

## **Build a Dwelling Place for God's Love** **Luke 1:46-55**

### **A Scandalous Love Story**

Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent, and our theme is love. Just hearing that word makes our hearts feel warm and tender. Christmas is the season of God's love. We picture it with joy, brightness, and peace.

Think of a Christmas pageant: children dressed as Mary and Joseph, holding a baby doll as Jesus. It's sweet and heartwarming. We smile, we laugh, and we rejoice together. But the real Christmas story—the one in the Bible—is far from clean, tidy, or serene. God's love came to us in a way that was shocking, even scandalous. It shattered expectations, defied societal norms, and disrupted the world. That kind of love can be hard to understand.

### **Making Room for God's Word to Dwell**

Recently, a movie called *Mary* was released. It imagines what Mary's life might have been like, beginning with her father, Joachim. According to tradition, Joachim was a wealthy man from the line of David. One day, he went to the Jerusalem Temple to offer sacrifices for the poor, but the high priest rejected him, saying, "It is unlawful for a childless man to make an offering." Heartbroken, Joachim left and prayed in the wilderness for 40 days. In his desperation, an angel appeared and promised that his wife, Anna, would bear a child—Mary. Imagine the joy of those parents, dedicating their daughter to God from birth.

But then one day, Mary's world turned upside down. An angel appeared and told her: "You will conceive and bear a son. He will be great and called the Son of the Most High." How would you respond? Mary was young, unmarried, and betrothed to Joseph. Confused and overwhelmed, she asked, "How can this be?" But despite her questions, her fears, and what this news would mean for her life, Mary answered, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

Mary made space within herself—physically, spiritually, and emotionally—for God's will to dwell. She didn't have all the answers. She didn't know how it would all work out. But she trusted.

We, too, are called to make space for God's love to dwell in us. It doesn't require grand gestures. It starts with listening. When the Holy Spirit nudges us—when God calls us to act, to speak, to love—we can hold it in our hearts, and respond.

Rachel, a pastor and author, tells a story about a wooden sign she received as a gift. It read: "Because Jesus Eats with Everyone." That simple truth inspired her to start *Open Table*, a monthly dinner at her home. Friends, neighbors, coworkers—even strangers—were invited to bring food and share a meal. Some months, 20 people showed up. Other times, 100. No matter how many guests came—expected or unexpected—there was always enough food. Over time, a community formed around those meals. That's what it means to build a dwelling place for God's love. It means letting God's word take root in our lives and grow.

### **Singing Songs of Joy in the Midst of Struggle**

But let's be honest—making room for God's love doesn't mean life will be easy. When Mary said yes to God, what happened? Scandal. Shame. Rejection. People whispered. Neighbors pointed fingers. Some traditions say she was thrown out of the Temple where she had been raised. Even her own father, torn between love for his daughter and the law, struggled.

Yet Mary endured. How? Because she was a mother. Her love for the child growing within her—combined with her trust in God’s promise—gave her strength.

This reminds me of a story shared by my friend who is a military chaplain. During training, he noticed a female soldier who refused to quit, even as tears streamed down her face. When asked why she kept going, she said: “Because of my children.” She was raising her kids alone and had become a soldier to provide for them. Her love—sacrificial and strong—gave her the strength to endure.

Mary’s strength was born from love and trust. But she wasn’t alone. When her fears felt too heavy, she traveled nearly 100 miles to see her cousin Elizabeth. And what happened? The child in Elizabeth’s womb—John the Baptist—leaped for joy. Elizabeth welcomed her with blessing: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!” In that moment, Mary’s doubts turned to joy. She responded with a song—a song we know as the *Magnificat*.

### **Our Song Must Change**

Mary’s song of praise is powerful. It declares that God is turning the world upside down:

- The humble will be lifted, and the proud scattered.
- The hungry will be filled, and the rich sent away empty.
- God’s mercy will flow for all people, generation after generation.

Mary’s song wasn’t just a private prayer; it was a declaration. It was a song of transformation and hope. And that song calls us to something deeper: If we want the world to change, our song must change.

What kind of songs are we singing? Are we singing songs of worry—songs that focus on what we lack or what might go wrong? Are we singing songs of despair—songs that say the world is too broken, too far gone to be saved?

Mary’s story teaches us that songs of worry and despair have no power to change the world. But songs of faith, hope, and joy—those songs transform everything.

Songs have played a powerful role in citizen movements that brought about social transformation during challenging times. Do you know the gospel song, “We Shall Overcome?” “We Shall Overcome” is more than just a song; it is an anthem of hope, unity, and perseverance. It became the heartbeat of the civil rights movement, led by Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., as people marched together against injustice to achieve racial equality. This song had the power to unite hearts, strengthen resolve, and inspire a shared spirit of determination for a better, more just world. As we know, this song transforms the world! If we want the world to change, our song must change.

Think of it like this: the song we sing in our hearts shapes the way we see the world. If we sing a song of hope, we start to look for signs of God’s work, even in the darkest moments. If we sing a song of faith, we start to believe that new life is possible, even in places that seem dead. And when we sing those songs together, something powerful happens. Communities are renewed. Lives are restored. The impossible becomes possible.

The world is full of noise—songs of fear, anger, and despair. But we are called to sing a different song. Like Mary, we are called to believe that God’s promises are true and that God is still at work.

### **Let Us Sing God’s Song of Love**

My beloved Asbury family, our Savior is coming to save us and the whole world. Let us change the song we sing. Let us sing of God's love, peace, hope, and joy. With that joyful songs, let us build a dwelling place for God's love in our hearts and in our lives. Because when our song changes, the world begins to change. So let us sing. Let us sing the song of hope, peace, joy and love together!  
Amen.