

Joyful, joyful, we adore Thee, God of opening to the sun above.
Hearts unfold like flowers before Thee, glory, Lord of love;
Giver of immortal gladness, fill us with the light of day;
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness, drive the dark of doubt away;

Unseemly Exaltation

WE ARE FAST APPROACHING THE FESTIVE HOLIDAY SEASON—a season rich with gratitude and adoration. Here in the United States we will soon be celebrating our Thanksgiving—a time when we, as believers, give thanks not only for the bounty from the land, but for all blessings showered upon us by a gracious and generous God. Then, a month later, we will celebrate the more global holiday of Christmas, when we give thanks again for God the Father's ultimate gift: the child, Jesus—God incarnate. In November we give thanks for *material* bounty; in December we give thanks for *spiritual* bounty—and all of it from above.

This season is also one of joy, but many of us will suppress the joy welling up from our hearts, either from our self-imposed inhibitions, or from the traditions to which we subscribe. Because of the church traditions in which we were raised, or because of the practices of the church where we now attend, our joy over God's overflowing, immeasurable grace may not be expressed in a vocal or physical way.

Perhaps this is not a problem for you; in your church thanksgiving and praise are expressed verbally—even extravagantly. But it may be that the practice has turned back on itself. Perhaps it has become so common—or, worse, expected—that the joy is contrived, artificial, mechanical.

Perhaps the consensus in your more restrained congregation is that “we don’t do that sort of thing here.” Demonstrative expressions of praise and joy are frowned upon. The pastor or a church elder are always ready to draw one aside with a little friendly counsel about such unseemly, undignified behavior.

Undignified Adoration

Michal, the sourpuss wife of King David, was a stodgy curmudgeon. The Ark of the Covenant—that artifact so central to Jewish worship—had been moved several times after being recovered from the Philistines, who had captured it at the battle at Ebenezer. David was determined to bring it back to Jerusalem, and, if he had anything to say about it, have it installed in a brand new temple of his making.

Now it was told King David, saying, “The Lord has blessed the house of Obed-edom and all that belongs to him, on account of the ark of God.” David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the city of David with gladness. And David was dancing before the Lord with all his might, and David was wearing a linen ephod.

(2 Samuel 6:12,14)

Just picture it: King David is thoroughly outside of himself, bubbling over with joy and praise to God, shouting and singing, trumpets blaring. The king is so filled with adoration for his Lord that he can no longer contain his joy, and begins dancing about as hard as he can. But then the wife caught the display.

Then it happened as the ark of the Lord came into the city of David that Michal the daughter of Saul looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart. But when David returned to bless his household, Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David and said, “How the king of Israel distinguished himself today! He uncovered himself today in the eyes of his servants’ maids as one of the foolish ones shamelessly uncovers himself!”

(2 Samuel 6:16,20)

Church traditions can be a wonderful thing. They ground us, they encourage unity, they make us stronger as a body. Church traditions can bind together like-minded personalities; individuals congregate with those of similar beliefs and habits to become stronger in their faith and relationship to God.

Traditionalism, however, can quickly become a barrier to authentic expressions of praise. Rank, deeply-imbedded traditionalism can sour the spirit in a church. And isn’t it odd that so many of our traditions go against Scripture itself. Dancing is a good example. Do people dance in your church? How about in private; have you ever “danced before the Lord?”

“Well,” you (or someone else) might say, “such carrying on is coarse and vulgar. It’s just showing off in front of others. Not acceptable.”

Undignified. That’s what Michal said to King David. She accused him of showing off for the servant girls. Vulgar exhibitionism. But

that was not at all what had taken place.

So David said to Michal, “It was before the Lord, who chose me above your father and above all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the Lord, over Israel; therefore I will celebrate before the Lord. I will be more lightly esteemed than this and will be humble in my own eyes, but with the maids of whom you have spoken, with them I will be distinguished.”

(2 Samuel 6:21-22)

Thou art giving and forgiving, ever blessing,
Wellspring of the joy of living, ocean depth of happy rest!
Thou our Father, Christ our Brother—all who live in love are Thine;
Teach us how to love each other, lift us to the Joy divine.
(Henry Van Dyke)

Spinning with Joy!

King David’s dancing was *for the Lord*. He was simply demonstrating his love for the Lord in a physical, expressive way. No matter what his contemptuous wife thought, he wasn’t showing off for the servant girls at all, but joyfully expressing his thanksgiving and love for his God.

Much like God shows His love for us.

“The Lord your God is in your midst,
A victorious warrior.
He will exult over you with joy,
He will be quiet in His love,
He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.”

(Zephaniah 3:17)

The word translated “rejoice” in this verse is a joy that expresses itself in the gestures of the body. It means, literally, to spin around.

In other words, *God dances over us with singing!* His love for us is so full that, at times, it must be expressed physically.

Our God—unlike Saul’s daughter, and some of her kin in our churches today— isn’t a stodgy curmudgeon. He loves us and cares about us—and sometimes leaps about with joy over us. *We’re* usually the stodgy curmudgeons. Like Michal, we’re the ones too inhibited, too proud to demonstrate our adoration of the Lord. But He is never inhibited; God is never too proud to dance joyfully for us.

During this season of thanksgiving, if the emotion is real and true, if your praise is grounded in “spirit and truth,” if the adoration and joy welling up inside you is authentic then let it out! Go ahead, and dance before the Lord with all your might. 