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Salvation's Song
Isaiah 12:1-6

Don't you just love Christmas music? All kinds of Christmas music?

From the secular side, there's nothing quite like Bing Crosby's rich, smooth voice singing "White Christmas" or Burl Ives's rendition of "Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer," is there?

And from our faith perspective as followers of Jesus, we're moved by the challenging intricacies of a soloist's presentation of "O, Holy Night" or the beautiful simplicity of a congregation's singing together "Silent Night, Holy Night" or the voices of children uniting in "Away in a Manger."

There's just something about the gift of song and the gift of Christmas that naturally go together.

As human beings, we use music, especially vocal music, to give expression to our feelings and experiences—from the playful to the sublime. Even if we're not the best of singers, this is still true, as we listen to songs and sing along with them.

Sometimes we sing the blues, sometimes a little jazz. Sometimes it's a silly song just for a laugh. Sometimes it's a song that expresses mourning or grief. And sometimes, we sing songs of joy and praise and thanksgiving.

Songs in the Bible

Have you ever noticed how often God's people sang in the Bible?

Moses and the Israelites sang a song of victory after they had crossed the Red Sea on dry land and the waters had crashed in on Pharaoh and his army (Exodus 15:1-18). They praised God for his deliverance and the display of his awesome power.

Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, was a prophetess. Along with the song that Moses led the Israelites to sing, she took a tambourine in hand and led the women in a victory dance as she sang to them,

Sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted.

The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea (Exodus 15:21).¹

David sang time and time again. When he was king, he organized some of the Levites as singers as he made plans for the temple that his son Solomon would build (1 Chronicles 25). And of course, many of the psalms came from David.

The longest book of the Bible is a book of songs—the Psalms. Some of them are songs of joy and praise and thanks. Some of them are songs of lament and mourning. Many of them are prayers. Some are instructive. Others give voice to the deepest emotions of the soul.

When the Jewish exiles were in Babylon, their captors asked them to sing, even demanded that they sing some of their songs of joy. They had hung their harps on the poplar trees, and sat down by the rivers to weep as they remembered Zion. They felt they just couldn't sing the songs of the LORD in a foreign land. So what did they do? They wrote a song about it—Psalm 137—remembering Jerusalem and asking God to remember and judge their enemies!

Getting ready to sing

The early chapters of Isaiah talk a lot about God's judgment on his people for their sin and rebellion. And yet interspersed in those oracles of judgment are promises—promises of what would come to be understood as the messianic kingdom, when the LORD would set his perfect ruler over his people to deliver and redeem them, and to bring the age of ultimate peace and righteousness.

At the beginning of chapter 11, Isaiah prophesied how the shoot and Branch of David (“from the stump of Jesse”) would bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD would rest on him so that he would delight in the fear of the LORD and judge with righteousness and justice. Indeed, righteousness would be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. And even the most natural enemies in nature would be at peace (11:6-9):

The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling together;
and a little child will lead them.
The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.
The infant will play near the hole of the cobra,
and the young child will put his hand into the viper's nest.
They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.

And then Isaiah went on to say that the nations would rally to the Root of Jesse as he stood “as a banner for the peoples” (11:10), and that the Lord would reclaim the remnant of his people from wherever they had been scattered over the earth.

He will raise a banner for the nations
and gather the exiles of Israel;
he will assemble the scattered people of Judah
from the four quarters of the earth (11:12).

The jealousy and hostility between the kingdoms of Israel and Judah would be no more, and together they would defeat their enemies with the help of the LORD.

The song

And then, “in that day” (12:1), Isaiah said, they would sing this song in our text:

“I will praise you, O LORD.
Although you were angry with me,
your anger has turned away
and you have comforted me.
Surely God is my salvation;
I will trust and not be afraid.
The LORD, the LORD, is my strength and my song;
he has become my salvation” (12:1-2).

Isaiah prophesied that God would give his people a reason to sing salvation’s song. But what did he mean when he said they would say, “God is my salvation?”

