



Carols of Winter

A SONG OF GRACE

December 6/7 • Pastor Matt Heard

Part 1: “A Song of Grace” (Mary’s Song), Luke 1:46-55

Songs are not only sung with the voice. They can also be sung with the heart. Coming from a deep place, from beyond the realm of key and chord, such a song resonates with our story, reflecting the reality we’re in or the reality we yearn to taste.

The word, *carol*, is a medieval term that incorporates the concept of both song and dance. When people caroled they were participating in both singing and dancing. You’d think, then, that summer would be a better time to participate in *carol* – when the weather’s comfortable, the sun is high and circumstances are pleasant. But winter?! Is that really where carols belong?

William Shakespeare opened his play, *Richard III*, using winter as a metaphor for misery. “Now is the winter of our discontent – made glorious summer by this son of York.” In the story, the misery was rescued – transformed into “summer” – by a change in circumstances (in this case, King Richard, the “son of York” taking over the situation).

More often than not, we don’t think we can participate in a *carol* until our winter has turned into summer; until our circumstances have changed. But the message of Christmas is that *carol* has come into our winter! The reason the gospel is Good News is that, because God became Flesh and dwelt among us – in the midst of our fallen world – hope has entered the realm of our despair, Light has burst into our darkness, and purpose has invaded our confusion. Our circumstances might remain unchanged, but the reality we experience in the midst of those circumstances is drastically different.

In Luke’s historical account of the events surrounding the birth of Jesus Christ, we come across several songs. Through church history they’ve been called Mary’s *Magnificat*, Zechariah’s *Benedictus*, the angels’ *Gloria in altissimus Deo*, and Simeon’s *Nunc Dimittis*.

Those are intimidating Latin names that can distract us from realizing the Christmas story’s relevance to our everyday “winter” circumstances. Can I really go *caroling* in the midst of the “winter” of my sin? In the midst of the winter of my financial situation in this economy? In the mundaneness of my journey? In the brokenness of this relationship? In the beauty of this family reunion? In the difficulty of this sickness? In the fun of this party? In the complexity and confusion of my story?

The Christmas story is about real people...engaging with a real God... who offers real Hope...and enables real carol-singing...with real hearts...in very real winters.



