

*“Make the Blessings Known: Unabashed Joy!”*

John Ortberg explained, “We will not understand God until we understand this” and then he quoted G. K. Chesterson, **“God is the happiest being in the universe.”** Ortberg continued, “God knows sorrow. Jesus is remembered, among other things, as a ‘man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.’ But the sorrow of God, like the anger of God, is his temporary response to a fallen world. That sorrow will be banished forever from his heart on the day the world is set right. Joy is God’s basic character. God is the happiest being in the universe.” (The Life You’ve Always Wanted (Zondervan, 2002), John Ortberg)

Indeed, talking about Joy and Happiness, especially **“Unabashed Joy”** goes along with the very nature of our Divine Parent, with our celebration of the 300th Anniversary of the Christmas Carol, **“Joy to the World”**, and with our appropriate response to the blessings we have received from God! A good way to begin this examination of **“Unabashed Joy”** is to “Consider the story of one young man. Sick and puny as a baby, he remained frail and delicate all his days. Later, as a pastor, his maladies were so severe that he could not serve his growing congregation. Instead he wrote them letters filled with hope and good cheer. Even though his body was frail his spirit soared. He complained once about the harsh and uncouth hymn texts of his day. Someone challenged him to write a better one. He did. He wrote over 600 hymns, mostly hymns of praise. When his health finally broke in 1748 he left one of the most remarkable collections of hymns that the world has ever known. His name?” **“Isaac Watts. His contribution to the Christmas season? Probably the most sung of all the Christmas hymns, ‘Joy to the World’”**.

The conveyor of that information, Rev. Duncan, continued, “Could Isaac Watts have written so, if his life had been easy? I don’t know. It is amazing, though, how often persons who have everything are spiritual zeroes, whereas those who struggle through life have souls with both depth and height.” (King Duncan, Collected Sermons, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com))

The Threshold Moment’s message for this Worship Celebration reminded us, **“Joy does not depend on everything being right with the world.”** Indeed, Mary’s world was completely upside down having found out she was pregnant before her marriage. It was dangerous, even. But this does not stop her from unabashedly singing out, with all of heaven and nature, that what was about to be born would turn the world ‘right side out.’”

Before we closely examine Mary’s singing out **“Unabashed Joy”**, our Scripture from Isaiah sets the stage for the making known of the blessings we receive from God. It began promising a joyous celebration in **verses 1-2, “The desert will rejoice ... The desert will sing and shout for joy”**. The Reading specified some of God’s Blessings, which would be experienced, in **verses 4-6, 10, “Tell everyone who is discouraged, ‘Be strong and don’t be afraid! God is coming to your rescue’ ... The blind will be able to see, and the deaf will hear. The lame will leap and dance, and those who cannot speak will shout for joy. ... They will reach Jerusalem with gladness, singing and shouting for joy. They will be happy forever, forever free from sorrow and grief.”**

God’s promised blessings in Isaiah goes well with the message of **“Unabashed Joy” in the Wreath Skit**. Remember, he said, “You see under this bubbly exterior, I KNOW the depths of joy. You all may not have taken me seriously yet, but let me tell you, today will remind us that joy is not just about ‘happiness.’” “I have known many people through the ages that I couldn’t believe had joy in the middle of what was really awful circumstances, times when hatred was pointed at them and unfair or even violent treatment was perpetrated against them. It’s like they said to those who were oppressing them,” **“YOU cannot take away my joy because YOU didn’t give it to me ... God gave me this joy, God is my joy, and it is deep within me and mine forever.”** **“Witnessing that kind of joy changes you. And that’s WHY I’m so full of joy... absolutely ‘unabashed joy’”**.

Yes, Joy doesn’t wait for struggle to be over. The young Mary rejoiced in the Gospel Reading from Luke, even though her pregnancy put her in a position of dishonor among her people. If Joseph had been so inclined, she would have been stoned to death! **Instead of wallowing in the fear of suffering, pain, and even death, Mary focused on the Amazing Joyful News about her pregnancy from the Angel Gabriel.** Very quickly, she

went to see her elderly cousin, Elizabeth, who the angel said was also going to have a very special baby. She knew Elizabeth's pregnancy would be amazing because she was far too old to conceive a child. Going to Elizabeth would give Mary the opportunity to celebrate and support Elizabeth's pregnancy, if that was true, and it would also provide clarity and, perhaps, comfort for Mary because Elizabeth's status would either confirm or destroy the truthfulness of the angel's message.

**It was a truly wonderful moment when Mary entered the home of Elizabeth and Zechariah!** As Mary said her greetings, the baby within Elizabeth, the future John the Baptist, leaped with joy. Further, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and it declared through the older cousin how blessed Mary was and how blessed was the child within her. The Spirit led Elizabeth to share with Mary how honored she was to have her ***“Lord's mother come to visit”*** her. Elizabeth went on to explain what happened when she heard Mary's greeting and to celebrate with Mary her joyous faith in the message the angel had given to her! So, it would be true to say **Elizabeth was full of “Unabashed Joy!”**

But, the reunion experience between the two miraculously pregnant cousins was not yet complete. Young Mary was up next. What she communicated is called **“Mary's Song”**. **She sang about the “Unabashed Joy” she was experiencing because of what God had done and was going to do.** Her words were not merely a celebration for herself but for everyone – especially, and even, for the oppressed and the suffering. She sang about the Joyous Blessings God was revealing through the Wonderful and Amazing Birth of God's Son! She sang out powerfully because she knew the turn of events would usher in the Presence of Justice for the oppressed and Freedom for the captive.

Yes, Mary's Song made known the Blessings, which lead all of us to share “Unabashed Joy!” She sang,

***“My heart praises the Lord;  
my soul is glad because of God my Savior,  
for He has remembered me, His lowly servant!  
From now on all people will call me happy,  
because of the great things the Mighty God has done for me.  
His name is holy;  
from one generation to another  
He shows mercy to those who honor him.  
He has stretched out His mighty arm  
and scattered the proud with all their plans.  
He has brought down mighty kings from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly.  
He has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away with empty hands.  
He has kept the promise He made to our ancestors,  
and has come to the help of His Servant Israel.  
He has remembered to show mercy to Abraham and to all his descendants forever!”***

As we join in that prophetic chorus of joy, we are more deeply bonded together, multiplying and magnifying the “Unabashed Joy” to all. Trust the Joyous Good News that our Divine Parent Agape Loves All People, Invites and Welcomes us into the New Relationship with God, and Gives us the New Life in Jesus Christ! **Let that Joyous Song and Message Transform your life, so you follow Jesus' Example of Agape Love and Make God's Blessings Known to others, who will also receive, believe, be transformed, and filled with “Unabashed Joy!” Amen.**