That’s a word that I think people often misunderstand. Marcia Ford tells about hearing her daughter who was two years old at the time use the word “salvation” in a conversation one day. She says she thought she should ask her if she understood what the word meant. Her little girl replied, “I know all about it, Mommy. We saw it at the movies.” Marcia says she was puzzled. The only movie her daughter had ever seen was a Disney production. So she asked her, “What movie?” “You know,” she replied, somewhat impatiently, “101 Salvations!”²

The salvation Isaiah was talking about here was God’s *deliverance* of his people from their judgment and suffering. They had brought all this on themselves because of their rebellion and sin. Yet God graciously promised to *do something* about their situation, to *deliver* them, to *save* them. And Isaiah said that when that happened, *they would sing*, “The LORD, the LORD, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation”! They would rejoice that it was God himself who had delivered them. It was as they trusted in him to save them that he became their salvation.

You see, *salvation’s song is a song of grateful praise to God for what he has done.* What Isaiah first understood as a restoration of Israel and Judah was realized in Jesus Christ as an eternal salvation—deliverance from the sin that separates people from God and one another, both in this life and in the life to come. If we don’t experience that salvation in Christ, our separation from God *now* continues into *eternity* in hell.

But thanks be to God, in Jesus Christ we experience God’s salvation from our sin. We’re delivered and set free, and in the last day even our mortal bodies will be redeemed in the resurrection! How can we *not* sing a song of grateful praise for what God has done and is doing in Christ?

This experience of salvation comes through a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ as we put our faith in him. You see, *salvation’s song is a song of joyful trust in the God who is our salvation.*

Isaiah went on to say that “with joy [they] would draw water from the wells of salvation” (12:3). God is the source of our salvation. As we’re in this relationship with him, we draw our strength and salvation from him. It’s a relationship that’s real and personal, and full of *joy*. Our circumstances may not always be good, and we may encounter a lot of trials and heartaches and

sadness along the way. But in our relationship with the God who is our strength and song and salvation, there is always a deep, abiding *joy*!

Isaiah went on to tell the people that in that day when they experienced God's great salvation, they would say:

“Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name;
make known among the nations what he has done,
and proclaim that his name is exalted.
Sing to the LORD, for he has done glorious things;
let this be known to all the world.
Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion,
for great is the Holy One of Israel among you” (11:4-6).

They would *have* to tell the world about their great God and what he had done for them!

You see, *salvation's song is a song that has to be sung to the nations!* When we know what God has done in Christ, when we have experienced God's salvation in him, we *have* to tell others about it. We *have* to praise God for what he has done. We express our joyful trust in him. And we desire that others know about him and his mighty work in Christ so they can know how great and powerful and merciful and gracious God is, and so they can experience him and his salvation for themselves!

When it comes right down to it, our worship must give rise to our mission to the world. There are two stanzas to this song. We sing our praise to God and we sing the message of his salvation to the world.

Mission without worship has no foundation. Worship without mission is only partial expression. *We must sing salvation's song to all the nations so they can know God's saving grace in Christ.*

Do you remember what happened after the angel Gabriel visited the Virgin Mary to tell her she had been chosen to bear the Messiah? She went off to visit her relative Elizabeth. Gabriel told Mary that Elizabeth, who was now old and had never had any children, was also going to have a son. When Mary walked in, Elizabeth's baby leaped within her and she blessed Mary as the mother of her Lord. And then do you know what Mary did? She *sang*—she sang a song of praise to God for his mighty acts for his people (Luke 1:46-55)!

When Elizabeth's little boy was born, her husband Zechariah was finally able to talk again (he had been mute ever since he had questioned Gabriel about how they were going to have a son). When his tongue was loosed, do you know what Zechariah did? He *sang* a song of praise to God for his salvation (Luke 1:67-79)!

And the night Jesus was born, do you remember what the angels did when they told the shepherds about his birth? They *sang*:

“Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to men on
whom his favor rests” (Luke 2:14).

And so must we.

We *must sing* grateful praise to God who is our salvation.

We *must sing* so people of all the nations can know our God and his great salvation in his Son Jesus Christ.

And then in heaven, we *will sing* with that great multitude that no one can count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language . . .”:

“Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb” (Revelation 7:9, 11).

Right there, before God’s throne, in the presence of the Lamb, our risen Lord Jesus Christ, we will for all eternity sing *salvation’s song*.

Thanks be to God! Amen!

†MEG

¹ Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.

² Marcia Ford, *Today’s Christian Woman*. Cited at http://preachingtoday.com/illustrations/article_print.html?id=18911.