

Series: Advent 2025

Songs of Joy

Luke 1:39-49

Sermon by Men's Minister Josh Brage

Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

Sunday morning, December 14, 2025

A reading from Luke 1:39-49: "A few days after the angel spoke to Mary, she hurried to the hill country of Judea, to the town where Zechariah lived. She entered the house and greeted Elizabeth. At the sound of Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's child leapt within her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, 'God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed. Why am I so honored that the mother of my Lord should visit me? When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. You are blessed, because you believed that the Lord would do what He said.' Mary responded, 'Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed. For the Mighty One is holy, and He has done great things for me,'" the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Josh: The thing we want, the thing we know will make Christmas or any moment of our life better, often the second we get it, we find that it did not bring quite as much joy as we thought that it would. Has this ever happened to you? It has to be one of my examples. One time I got a brand-new car. I love this car. It is the only new car I have ever had, and the second day I had it, somebody backed into my driver's door. It was not a big scratch, but it was enough. Now I just had a used car. Here is what is so strange. Often we spend a lot of our lives trying to find places where we can experience joy, and when we find those places, we find that that joy is fickle, disappointing sometimes, short-lived, does not last as long as we think it is going to, and sometimes Christmas accentuates this feeling, doesn't it? The things that we want, every commercial we see right now is telling us that if you just had this thing, you would be happy, so the question is today for us, where can we find joy?

I love this story, and I am so honored to get to preach it. We are just going to tell this story that these kids read so beautifully today, but I will tell you what we are going to hear in this story. We are going to find two women who find joy, not in looking for it, but they actually find joy because joy finds them, and it is a really fascinating story, so let's start our story here. Parents, I have a question. What would you do if sometime during this Christmas season, someone knocked on your door, and when you opened it, it was a family member who was pregnant? What would you say? Maybe they are a teenager. What would you say to that person? This is exactly what happens in this story, so let's start, Luke chapter 1, verse 39: "A few days later, Mary hurried to the hill country of Judea, to the town where Zechariah lived. She entered the house and greeted Elizabeth." This morning our story starts with a teenage runaway. Mary is young, and just a few days before this, we preached this last week, just a few days before this, her entire life had been turned upside-down. One minute she was young and engaged. She is a good church girl, engaged to a good guy. He has a good job. She was planning a wedding. She was in the middle of planning a wedding. Her entire life was out in front of her. She had peace and security and family all in front of her, and then an angel showed up and disrupted all of that.

Actually, when the angel arrived, when the presence of God, when the calling of God arrived, it launched her into something that may not have felt peaceful at first, and so what does she do? It says a few days later, she hurries off. She is hurrying from Nazareth to the hill country in Judea. This town where she goes is about eighty miles away, a four or five-day hike, a young teenage girl, maybe alone. Nobody else is really mentioned in this story, but can you imagine the journey that she goes on? She picks up from Nazareth, and she heads out on this hike from here to Breckenridge, hiking alone. It is dark, it is cold, and can you imagine everything what is going through this young girl's mind? Can you imagine? Just a few days ago, she had everything in front of her, and today she is running towards Elizabeth. I do not know exactly what she was thinking, but she knew she had to get out of there. Can you imagine everything that is going through her mind?

Have you ever been in a moment like that? I have just once that I can really remember. One time a few years ago, I was about twenty. I had lived for three years in Missouri, going to school out by Kansas City, and one Saturday, my time there came to an abrupt end. I woke up one Saturday morning, and it had become apparent that my time in Kansas City was over, that season of life was over. I decided to have one more conversation to try and see if it would be salvageable. It was not, and so I decided that afternoon that enough was enough, and it was time to come home. I went home, and I packed all the stuff that I could into my little 2000 Dodge Neon. I went to a friend's house, I said goodbye, and I got on the highway, and I drove overnight, left about 8:00 p.m., and knocked on my mom's door at six o'clock the next morning. My time had come to an abrupt end, and everything I had felt called to do in that season had just stopped pretty suddenly, and I came to the only place I knew where to come. I came home. I have been in this type of moment. I wonder if you have too. I wonder if you have been in a moment where one day your life was a certain thing, and the next, none of that was true any longer, and I know what I was feeling in that drive. I was feeling worried about the cops. I was feeling disappointed. I was feeling shame. I was feeling anxiety. I was feeling uncertainty.

