fact, he responds with, "I just love it when you people say that." Ever been there?

The truth is, God's Word is filled with stories of ordinary people confronted with circumstances and situations that seemed impossible to live out. But the beauty in each of these stories lies in the reality that what seems impossible to man comes to life again and again through the hands of a God that make the impossible possible.

This is Mary's story.



IN THE WORD | LUKE 1:26-38



VIDEO LESSON | View lesson two, *Knowing the Who in the Midst of the How*

- God majors in making the impossible possible.
- Mary's question..."How on earth is God going to bring this to light?"
- This angel gives Mary a beautiful word of assurance ... no word from God will ever fail.
- "For God so loved the world" that He stepped into humanity, putting on flesh, to show us His very nature and love so that we might now have salvation.

AFTERWORD

Reflect on a time in your life when you asked God, "How can this be?" and how God brought it to light. Explain.

Angels appear on several occasions in the biblical narrative surrounding the birth of Christ. Where do they appear and what is the common theme of their message? How was God working through these celestial beings and how might God be doing the same through us?

When God calls Mary, she postures herself as a faithful servant welcoming the fulfillment of God’s plan. What can we learn from Mary’s response to the angel? How might God be inviting you to partner with Him this season?

Compare and contrast Mary and Zechariah’s responses to the divine messages they received. How are they similar? Different?

How did God immediately provide for Mary in her moment of uncertainty? When we have found ourselves in uncertain times, how has God provided for us?

Share the ways God is drawing near to you in this season. How has God already made Himself apparent to you?

What is your ‘how’ this season? In what ways is God inviting you into a deeper level of trust in Him?

OTHER WORDS

God will look to every soul like its first love because He is its first love.

— C. S. Lewis

Love is a fruit in season at all times, and within reach of every hand.

— Saint Mother Teresa

Music is well said to be the speech of angels; in fact, nothing among the utterances allowed to man is felt to be so divine. It brings us near to the infinite.

— Thomas Carlyle (1795 - 1881)

Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.

— Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

WORDS OF LOVE

If possible, light the candle of love and then sing or reflect on the song “Silent Night”

*Silent night, holy night!
All is calm, all is bright.
Round yon Virgin, Mother and Child
Holy infant so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace*

*Silent night, holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight
Glories stream from heaven afar
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia
Christ the Savior is born!
Christ the Savior is born*

*Silent night, holy night!
Son of God love's pure light
Radiant beams from Thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace
Jesus Lord, at Thy birth
Jesus Lord, at Thy birth*

YOUR WORDS

Take time to jot down a few notes, pen a prayer or write a song as an expression of what the Holy Spirit is saying to you.

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[illegible]

JOSEPH

JASON J. NELSON



BEFORE WE START

As a kid growing up in Wisconsin, I didn't have to dream about having a white Christmas. We had a white Christmas almost every year. Snow was definitely a big part of my life. So much so that even as an adult I can hardly think of an outdoor nativity scene without picturing shepherds, sheep and snowmen standing around baby Jesus in the manger. I have so many great childhood Christmas memories that involve sledding and snow forts, snowballs and snowflakes, snow angels and snowmen. So, for me, snow and Christmas really do go hand in hand.

Now that I'm all grown up, snow isn't nearly as important to me. But the closer we get to December 25th, the more I still begin dreaming of a White Christmas. But I also remind myself that what's more important than having a White Christmas is having a Christ Christmas. See, far too often, thanks to the influence of popular culture, Jesus is given a back seat, sidelined, pushed to the periphery by presents and eggnog, candy canes and holly. As Christians, it's important for us to allow Jesus to be the center of our schedules, plans and celebrations — the center of our lives. This is what Joseph did. Once he was introduced to his adopted Son, Jesus became the center of his life.



IN THE WORD | MATTHEW 1:18-25



VIDEO LESSON | View lesson three, *Singing a New Tune*

- When Joseph holds his adopted son for the first time, I wonder then if he thought, “How in the world am I supposed to raise a king?”
- Who is this baby? He is Jesus, Messiah, Emmanuel.
- Messiah is the Jewish term Matthew uses to describe this baby as the royal Son of David and the rightful King of Israel.
- Emmanuel was born for us, to live for us and to die for us, to suffer for us and to suffer alongside us.
- This baby is exactly WHO humanity needed.
- We needed someone who could save us from our sins, rule us with His love and identify with us in times of suffering.

AFTERWORD

Evaluate and describe how you approach change.
When was it easy? When it was difficult?

Describe the most pressure-packed situation you’ve ever experienced. How did you respond? What coping mechanism(s) helped you persevere?

How would you feel if you were in Joseph’s shoes?

Describe a time when you experienced Jesus as Emmanuel.

What are the most perplexing components surrounding Jesus' conception? What are the social implications? Theological implications?

What can we learn from Joseph's response? What does this say about his character? His faith?

What are the amazingly beautiful ramifications of the three titles for this baby Matthew highlights (Jesus, Messiah, Emmanuel)?

OTHER WORDS

Come, thou long expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

— *Charles Wesley*

The only thing better than singing is more singing.

— *Ella Fitzgerald*

The total person sings not just the vocal chords.

— *Esther Broner*

Clap your hands, all peoples! Shout to God with loud songs of joy!

— *Psalms 47:1*

WORDS OF JOY

If possible, light the candle of joy and then sing or reflect on the song "Joy to the World"

Joy to the World, the Lord is come!

