



Hi, I'm Elisa Preston. You're listening to the Blue Christmas collection for the Praise Through It podcast.

Christmas is not the most wonderful time of the year for *everyone*. Various life circumstances and happenings can steal the joy of the season right from us. We experience grief, hurt, faintness of heart, and messy spirits.

The good news, though? No matter the state of our hearts? Christmas with Jesus offers grace, healing, faithfulness & mercy.

We bring him grief; He gives us grace.
We bring him hurt; He offers healing.
We bring him faintness of heart; He remains faithful.
We bring him our messy spirits & selves; He extends mercy.

Join me for this four-part series, each episode a snippet of hope, especially if your Christmas is more blue than it is merry & bright.

(soft piano music)

Joyful, Joyful
Lord we adore thee
God of glory
Lord of Love
Hearts unfold
Like flowers before thee
Opening to the sun above

Melt the clouds
Of sin and sadness

Drive the dark of doubt away.

I hear this song in Lauren Hill's brilliant, beautiful register as I sing it to myself because she sang it in *Sister Act II*, which I know is not a Christmas movie. Still, I let the words move my heart, move my feet too because you can't stand still when your whole self is moved by something. Just like when she sings *My Eye Is on the Sparrow*.

The author's inspiration for this hymn was the Berkshires, a small mountain range in western Massachusetts. But should we call any mountain range small? In comparison to other fuller ranges, sure. In and of itself, the Berkshire mountain range is not small - the peaks and valleys go high and low; the presence of this geographical landmark is unmistakable.

When we think of mountains, we think of valleys.

If we place that visual into our actual lives, we know that we hit peaks and valleys in our faith on a regular basis. We feel faint. We have a hard time mustering the energy to remain faithful. We're in a valley, we're tired, we don't know how to walk back up the mountain. Or even if we do know *how* to, we don't have the energy to do so.

This hymn reminds us that it is God who can melt those clouds. It is God who can drive away the dark. It is not up to you and your energy level to do those things. God is a God of glory, He is Lord of Love, His son is the Prince of Peace. He wants our whole hearts, and He knows that sometimes we don't have the energy to offer them. So He swoops in and cradles our hearts for us. He restores us back to full energy, full capacity, so that we may see His goodness once again.

Someone once told me I didn't have to live with my ailments; I could pray and they'd surely go away. We could talk about a lot of things that are wrong with that absolute sentence, but let's focus on this: our ailments, our faintness, does not make us weak in the way we culturally think of weakness. When we are faint and our souls are weary, that's when Jesus comes in. We break so we can heal with him. Our faintness is the right kind; the kind that helps us see and experience Jesus more fully.

During the Christmas season, any kind of faintness can be either multiplied or ignored. It can be multiplied because the pressure to be jubilant can weigh so heavy on an already burdened soul. It can be ignored because some of us are very good at keeping ourselves busy and distracted.

But that busyness and that faintness multiplication and ignoring both have the same antidote - Jesus. We can remove the pressure of having a Hobby Lobby Hallmark Christmas this year and we can just ... be. We can rest. We can hand our faint hearts to God and let him lift the clouds of

sin and sadness. We can ask Him to open our hearts. We can invite him into the valley, invite him into our weary souls, and ask Him to make our faith whole again.

When Jesus lay in the manger, his mama was probably very tired. They had traveled far, they had been turned away. Her faith had been tested and though she remained faithful to God, believing the angel Gabriel's words, she still had to be pretty tired. I think about her when I think about being tired & when I think about being faint. I think about how she just took one step at a time, remained faithful to her task of caring for the child in her arms. And I think of how her faith grew out of her faintness.

There are no stories in the New Testament of how Mary hustled through her faintness. There are no stories in the New Testament of how Mary just pushed through to make it all better. Instead, there is a story of a mom who treasured, meditated on, and rested in the goodness of God. She kind of faded from the rest of the birth story as it's written in scripture, and maybe that's because she was tired. And she rested. And she listened to the angel tell her, Do not be afraid. She allowed herself to be faint, and she knew it had nothing to do with her faith.

This Christmas season, may you allow yourself to slowly bridge the gap between faint and faith, not counting one as more or less holy than the other. In your faintness, remember God's strength is made perfect in those moments because our weakness isn't a sin to him; it's beauty to him. And in your faith, remember God's strength and grace are the perfecters of that faith and that even though we feel finite, he is anything but.

Today...

May your faint heart find rest in the easy yoke of a relationship with Christ.

May your faint heart find faith in knowing that it's mostly God's job to nourish your weary soul back to life, and resting in His faithfulness is a great way to let Him do that.

May your faint heart find confidence in the trinity, with a Father who offers hope for the hurt, a Son who offers grace for the grief, and a Holy Spirit who guides you through the mess by opening your eyes to God's great mercy.

(soft piano music)

Thank you so much for joining me for this Blue Christmas series. I'll be back the first week in January and Praise Through It will go back to the regular rhythm of a podcast every other week and a blessing meditation for the in-between weeks. If you want more from me, I'd love to meet you in your Inbox! I send emails on Mondays and Fridays - we start our week with encouragement & blessings, and we end our week with adulting tips framed around the Enneagram going into the weekend so that when you're home with your people you all continue

to get along. Starting in January we'll be doing mini lessons on every number of the Enneagram, one each week. Head to elisapreston.com for those.

Wishing you a week filled with knowable grace, hope, healing, mercy & faith. I'll see you in 2022.