I wonder if this is some of what Mary was experiencing on this hike. Can you imagine this hike? She runs to the only person who she feels like might understand. She runs to Elizabeth. Do you remember Elizabeth? We preached about her in the very first week of this series. She is a little underrated, in my opinion, but Elizabeth was a lovely woman. She was a little older, it says, and she was perfect. She was married to a priest. They had a lovely life. They were good church people with a good life record. Scripture says they were blameless. They had lived a perfect church life, with this exception, they were childless, blameless, and childless, and this was Elizabeth's reality. In a day without a whole lot of medical assistance to help them understand it, Elizabeth went through decades of infertility. We have no idea what that heartbreak was like, no idea what that monthly cycle of hope and heartbreak, of disappointment, of excitement, of that is the world that she had lived in.

We know a little bit about this. My wife Hannah was able to share on video that first week here a couple of weeks ago, and she did a courageous thing. She did a great job sharing our story with infertility and miscarriage. It is an incredibly painful thing to go through, and I am so proud of her, and thank you to all of you who have said really kind things to us since. We appreciate that, but unless you have been there, you probably do not know everything that she has gone through.

Imagine Elizabeth as her friends were starting to have kids, sitting in another baby shower, opening up the stack of Hanukkah cards with happy families that are growing and smiling. Imagine what she went through, decades of this stuff, and maybe, and I hope you haven't experienced that kind of pain, but maybe you have found yourself wanting something so good for so long, and yet you can't seem to find it. Have you ever been there? Have you ever been in a place where you want something so good, you know the Lord wants it for you, you know it is a good thing, your heart is in the right place, and yet somehow the Lord stays silent for a long period of time? Maybe it is a job search that remains a little bit elusive. Maybe it is resolution in your family. Maybe it is a marriage that continues to be Christmas after Christmas, a little bit rocky. Maybe you are lonely this Christmas, and being alone at Christmas is hard.

This was Elizabeth's reality. Waiting on the Lord for good things is really, really hard, and this is what Elizabeth's entire life had been like until six months ago. This is the power of the gospel, and I am going to share this multiple times, but six months ago, the Lord answered Elizabeth's prayer. She was pregnant. Six months ago, the Lord turned to her and blessed them with a child. Six months ago, Elizabeth's decades of waiting, her lifetime of waiting, her lifetime of frustrated, sad, angry, discouraged prayers were answered. She turned to the Lord. She sought the Lord. He heard, and He answered. We do not serve a God who ignores us. We serve a God who acts. After a lifetime of no's, Elizabeth finally experienced a yes.

Elizabeth is in her house when there is a knock on her door. She is about six months pregnant at this time, so I bet it took her a second to get to the door. No offense to anybody, but probably took her a second. It probably took Mary a couple of times to get her going, and there is a knock on her door, and Elizabeth gets up and opens the door, and be with me in this story. She opens the door, and there is a teenage, pregnant, dirty, tired, exhausted Mary, fresh off of an eighty-mile uphill hike, staring at her, and Mary just gives her a simple greeting. It probably was "shalom," and in this moment, where the virgin and the barren meet in this moment, something extraordinary happens that changes their entire world. The baby in Elizabeth's womb leaps for joy, not a flutter, not a kick, not a hesitation, not indigestion, a leap in her womb.

Do not miss the beauty of this moment. This is how the kingdom comes. The kingdom comes not to palaces, but to hillside houses, not to the important, but to the pregnant and forgotten. This is how the kingdom comes. In this moment, both of these women have experienced fear and anxiety. They should be experiencing uncertainty and hesitation, but instead they are experiencing tremendous, exuberant joy. It is almost as if the point of this story is that no pregnancy is too unexpected, no story too broken, no life circumstance too fragile, too destroyed, that joy is not possible. It is as if part of this story is saying there is no place we can find ourselves in this life where joy can't once again emerge. Psalm 30 says it this way: "Weeping may last for the night, but joy comes in the morning." Weeping may last for the night, but joy comes in the morning.

