

We are the people

[Luke 1:39-55](#)

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A few years ago, I tried to buy Johanna some jewelry for Christmas. I figured that that was something that husbands are supposed to do, and since I hadn't done it since I bought her engagement ring, it was probably overdue. So I went to the mall, and I went into the first jewelry store I found, and an exceedingly cheerful salesperson started showing me all sorts of very lovely things, and I nodded and smiled and tried to very subtly turn each thing just enough so I could get a glimpse at the price tag. And when I finally was able to see one of the tags, the first and only thought that came to my mind was – I am in the wrong store. I don't belong here. This place is too good for the likes of me. This must be where Oprah shops. This tiny little doodad I was holding cost more than every single thing I own in the entire world put together. We're talking, like, thousands of dollars here. I needed to get out of that store as quickly as possible, hopefully without letting on to the salesperson that I was in way over my head here, so I made some kind of plausible excuse – “oh dear, I seem to have left my monocle in my other tuxedo” – and I ran, and never looked back.

Some places in this world are very good at making you feel like you don't belong. Maybe it's the clothing store where the only sizes

available are too small, or the gym where everyone else is in perfect shape. Maybe it's a party where you don't know anyone and can't seem to strike up a conversation, or your first day in a country where you don't speak the language. Sometimes the people around us make us feel like we don't belong, and sometimes we do it to ourselves – we tell ourselves we're not good enough to be in this place, be with these people. Even in places where we know we should be safe – at work, with friends, with family – even then, we can sometimes feel like we're not good enough, like we don't really belong.

And to be honest, for a lot of people, church is a place where they feel like they don't belong. You walk in those doors, and you look around at all these Christians everywhere, with ties and dresses and lovely smiles, well-behaved children and perfect hair, all laughing politely at church-appropriate humour, and you feel like your life is a mess. You just barely managed to get breakfast into your kids or yourself, you're wearing your last clean shirt, and you can think of a million different ways that week you failed to be the person you're sure you're supposed to be. And somehow Christmas just makes it worse. Christmas adds a thousand other things to that list of what you're supposed to do, what you need to have in order to feel appropriately festive, lights on the house, cards in the mail, gifts wrapped under the tree with few extra just in case someone drops in unexpectedly, perfectly baked Christmas-themed treats in both gluten-free and gluten-full

varieties, and if you don't get all this done by December 1st with a smile on your face, you are a Christmas failure, pa-rum-pa-pum-pum. And if you feel like a failure, if you feel like everyone else has it all figured out and you're a mess, then it's easy to hear that story of the baby in the manger and figure that it's not for you. You can't be one of those people, you just don't belong.

And if you feel that way, if you've ever felt that way, I think it might help to know that Mary probably felt that way too. She was a peasant girl, an unmarried teenager in a backwater little town in the middle of nowhere, and an angel shows up and tells her that she's going to become pregnant with the Son of God, which is a hard thing to accept. There's no possible way you could feel good enough, worthy enough to do something so unthinkable as become the Mother of God. And of course, it won't be long before the people of Nazareth start noticing Mary's growing belly. It's no wonder that Mary immediately gets out of town before all the neighbours start pointing fingers and wondering who the father is; before the entire town starts treating her like an outcast, Mary leaves Nazareth and travels to stay with her relative, Elizabeth. She tries to find a place to hide, a place to be safe, a place where she feels like she belongs.

But before Mary arrives, Elizabeth knows that something incredible has happened, and if Mary was feeling unimportant or unworthy or insignificant, well, Elizabeth feels the same way. She tells

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?”

Mary leaves Nazareth because the people there will see her as a failure, a cautionary tale, but in Elizabeth’s eyes, Mary isn’t unworthy, she isn’t a failure. She’s blessed, incredibly blessed, just as she is. In Elizabeth’s eyes, Mary brings honour and blessing wherever she goes, because Elizabeth can see that Mary carries the Son of God with her, and even if Mary feels unworthy of that great responsibility, even if Mary feels like she can’t possibly live up to this incredible blessing she’s been given, it can’t change the fact that God has made Mary worthy, God has made Mary blessed, not because of who she is, but because of who God is.

That’s what Mary’s song is all about. Mary gives thanks to God for what has happened to her – she praises God for taking this lowly servant girl and making her someone extraordinary, someone who from now on, all generations will call blessed. That’s the kind of God Mary knows – God takes lowly people, unworthy people, poor and humble and hungry, and with those ordinary people God does extraordinary things. God lifts up the lowly, God fills the hungry with good things to eat, God exalts the humble. It doesn’t matter how unworthy they might believe themselves to be, in the eyes of God, they are people who can do tremendous things, people who can change the world.

Because that’s really the whole point of Christmas. God looked at a planet filled with unworthy people whose lives were a mess, who were

insignificant, who didn't belong, and God decided that those people were worth dying for. God decided that we were worth dying for. When we couldn't find a place to belong, God decided to belong with us, to enter into this world and join us in the messes we made for ourselves and make us worthy, make us exceptional, make us extraordinary because we have God with us, we carry Jesus Christ, the Son of God, here in our hearts, here in our lives. We can never see ourselves as unworthy, as unimportant, as insignificant, because God has decided that we belong to him, we belong with him, and because of God's love for us, because of God's choosing to be with us, no matter who we are, we matter to him, no matter where we go, we belong.

And that means that if you're here today, you are right where you belong. You are right where God has called you to be. It doesn't matter how much of a mess the rest of your life might be today. It doesn't matter how you think you measure up to the people sitting around you. It doesn't matter if you think that this story isn't for you, this moment isn't for you, this child isn't for you, because the truth is that whoever you are, whatever you've done, Jesus Christ came for you. Jesus Christ was born for you, he died for you, he decided you're worth it. He decided that you belong with him. And there is nothing you can do that can change that. Our God lifts up the lowly, brings food to the hungry, rescues the imprisoned, seeks and saves the lost. The love of Jesus Christ that came to us at Christmas is here for you, and there is nothing

that can separate you from that love, not death or life, not our fears for today or our worries about tomorrow, nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. So celebrate, and give thanks – his love is with us, now and forever, everywhere we go. Amen