Let earth receive her King

Let every heart prepare Him room

And Heaven and nature sing

And Heaven and nature sing

And Heaven, and Heaven, and nature sing

YOUR WORDS

Take time to jot down a few notes, pen a prayer or write a song as an expression of what the Holy Spirit is saying to you.

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This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

SHEPHERDS

MARK SORENSEN



BEFORE WE START

There's a saying I heard many years ago that I love and have written in a journal of quotes that I always keep nearby. It's this: God doesn't call the qualified — He simply qualifies the called. How true is that? When you pick up and flip through the pages of Scripture, you encounter person after person that in no way, shape or form had the ability to do what God called them to do. Yet what made God's calling on their lives a possibility was that God was in the midst of the call.

God whispered the promises of the Messiah to Zechariah. He lovingly assured Mary that the Savior would come through her as she was highly favored, and God assured Joseph that they would not do this alone. And now? Light was upon the world. The Savior was to come. And who would usher in this Good News? Whom would God choose to announce that this proclamation of hope and promise found throughout the pages of the Old Testament had come to fruition?

It was the shepherds.



IN THE WORD | LUKE 2:8-20



VIDEO LESSON | View lesson four, *When Ordinary is Interrupted by the Extraordinary*

- God doesn't call the qualified. He qualifies the called.
- Light was upon the world. The Savior had come.
- Whom would God choose to announce this proclamation of hope and promise? The shepherds.
- Jesus Christ brings us into the presence of the One who is worthy.
- Because of this Good News, we're never the same again.

AFTERWORD

The shepherds were social and religious outcasts, never being allowed in the temple, invisible to those around them. Who in our culture today would be considered the shepherds?

In the Hebrew context everyone had to be ceremonially clean prior to entering the temple. How would it make you feel to be prohibited to enter your place of worship? In what ways has this newborn baby made us ceremonially clean/worthy to enter our place of worship?

The Good News draws us to the manger, but we don't stay there. Why is it important for us to take the Good News into the world?

How does the Good News change our lives? How are we never the same again? In what ways have you been changed by the Good News?

What is holding you back from singing the song of the Good News? What is keeping you from sharing it with others?

Reflect on a time you felt under-qualified for a task at hand. How can you now see God's work in helping you through it?

OTHER WORDS

Only in the darkness can you see the stars.

— *Martin Luther King, Jr.*

“I tell you,” He replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

— *Luke 19:40 (NIV)*

God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.

— *C. S. Lewis*

A great many people are trying to make peace, but that has already been done. God has not left it for us to do; all we have to do is enter into it.

— *Dwight L Moody*

Peace is more important than all justice: and peace was not made for the sake of justice, but justice for the sake of peace.

— *Martin Luther*

In the midst of the awesomeness, a touch comes, and you know it is the right hand of Jesus Christ. You know it is not the hand of restraint, correction, nor chastisement, but the right hand of the Everlasting Father. Whenever His hand is laid upon you, it gives inexpressible peace and comfort, and the sense that “underneath are the everlasting arms,” (Deuteronomy 33:27) full of support, provision, comfort and strength.

— *Oswald Chambers*

WORDS OF PEACE

If possible, light the candle of peace and then sing or reflect on the hymn “Hark! the Herald Angels Sing”

*Hark the herald angels sing
“Glory to the newborn King!
Peace on earth and mercy mild
God and sinners reconciled”
Joyful, all ye nations rise
Join the triumph of the skies
With the angelic host proclaim:
“Christ is born in Bethlehem”
Hark! The herald angels sing
“Glory to the newborn King!”*

*Christ by highest heav’n adored
Christ the everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold Him come
Offspring of a Virgin’s womb
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see
Hail the incarnate Deity
Pleased as man with man to dwell
Jesus, our Emmanuel
Hark! The herald angels sing
“Glory to the newborn King!”*

*Hail the heav’n-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Son of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings
Ris’n with healing in His wings
Mild He lays His glory by
Born that man no more may die
Born to raise the sons of earth
Born to give them second birth
Hark! The herald angels sing
“Glory to the newborn King!”*

YOUR WORDS

Take time to jot down a few notes, pen a prayer or write a song as an expression of what the Holy Spirit is saying to you.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Jason J. Nelson is The Loft Teaching Pastor and an ordained elder at The Woodlands United Methodist Church where he leads, teaches and preaches within a variety of contexts. Jason holds B.A., M.A., M.Ed., and M.Div. Degrees and is currently a Polycarp Community Fellow pursuing a Ph.D. in theology and writing within the fields of evangelism and missiology. Jason and his wife Kelsey have four children and reside in The Woodlands, Texas.



REV. MARK SORENSEN

Mark Sorensen is Lead Pastor of The Harvest, a contemporary worship community of The Woodlands United Methodist Church. He has his M.Div. from Asbury Theological Seminary and has served in the United Methodist Church for around two decades as a worship leader and then a pastor. He is the author of *When Will Jesus Be Enough?* Mark and his wife, Nycki, have two children and reside in The Woodlands, Texas. When Mark is not playing husband, dad and pastor, you will likely find him running trails, journaling or blogging. Follow his story at marksorensen.org.

NOTES



THE MELODY OF YOUR HEART

Examine four stories about people driven to song when God shook up their world for the better. Take a look at how Zechariah, Mary, Joseph and the shepherds reacted upon learning of God's plan to save humanity.

Taught by Rev. Jason J. Nelson and Rev. Mark Sorensen