How? How does joy come in a moment that should not be as joyful as it is? How does joy emerge out of the rubble of our life sometimes? To learn that, we need to turn towards John. Luke 1, verse 44, this is Elizabeth speaking: "When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy." This is a remarkable story. At 24 weeks old, I looked this up, I did not know this, I am not some sort of baby doctor, but at 24 weeks old, preterm, unborn infants are in a really unique place. They are about the size of a cob

of corn. I am from Nebraska. I know exactly what that looks like. They are about the ear of a cob, and they weigh between ten and sixteen ounces, not quite a pound, and a lot is happening at this phase of their development. Their facial features are beginning to form. Eyebrows, hair has come in, the nose looks pretty good, eyeballs, sometimes eye color even, and maybe more important to our story, their sense of hearing develops right in the same time frame. They begin to hear the mother's heartbeat. They hear her voice. They hear music. Maybe some of you moms know more about this than I do. Actually, it seems like in our story that John could hear other people's voices. He hears Mary's voice, and he responds with joy.

I do not know if we have ever had the opportunity. We do not really get this opportunity much to see what a 24-week-old preterm infant is like. I got to see it this year. Our niece, Josie, was born at 28 weeks, and the reason she was born premature at 28 weeks is because she was about the same size as a 24-week-old. She was born right at a pound, and she sat in this thing. She sat there, and I was able to see her the day that she was born, and it is hard not to look at something so small and so fragile, so beautiful, and it is hard not to realize that even in that moment, at one pound, 28 weeks, that even small babies have something to communicate. Even at 24 or 28 weeks, all children have something to communicate. Even at that age, all life has something to communicate about the glory and the life-giving power of our God. This is part of what is happening in the story. John is leaping for joy, because our God is a good God.

All right, kids. Name some of the most exciting people in the world to you right now. I want to hear some. Let's hear. What was that? Say it again, left side. Bo Nix. Let's see it. Bo Nix. That is what I am talking about. Peyton Manning. Come on, let's get some girl participation. Most exciting person in the world right now. Go. I can't hear that side. What is it, Joe? My auntie. Shout out, Aunt Amanda. That is a five-dollar payout right there, I think. Bo Nix, Peyton Manning. Nikola Jokic.

What if I told you? What about Santa Claus? Hang on. What if I told you that right now Bo Nix or Taylor Swift or Santa Claus himself was behind this door and was about to come out here and talk to you? What would you do? How would you act? Yeah. Santa. I know him. That is how we would act. We would probably jump up and down. I have been to a Dude Perfect show. They just mobbed him. I saw 10,000 fifth graders once who were there just charging at him and running at him. This is exactly what John, T-minus 16 weeks, is doing when he sees Jesus, when he hears that Jesus just walked into his house. He leaps up and down with exuberant joy. John in this moment recognizes that Jesus is here and leaps for joy. He hears Mary's voice and he gets to be the first one to say this, "This is Christ the King."

At this moment, John goes from being just some other preterm baby to being the forerunner of the Messiah, and this is where the story gets really exciting. Elizabeth had waited for a long time, but the people of Israel had waited even longer. The people of Israel had been in a waiting season, waiting for their Messiah to come, waiting for their world to be put right. For 400 years, they had heard nothing except silence. For 400 years, no angels, no miracles, no prophecies, nothing, only the Roman Empire coming in, enslaving them, and making their lives miserable, and I would suspect that the people of Israel, an entire people group, thought to themselves, "Where is God? Has he forgotten about us? Has he ignored us? Has he neglected us?" In this story, we are seeing that God breaks the silence. He breaks it with two miraculous pregnancies. This is what John is pointing us to, not that Christmas itself is joyful, but that we can have joy because Jesus has come. In this moment, John becomes something far more than his

individual self. He becomes a herald of a new age. The time has come. The time is fulfilled. The kingdom is at hand.

Do you remember Narnia? It counts as a Christmas movie in my book. It counts as a Christmas movie, but do you remember Narnia? It was covered with what? It was covered with snow and cold and ice. Do you remember why? Why was it frozen solid? It was always winter and never Christmas. The power of the White Witch had frozen the land of Narnia solid. Life wasn't happening anymore. It was just ice and oppression and frozenness. Doesn't it seem sometimes like our world is frozen, solid, stuck in our sin? Sometimes I look at this world, and it looks really cold, no life, just cycles of violence, cycles of greed. We seem to be stuck in war after war. Turn to our neighborhoods. We do not see collaboration. We do not see warmth. We see coldness. We see animosity. We see frustration. We see enemies. It is almost like our world is frozen, solid, stuck under the power of sin, but there is this great scene in Narnia where the three siblings, Peter and Susan and Lucy, are on a mission, and they go on a mission with Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, brave Mr. Beaver, and they are going to save their brother Edmund.

