

**A Song of Hope and Promise**  
**Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 1:46-55**  
**December 22, 2024**  
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Words create the world we live in.

In the beginning, the very beginning, when the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, and wind from God swept over the face of the waters. God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God spoke again and created the sky. God spoke again and created the land. God spoke again creating plants of every kind. God spoke again and again creating stars; creating animals from the land, sky, and sea; and creating us, creating humans. God spoke our world, God spoke us into being.

When an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, the angel’s words crafted the family Jesus was born into. The angel spoke words of assurance, words of calling, and words of hope and promise to Joseph, “Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save people from their sins.”

When Joseph took Mary as his wife, we don’t know the vows he made to her. We don’t know the exact words he said uniting his life to hers. But we know that it made Mary and her unborn son a bit safer. Joseph who could have left Mary and the not-yet-born Jesus to death, chose not to. There’s not a lot we know about Joseph, but I imagine he was gentle. I imagine he was kind. He loved the son Mary bore. We see the same gentleness and kindness in Jesus, when he defies social convention and says, “Let the little children come to me.” We see it when he heals the lepers. We see it when he talks to the woman at the well. We see the same gentleness and kindness, when Jesus weeps for his dead friend Lazarus. Jesus learned to be gentle, Jesus learned to be kind from Joseph.

Jesus might have gotten his gentleness from his Daddy, but he got his fire, his passion, his sense of justice from his Mama.

The Magnificat, Mary’s song, is my favorite passage of scripture. Mary’s words are a prayer, a prophecy, a sermon, a promise of who her son will be. Her son will be the one who turns the world upside down. He will challenge the established order. He will bring about a great reversal, a turning of the tables, and we know he won’t just turn the tables, but he’ll flip a few too. Mary sings and prays her child who will save the world—bringing peace, mercy, justice, hope, joy, and love—into being.

I have quite a bit of art depicting Mary. I have an image of the holy family—Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus—as refugees crossing the Mexico border into the United States in the dead of night. Joseph has his arm around Mary and she has Jesus in a sling across her body, as they flee. I have another image of the holy family under the rubble in Gaza—Mary and Joseph shielding their

newborn baby Jesus from the rubble as the buildings tumble and burn from the constant onslaught of bombs. I have an image of a pregnant Mary and Eve—Eve reaching out to rest her hand on Mary's pregnant belly, Mary reaching out to hold Eve's face, and Mary stepping on the head of the serpent wrapped around Eve's leg slithering toward her. It's an image of grace and promise. Jesus is the hope to come. The serpent doesn't get the last word.

Each image shows who Mary is: a mother who will do anything for her son, carrying him to safety over the border, shielding him from the rubble and bombs even though it might cost her life. Each image of Mary shows what her Magnificat proclaims, that Jesus is the one who will bring about God's great reversal—and Mary is part of that reversal. Mary, an unwed teenage mother is the lowliest of the low, and she is the one who conceives, bears, names, and raises the Son of God.

My favorite bit of art depicting Mary is from an artist by the name of Ben Wildflower. It is a charcoal print of Mary with her fist raised in the air and a clenched fist at her side as she crushes a serpent and a skull. Around this image of Mary are her own words, "cast down the mighty," "send the rich away," "fill the hungry," and "lift up the lowly." Similar to the image of Mary and Eve, Mary's crushing of the serpent and skull symbolize that the child within her will be the one that defeats death in all its forms. The child within her does this through the words she sings over him in the womb, through bringing down systems of power, oppression, and death to lift up the lowly. She sings him into being and teaches him everything she knows about the God who has looked on her with favor and done great things for her.

God's words spoke the world into being. The angel of the Lord's words to Joseph and Joseph's own words that we don't hear joining his life to Mary's, craft the family Jesus is born into. Mary's words sing and pray her son, Jesus, into being. These are beautiful words. Holy words.

But then there are other words that are spoken—words that harm. Words that cause violence. Words that oppress. Words that kill. Like when Herod ordered the slaughter of all children two years of age or under in Bethlehem. Like when the people shouted "Barabbas" again and again, condemning Jesus to be executed. Like when rhetoric and fearmongering against immigrants and refugees is used and mass deportations are promised. Like when words are written in founding documents hundreds of years ago about the right to bear arms, and instead of changing or challenging this "right," children in schools are the collateral damage.

There are so many words used all the time that further hatred, division, violence, and harm. And those words are creating the world we live in too. It can be difficult to not let those words win out. As those words get louder and louder, as those words become more widespread, it is easy to grow quiet. It is easy to think that our own words that might counteract don't matter or won't even come close to making a difference.

Last Saturday, a few of us from SFBC gathered with other Christians from across the Seattle area at the corner of Fourth and Pine in front of the big Christmas tree at the Westlake Shopping Center. We gathered to do some "Ceasefire Caroling." Ceasefire Carols were created

last year by two Christian organizers who felt called to action by Palestinian, Arab, Muslim, and Jewish-led movements calling for an end to the genocide in Gaza and an end to the occupation of Palestine.

The carols are beloved Christmas songs that have been re-written into songs of hope, promise, peace, justice, and liberation for the people in Gaza. We sang songs like “Joy to the World”:

*Joy to the world! We have a choice  
To end this genocide!  
It's our tax dollars funding it  
Our politicians blunder it  
We won't stand idly by,  
We won't stand idly by,  
While thousands and thousands die  
We say, cease fire*

Songs like “Good Christian Friends Rejoice”:

*Good Christian friends rejoice  
With heart and soul and voice  
Give ye heed to what we say  
We call for cease-fire today  
We ask what would Jesus do?  
In Palestine, he'd stand for you  
End the war today, end the war today*

*Good Christian friends rejoice  
With heart and soul and voice  
Different views and different faiths  
Can all agree on what's at stake  
No more genocidal wars  
No more bombs at children's doors  
Christ was born for this! Christ was born for this!*

We sang “White Christmas (I'm Dreaming of a Ceasefire)”:

*I'm dreaming of a ceasefire  
A peace to last a thousand years  
Where we un-learn hatreds  
Where lives are sacred  
Where folks bravely face their fears*

*I'm dreaming of a ceasefire  
With every breath that I release  
May our days see justice and peace  
And may all hostilities be ceased<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1JKiZKYNOo9McaXKPx\\_-8Wi-\\_6ZxfduBo/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1JKiZKYNOo9McaXKPx_-8Wi-_6ZxfduBo/edit)

People across the world have been ceasefire caroling, hoping the words from these songs will create a more peaceful, just, liberative world for our Palestinian siblings.

Singing songs for a ceasefire may seem like a small action when you think about the massive scale of what is happening, but it's still important. Mary was a teenage girl living under the occupation of the Roman empire, but that didn't stop her from singing about the unborn child in her womb.

Mary sang anyway. Mary knew she was bearing the Son of God, the Prince of Peace. Mary knew her son was the light and life that was coming to break through. Mary knew that her son had always been and would always be the one who scatters the proud and brings down the powerful, the one who sends the rich away empty, the one who lifts up the lowly and fills the hungry, the one who always stands with and for the most oppressed in the world. Mary sang a song of hope and promise about the Christ-child, knowing that he is love-incarnate, the hope of the world.

It won't be long now, friends. Just a couple more days. We've been waiting, hoping, praying, singing. Pretty soon now the holy family will arrive in an over-crowded Bethlehem and Mary will feel the pangs of labor. Emmanuel is coming. The Prince of Peace is coming. Listen and join the song of hope and promise, because Jesus is coming and nothing can stop him.