

**Shepherd of the Springs Lutheran Church
First Wednesday in Advent - Vespers**

Text: Luke 1: 46-55

Theme: *The Magnificat - The Joy of Mary, for a Song*

For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His Name. And His mercy is for those who fear Him from generation to generation. (vss. 49-50)

In the world of idioms, *for a song* has a rather paltry or diminished connotation. It has meant nothing or next to nothing. In days of old, and even still on urban street corners today, minstrels and performers have tried to eek out a living from coins tossed their way for the songs they would offer passers-by and those who might gather to listen. The expression then often used when you get something of value for next to nothing - You say you got it *for a song*. . . . So we say: *No one else wanted it so I picked it up for a song.* Or, *I bought the house for a song.* The idea is that the song represents some humble means by which you get something of big value for what amount to nothing. The commercial come-ons to get you into the stores on Black Friday have been advertising that you can get some great merchandise for the Christmas holidays for almost nothing, or as the expression goes, *for a song*.

For the people of God, going back to the times of ancient Israel, the mighty acts of God that have brought great deliverance have been preserved often for succeeding generations by songs. In other words, you can get them and be blessed by them for a song. In the aftermath of the great deliverance of the children of Israel by God from the Egyptian Army at the Red Sea, it was the lowly Hebrew woman, Miriam, who took up a tambourine and extolled God's redemption there by song. *Sing to the Lord for He has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider He has tossed into the sea* (Ex. 15:21). When the children of Israel crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land, God gave them a glimpse of what it would be like for them under the terms of the covenant of Law by means of a song. And of course, God made provisions to bring to ancient Israel and to His people since then the full spectrum of his mighty acts and what it means to live in their promises, giving to them and us an entire book in the Scriptures devoted to song, the Psalms. You can get what it means to have the God of creation and redemption as your God and what it is like to live with Him for . . . a song . . . indeed in that book, for 150 songs.

This Advent season, you are invited to reflect and prepare for the coming of the Christ child by means of some very famous songs taken from the Christmas Story in the first two chapters of Luke's Gospel - songs that the Church has sung in the worship of our God down through the ages. For a song each week here in the Advent Season, you have the opportunity to listen to the lyrics and let them renew and sharpen your awareness and appreciation of the marvel of God becoming man for us and for our salvation. And here in our text for this evening, the Church through the ages has

brought to us and many generations before us the great poem of praise by the Virgin Mary in the form of a song, the *Magnificat*. There is an important parallel here for us to appreciate. As this lowly virgin mother became the humble vessel by which the Creator of the Universe entered the world to save us from our sins, it is the humble song that brings the words of Mary to our hearts and minds to reflect on the enormity of this gift that was given her, and from her a gift now extended to us - a Savior who will save us from our sins - a Savior who will enter history and do the greatest of the mighty acts of God that bring redemption and salvation to the lowly and downtrodden of every age.

The melody and chanting attached to the *Magnificat* has varied through the ages, but the words have remained the same and have served well to connect the people of God with His mother in that great mysterious wonder of God becoming man for us. In anticipation of seeing the arrival of this Son that she has conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, her soul and her voice magnified the Lord, for she understood greatly how He has done marvelous things for her, and through her. It is the combination of the anticipation of God's great work being accomplished in her and from her, coupled with a strong sense of her unworthiness that elicited the great praise and thanksgiving she offered. These are the things that gave her such great joyful anticipation of that first Christmas that would come to her. And for you, you get this all for a song - a song to help you recognize your own lowly estate and the great thing that God has done in her child to be born for you. With her assuring words that His mercy is for those of all generations who fear Him, the song invites everyone to take inventory about themselves. In the words of Mary, this God who comes to us, scatters the proud; He brings down the mighty; and He turns the rich away. And yet, He fills the hungry with good things; and He extends his mercy to all children of the promise as He delivered it first to Father Abraham. Getting all this in the song requires counting yourself among the lowly ready to receive this Immanuel anew this Christmastide. Yes, you are invited to join Mary to receive all these great things for a song.

The Advent season is that penitential season when you are invited to consider your own lowly estate and contrast that with the grand wonder of the gift of Himself that God is poised to give you. He comes to do marvelous things for you - to deliver you from your sins, your enemies, and your fears about your own poverty. He comes to establish His rule over the world, the flesh, and the Devil and establish that rule in your heart and life. Putting away all pride, surveying your own neediness in humility, let Mary's song become yours to heighten the joyful anticipation of receiving your Lord and Savior anew and celebrating His incarnation and entry into your world.

The true meaning of this season is not what you can get on Black Friday for *almost* nothing - or thereafter, as they say, for a song. . . . Rather, the true meaning of this season is in what you can receive and be refreshed by from one particular and decisive *Good Friday* that is anticipated and brought to us anew by Mary for a song - and by that we mean you get it *not* for almost nothing; but you get it for flat nothing. What

comes to us at Christmas is not a great seasonal bargain to enhance happy holiday; it is the priceless gift of God's Son who brings life and victory over all the forces of evil. This is a song that we not only can receive and hear, it is a song that the whole Church is invited to join in on - not just to spectate, but to sing again and again as it has been by the people of God through the ages. Mary provided the words and the Church has gathered round to sing it through the ages. It has done so in connection with preparing for the Christ child, in part, because it has received the example of doing so from angels on that first Eve of Christmas. The shepherds in their fields received the Good News for a song. And about that song - the angels song - we shall explore next week. It's a familiar song that we all know and have sung countless times, but we are holding it in check until we sing it again at our celebration of Christmas this year . . . But we will reflect on it next week, to gain further insight and enrichment of God's great gift coming to us . . . for a song.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. A-men.