Edmund has succumbed to the power of the witch and betrayed his family, and they are on this mission, and it is such a long mission that they have to stop for the night. They have been treading through snow and ice for a long time, and they have to stop for the night and sleep in a small, cold winter's cave. It was a restless night of sleep, and all of a sudden, in the early wee hours of the morning, they are awoken, and they're awoken by an interesting sound that at first scares them and then brings them some excitement, and do you remember what the sound was? Sleigh bells, jingle bells, and here is what happened. They nervously sort of look out of the cave, and they see that Father Christmas has arrived, and they go and talk to Father Christmas as they say, "Why have you finally just now shown up? What has changed?" Do you remember what Father Christmas says? He says, "Aslan is on the move." Even Father Christmas knows that something changes when Aslan is on the move, and there is this beautiful line about Lucy I want to read. The book says this, "and Lucy felt running through her that deep shiver of gladness, which you only get if you are being solemn and still."

Here is the point to our story today. We experience joy when we recognize that the King has come. This is why John is leaping. He is not pumped about Christmas. He is excited because Jesus Himself just walked through the door. The wait is over. The King has come. The new age has dawned, and when the King comes, it is good news. This is why we meet on a Sunday morning. It is good news when the King comes, because when the King comes, sins are forgiven. When the King comes, souls are redeemed. When the King comes, bodies are healed, relationships are restored, and addictions are broken. Come on, Waterstone. Who knows this? Who knows that when the King shows up, we are not just left stuck in our icy world? Something changes, because the King has come. When the King comes, lonely people are given a family. The rebellious are brought back to faith. The powerful and the mighty are brought low, and the humble and the lowly are lifted up. It is good news when the King arrives. When the King comes, even the barren and the virgin bring forth new life.

The King has come not just to meet us in our places of uncertainty or disappointment or fear. He has come to punch through the frozen hold that sin has on our lives. Yes, He meets us where we are, but He has come not to just merely comfort us in our sorrows. He has come to reclaim and recreate this world

into a place where sorrow does not exist any longer. His vision of our world, His mission in this world is to meet us where we are and to fix it once and for all. It is good news when the King arrives.

We experience joy when we recognize that the King has come. This is Christmas. G.K. Chesterton calls joy the gigantic secret of the Christian. Here is where we can find joy. Here is how we have joy as Christian people, not in our circumstances, not when everything goes right, not when we get the job or get the wife or get the pregnancy. No, we already have joy, because the Christian understands that joy does not come from a place that we find or a circumstance that we get ourselves into. We find joy because joy has found us. Joy is not a destination that we are trying to get to. It is a reality that we already get to live in. We experience joy, and we recognize that the kingdom has come. Wherever the king is, joy is found. Jesus changes everything. How could we not leap for joy?

The last story, about thirty years later, these two men get to meet again, John and Jesus. It's a really beautiful, poetic piece of scripture. We do not know if they had a relationship in between those 30 years. Maybe, they were cousins. I hope so. I hope that they knew each other. Baby John had become John the Baptist, and he was a wild man. He was a bearded hunk of a dude. He ate locusts, and he drank honey, and he just sat along the Jordan River, just screaming at people about the gospel. He was my kind of guy, and one day when he is down there telling everyone to repent, telling everyone that Jesus is coming, telling everyone to come and get baptized in the Jordan River, all of a sudden he looks up, and he sees Jesus coming down the hill towards the river, and John gets to do, I think this is so beautiful, John gets to do the same thing that he has been doing since T-minus 16 weeks. John one, verse 29: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." John the Baptist's entire life, entire ministry, his pre-infancy, apparently, his youth, his ministry, are all pointing to this moment that this man, this person, is the coming Messiah. He has come, and He will make things right.

This is what baptism is all about. Baptism is, yes, it is a sign, it is a tradition, it is an emblem, but really what baptism is, it is a present-tense sign that the King has come, that the King is here, that the King is still in the business of changing our lives. Baptism shouts that the time is fulfilled, the King is here. Baptism is our own leap for joy, made public. How can we not be excited on a Sunday morning when we get to baptize three people? We get to baptize three individuals this morning, and we are going to hear their stories in just a second, and it is an amazing experience, because we still serve a king who changes people's lives from cold and lifeless to life-full, joyful, and we are going to hear this story, but as we do, I want us to just take a second and not let this just become another tradition that we do. I want this to remind us that if you are here, joy has come. Joy is available. You do not have to be perfect. You do not have to get things right. You do not have to know all the right things. You just have to say yes to joy, so if you have been baptized, great. If you have not, we have an invitation for you today, and I want you to see if you resonate with any of the stories, and I am going to come back after the video, and we will talk a little bit more, so let's look at that video now.

