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An Advent Message: Singing for the Birth of a Child.

Wendy and I have three children. Those of you who have had children or have had children in your life can probably relate to the happy anticipation and high anxiety of that *first* birth. Our first child was Martina. We entered the hospital on a warm morning, exactly thirty-seven years ago today. I remember, after Wendy had been in labor for a day and a night, a heart monitor suddenly indicated that Martina was in grave danger. So, there was a quick, emergency cesarean performed. I can recall being told that if I wanted to be in the room when the surgery was performed, I had better quickly jump out of my clothes and into a pair of scrubs that a nurse was handing me. I stripped to my underwear and changed in the hallway.

Martina was born just fine, but she was extremely low on blood sugar, and she was cold. So, a nurse quickly handed me Martina – I felt like I was being passed a football by the quarterback – and I was told to follow the nurse down the hall. We half ran. I ended up feeding Martina a bottle of sugar water while standing under a powerful heat lamp – which melted my hair. I spent much of the next 24 hours with Martina because Wendy needed medical help herself after the protracted labor and lightning cesarean.

It was great to bond with my child that way. When I finally left the hospital, after spending two days and two nights there, I walked out of the sliding glass doors of the old north Boulder Community Hospital facility only to discover that the sunny weather we had been having had given way to an icy cold, heavy snowstorm. I was wearing cotton pants and a tee shirt as I dug my car out. But I wasn't cold. I wasn't angry. I was joyous. That's what having a child is all about. I remember singing the Rolling Stones song *You Can't Always Get What You Want*. I did indeed get what I needed.

The following is from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 1. It describes an angel telling Zechariah, the husband of Elizabeth, that after so many long years of trying to have a child, they would have one. That child would be John the Baptist, who would usher in Jesus' ministry and personally baptize Jesus:

While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. ¹² Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. ¹³ But the angel said, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John. ¹⁴ You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great in the eyes of the Lord.

We will soon celebrate the birth of another child: Jesus. No matter how big or how small our immediate family is, whether we are surrounded by loved ones on Christmas morning or whether we find ourselves with no other people around us, we are never alone. There is one child who was born into all of our immediate families.

Jesus came to this world to be with every one of us – and he will never leave our side.

There are parts of the Bible that we believe people sang. The Psalms are primary examples, and we know that some of them were used in ancient Jewish and Christian services, and others were sung when Israelites made pilgrimages to Jerusalem for festivals, such as Passover. There are some passages that, in the Bible, are clearly spoken words, but are often formatted as poetry in our Bible translations, and they have been turned into beautiful hymns. A very famous poetic passage comes from the mouth of Mary, when she learns that she will have a child. It is a prophesy of how important her child will be. There is a very famous version of it called the *Magnificat*. It is frequently sung in Roman and Greek Catholic orthodox churches, and it is often used in Protestant services. The words, as found in Luke are clearly reminiscent of Hannah’s words in 1st Samuel, and this is also sometimes sung. Hannah praises the grace of God and affirms her faith. She also thanks God for the birth of her son, Samuel. In Mary’s song, she is deliberately drawing a parallel between Hannah’s joy and hers, and subtly, she is telling us that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophesy of a Messiah. This is Mary, the mother of Jesus, quoted from the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 1, verses 46 to 55:

*“My soul magnifies the Lord,
47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
48 for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.*

*Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,
49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name;
50 indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
51 He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
52 He has brought down the powerful from their thrones
and lifted up the lowly;
53 he has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty.
54 He has come to the aid of his child Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
55 according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”*

So, let's sing in praise of the birth of a child, the child who taught us about peace, empathy, forgiveness, and regeneration. Amen.