

Advent Devotional December 22, 2018

Scripture

Luke 1:39-56

³⁹In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴²and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

⁴⁶And Mary said,

 "My soul magnifies the Lord,
⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
⁴⁸ for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
 Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
 and holy is his name.
⁵⁰ His mercy is for those who fear him
 from generation to generation.
⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;
 he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
 and lifted up the lowly;
⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things,
 and sent the rich away empty.
⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
 in remembrance of his mercy,
⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
 to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

⁵⁶And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

Devotional

The Rev. Dr. Catherine Brall, Director, Field Education

As the oldest child in a family of seven children, I have memories of family vacations that always include a good dose of long rides in a packed car, buoyed along by our family's singing one of the many simple songs we still sing when we gather these days, yet frequently punctuated with the plaintive question by one of my siblings, "Are we there yet?" Here we find ourselves today, with nearly 90 percent of the season of Advent behind us and with only three days remaining until Christmas. Are we so ready for Christmas that we wish it were already here, or even over, or would we prefer a few more days to get everything on our to-do lists checked off?

This account in Luke's Gospel relates the wondrous meeting of Elizabeth and Mary—each both joyfully (miraculously!) pregnant and yet likely also aware of the very real complexities that accompanied the bearing of their sons. Elizabeth was old and had been barren—certainly a shameful condition made worse by her husband's profession of being a priest. At her advanced age it would be more difficult for her to care for her child, and she probably was not likely to live to see him reach adulthood. On the other hand, Mary was too young a woman—by today's standards a mere child who was called to bear the son of God. The older man to whom she was betrothed had every right to leave her in the lurch (or

worse), as he knew the child she carried was not his. The circumstances of both Elizabeth's and Mary's lives were "complicated," as we like to say—perhaps much more so than most of our lives are, even with the difficult dynamics of blended families, political differences around the dinner table, and rushing around to get everything ready three days before the big holiday.

What Mary and Elizabeth model for us is the joy of knowing that, in the midst of their difficult predicaments, they are exactly where God would have them to be. They are both blessed for believing that God would fulfill what God had brought into their lives. They have learned that life with God is a continuous journey, rather than a stable place at which to arrive. They encourage us to hope and believe that God will be with us in the difficult predicaments of our lives—even those right around the corner that are coming with this year's celebration of the Christmas holidays.

When Elizabeth hears Mary's greeting, the child inside her leaps for joy and she is filled with the Holy Spirit. Do we each have an "inner child"—a part of ourselves at the core of our being that is open, receptive, and perhaps even longing to be filled again with the Holy Spirit? Are we there yet?

Prayer

Come, Holy Spirit, come. Come remind us of all the promises that God has spoken to us through the years, even as we await the coming of the Christ child once again. Help us to be with God, here, now, and always—with joy in the midst of our many predicaments. Amen.