"When I realized that I really needed Jesus was about three to four years ago. I started surrounding myself with people who had a very strong faith, and over the last three or four years, that faith has only strengthened." "I want to be baptized because at my old church in Austin, after a few Sundays I was there, I was like, 'Well, God must be really important.' Then I learned the stories about Him, and then I started to follow Him." "I was baptized when I was in my teens, and I think jumping from different religions,

different churches, maybe I really was not a hundred percent confident in which faith to follow, which religion to follow, but now, here at Waterstone, I have found my people, and yeah, it feels a lot different, and my faith is stronger than it ever has been.” “It feels like, it feels good to, after I pray to Him, and I feel a little better if I pray to Him after I did something wrong.” “I guess the biggest moment that I really felt close to God was hearing from my son that he was joining a youth group, and he knew that I had been going to church on a regular basis and really strengthening my faith, and to hear him say that he did that with no prompting from me, I think that was a big one.” “He means a lot to me. He made the world, and that would be, and if He did not, I would not be alive right now.” “Baptism means to me accepting and putting my hands in Jesus’ and God’s hands. To this point, I feel like I have been really forcing myself to make my own future, and over the last few years, I feel like with my faith strengthening, that things have only gotten better.” “I want to be baptized because to show that I believe in Jesus and I am going to follow Him for the rest of my days.” “I am ready to publicly express my faith in God, in Jesus Christ, and also to lead by example for those that are intimately involved with me.”

We are going to start with Tilly here. Tilly, have you chosen to follow Jesus? “Yes.” Do you plan to follow him for the rest of your days? “Yes.” With this profession of faith, I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Josh: That was Tilly’s mom and dad, and now we will baptize, Brooke is going to baptize Steve, and then Steve is going to turn and baptize his son, Max. It will be a really special time.

Brooke: I just have to say, I met Steve at the PTO, so big things happen at PTO. Dads can do it too. Steve, have you chosen to follow Jesus? “Yes,” and will you follow him for the rest of your days? Yes. All right, Steve, with your profession of faith, I baptize you in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Steve: Maxon, have you chosen to follow Jesus? “Yes.” Do you plan to follow him the rest of your days? “Yes.” Maxon, with your profession of faith, I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Josh: What a beautiful baptism. Thank you, Max and Steve, and Tilly for letting us be a part of that. Let’s stand up. We will pray for these people. If you have already been baptized, I hope today is a reminder that joy is found in our salvation. It is not found anywhere else. It is found because Jesus has shown up and made us His. If you have not been baptized, I want to invite you this morning. Christmas is, yes, it is a lot of things, a lot of tradition and a lot of family, but right now, Christmas is an opportunity for you to meet Jesus. That is why we do this. That is why we celebrate. That is why we sing, and we pray, and we preach. It is because we know that Jesus is alive, and He wants to change your life, and He will, so if you are here today, and you have never been baptized, and you showed up today, maybe full of sorrow, or maybe full of frustration, or maybe full of doubt, welcome. You do not need to wait to get baptized. We will do it right here, right now this morning, so if that is you, we are about to sing a song. I invite you to be courageous and step out of your seats and to come over here to the cross. We do business with Jesus at the foot of the cross. Paul is over here. Brooke is over here. We want to meet you and welcome you. Kids, you are invited too. Just talk to your parents.

Waterstone, this is an important moment. If you see people around you ready, do not let them walk over here by themselves. Encourage them, support them, and bring them to get baptized. Let’s pray over Tilly and Steve and Max really quickly.

Lord, thank You that You are joy, that You are the King, that You have come, that Christmas is not a shallow, empty, nostalgic thing for us. It is a daily reality that Jesus, You have come. God, You have not left us alone, not frozen in sin, but God, You have come, and You come to make all things new. I thank you for Tilly and Steve and Max, with this day being forever cemented in the hearts of their faith, that they would know that you chose them, that you saved them. I pray that they would look back on this day with fondness through any other future days of trouble, and God, I pray right now for people in this room who know it is time to come to you. Would they have courage and boldness to step forward right now and to get baptized in the mighty name of Jesus, amen. Let's sing and respond.

37:21 minutes

Edited by Tom Kenaston

Message #905