

Luke 1:46-56
Mary's Song
Rev. Jonathan P. Cornell
12-21-14

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

What we have before us here is an example of a first century baby shower. You'll notice Mary didn't confide in her own mother, definitely not Joseph. No. Women, you know it's true that those pregnant tummies are like magnets. I could swear my wife has a sixth sense for when there is fellow woman in term nearby. So, of course, Mary goes immediately to her sister-in-arms, or should I say her sister-in-bellies, Elizabeth. These two women, each as unlikely as the other to find themselves in maternity wear, are holding hands and leaping for joy because somehow, by a stroke of the miraculous, they are going to be moms.

This is quite a pair, Elizabeth and Mary. Elizabeth, who is laughably beyond her childbearing years, and Mary, who as a virgin and unwed, finds herself in a situation that's not so much humorous as it is horrifying. To the outside world, it was a scandal; for Mary, it must have been downright terrifying. That is, until God gets to her. For each of these women, God interrupts their expectation and surprises them with unexpected good news.

Presumably, Elizabeth had probably come to terms with the fact that kids were no longer in the cards for she and Ol' Zechariah; remember, he's still in the picture, we just can't hear him...cause he's mute. For them, it would be nieces and nephews who would receive their parental affections. Elizabeth and Zechariah had grown accustomed to their disappointment.

But at the moment they least expected, God interrupted their lives. Now Elizabeth is trading her walker for a stroller, her Lazyboy for a baby bjorns. Elizabeth, at long last, was getting her heart's deepest desire, and she needed to get used to it.

Mary, on the other hand, was blindsided by her news. I find it ironic that the angel says to her, "Greetings, you who are highly favored." For Mary, being highly favored meant she was going to be pregnant and unmarried, would have to travel 90 miles from home to give birth in a barn surrounded by animals, and then flee to Egypt because her neurotic

king wanted her baby killed. Turns out that being highly favored by God is hazardous to your health. Mary's expectations were also dramatically interrupted.

We all can relate in one way or another to God's timing with these two. For some of us, we've waited for something for so long that we've begun to lose faith; we've gotten comfortable in our despair. One thing this story does is remind us: don't ever become so resigned to your circumstance that you're immune to amazement. The fact of the matter is just as the messenger Gabriel says a few verses earlier, **"Nothing is impossible with God."**

For others, maybe like Mary, you've been blindsided by some news that all of a sudden changes your life completely. One of the lessons Mary and Elizabeth remind us of is that control is not one of the gifts God gives in the 12 days of Christmas. Unlike the nauseatingly consumeristic Christmas message that says you create your perfect holiday, Christmas says, "Just you try and control your experience."

I mean, can you imagine what Mary was thinking as she pondered all these things in her heart? She and Joseph are planning their picture perfect wedding, then the angel comes and tells Mary, "Yeah, so here's the thing, the baby inside you, you didn't know was there until just now, that baby is God." So, yeah, no extra pressure there.

This is a lot of pressure. I mean, there has never been a perfect human being, until now, and Mary's thinking, "How in the world am I going to raise him?" What is she to do when Jesus gets to be a little boy, or a teenager? Some of you know what it's like to live with or raise a know-it-all. Maybe you even know someone with a God complex. Imagine being responsible for raising the first person for whom it's not a complex. Imagine when Jesus was a little boy and decided he didn't want to eat his vegetables at the dinner table.

Mary: Jesus, eat your vegetables.

Jesus: My vegetables are to do the will of the father.

How do you respond to that? I mean it's going to be in the Bible someday.

Mary: Not as long as you live under my roof.

Mary and Elizabeth have their lives gloriously interrupted. Both of them represent the close of one age, the age of Old Testament prophets, and the dawning of the new day, a new covenant a new hope. So the reality is, they have no choice but to trust because there's no earthly reason why they should be there in the first place. And the gospel message of this season and this day is that is the absolute best place to be: vulnerable, dependent, utterly trusting in the holy interruption.

In the midst of their shock and amazement, Mary and Elizabeth remain so refreshingly human. Even though there must be so many questions. How am I to raise this child? What will happen when he leaves my care? Will he be rejected by his peers? Would he be persecuted for the person he is? Will suffering be a part of his story? So many

questions; so much interruption, Elizabeth empathizes with Mary for the burden she herself would have to carry.

But then the scene turns to Mary, who to this point in the text has been silent. Mary opens her mouth, not with words of trepidation and fear for her unlikely and scandalous estate, but with the very first Christmas Carol, the most beautiful and important hymn of praise our world has ever known.

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked upon the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed for he who is mighty has done great things for me and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts, he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.

Mary, in the midst of her life being interrupted, looks up and sings a song of praise to God. These are not only some of the most beautiful and hopeful words, but they are also some of the most subversive and politically scandalous words ever spoken. In her innocence and vulnerability and praise, Mary also issues this grave warning: God will turn the tables.

Did you know that until the early 1980s, in countries like Guatemala, the Philippines, and the former East Germany, it was illegal to read these words aloud in public, they were that charged. Mary's Song is not only a hymn of praise, it's also a warning. A revolution is coming, but it won't look how you think it's going to look. It will come in peace, in compassion, in mercy and in suffering. The lowly are going to inherit the earth, the song will go on to say. And that is a message that interrupts many hearers.

Of course, we can't read Mary's song without a twinge of despair because we know that her love will also lead her to stand by the side of her son at Calvary.

But in the midst of all the questions and confusion, she looks up, and Mary's heart soars because she can see through the gloom and despair. She can see the Morning Star of a new day dawning for those who walked in deep darkness. Mary relinquished control and trusted in God. You'll notice that after verse 46, every verse of this song has God as the subject. It's a song of praise for God's goodness, God's power, God's mercy. In trust, Mary was able to put her expectations aside and say in the not-yet-uttered words of her son, "Not my will but thine be done."

Mary was able to humble herself, hand over her expectations, and prepare herself to witness the work of God almighty. You know, so often we get so consumed with "my life." What am I to do with "my life?" Maybe that's what is at the root of our frustrations. We're so worried about "my life" that we don't see clearly. Christmas is about God's life

and the life God is cultivating in you. And like Mary, it begins when we humble ourselves before God.

When Elizabeth and Mary met, the Bible says that the Elizabeth's baby leapt for joy within her. When we focus on the coming Savior, perhaps something will leap within you. Something old that was lost, like hope, might spring once again for joy. That something that stirs within you, that makes you restless, maybe you don't even know what it is. That something is preparing the way of the Lord. It leaps because God is still at work in you.

We have only a few more days before Christmas Eve. Don't get so distracted that you miss it. Don't get so consumed with controlling Christmas that you don't allow yourself to be captivated once more by the mystery of God's Word becoming flesh. And when you come near, let your soul ring out as Mary's did, and magnify, magnify, magnify.