

January 7, 2018

A Sincere Faith

Daniel 1:8-21

At Russo's grocery store in Watertown, Massachusetts, owner Tony Russo has a tradition of hiring live musicians to perform Christmas carols during the holiday season. This past Christmas during a sound check, Russo learned that one of his part-time clerks has "the voice of an angel." Gilly Assuncao, a 23-year-old computer student from Brazil, hopes to study music at Berklee College of Music in Boston. A video of Assuncao singing "O Holy Night" while surrounded by poinsettias in the produce section has gone viral.¹ Customer April Berry-Fletcher said, "It makes me feel very happy that despite all the turmoil in the world right now there are these little moments that we can treasure and share together."²

In today's lesson, our author writes of the exiles living in Babylon who "had to figure out what maintaining identity meant."³ They struggled with how to stay true to their Jewish faith while being oppressed by an empire determined to squash everything Jewish. Our author challenges us today: "Christians face subtle choices about what it means to live as a Christian in American society."⁴ We struggle with how to express our Christian faith while many in society want to squash our expressions.

Tony Russo makes a choice every year to offer live Christmas music in his grocery store. Gilly Assuncao makes a choice to lift the spirits of shoppers with his gift of music. An expression of belief in the story of Jesus's birth becomes a little moment that customers and employees can treasure and share.

1. Describe a moment this past Christmas season that you treasured and shared with a stranger.
2. How was the Exile designed to strip the Israelites (and other conquered nations) of their identity? Why was it important to the Israelites to maintain their identity?
3. What situations have you faced recently that help you define what it means to live as a Christian in our society? When is it a struggle to express your Christian faith?

Reverend Katie Shockley is a licensed local pastor and serves as pastor of Community United Methodist Church in Copeville, Texas.

¹From "Student Sings Christmas Carols During Part-Time Job at Grocery Store," on *ABC World News Tonight*, at ABC News (abcnews.go.com/WNT/video/student-sings-christmas-carols-part-time-job-grocery-51918304).

²From "Singing Deli Worker Delights Customers at Watertown Store," by CBS Boston, on You Tube ([youtube.com/watch?v=hDZUj2pZ7zk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hDZUj2pZ7zk)).

³From *Adult Bible Studies*, Winter 2017-2018, by Chuck Aaron (Cokesbury, 2017); page 43.

⁴From *Adult Bible Studies*; page 45.