

Luke 1:39-55

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. 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 powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever." (*See also Micah 5:2-5a*)

"Expectations Abound"

Last week I went to see the movie *The Nativity*. The directors chose to portray the teenaged Mary as struggling to understand how God's plan would unfold. Considering her circumstances as an unwed pregnant teen, this was probably a realistic depiction. Mary's decision to visit to Elizabeth, who the angel proclaimed pregnant as well, marked her passage of understanding and acceptance in the film. Upon arriving at Zechariah and Elizabeth's home Mary greets Elizabeth from behind. The child kicks in Elizabeth's womb and the older woman smiles broadly and turns holding open her arms. After the two embrace, Elizabeth cups Mary's face tenderly in her hands and delightedly cries, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

Seeing the scene enacted by realistically aged characters helped me realize something that had never occurred to me before. The women needed each other to comprehend all that God would do through them. By sharing their expectations they became the first Christian community! Two powerless pregnant women became the first believers in Jesus the Christ!

Though Jesus is not yet born Mary's lips bear a message of the future he will bring about. "Mary sings of the whole new order of things that God is creating all around us, one in which the hungry are filled with good things and the rich, who have unwisely filled up on so much that does not satisfy, are emptied so that they can have their real hungers met at last."¹ These reversals of God seemed as impossible to claim in Mary's day as they do now. Claiming God's promises, while waiting for their fulfillment, became the church's proclamation of faith in Jesus Christ over time. Elizabeth's blessing and Mary's song have been passed on to us by the ancient church who professed them as their own. The two bear pregnant expectation, meaning new life is breaking into the

world—even now. In the women’s words we are given hope; in their actions we find a way to live.

Life might try to teach us to expect little of anyone or anything. We even believe at times that the only person we can rely on is ourselves. The gift of Jesus Christ, of God incarnate, teaches us instead to expect everything of and from God. Steadfast love, generosity, faithfulness, suffering for our sake, empathy. In expectant hope Elizabeth and Mary “discern that the future God has planned is bleeding...into the here and now....signs of the great reversal are everywhere.”² We proclaim God’s saving work in our midst and God’s final triumph over the principalities and powers that seem to rule the world.

Paul Haidostian, the president of Haigazian University, a school of the Armenian Evangelical Church in Beirut, Lebanon, recently wrote that when the University resumed for classes on August 23, in the aftermath of a month of violence between Israel and insurgents in southern Lebanon, and the students from various backgrounds and ideologies regathered, “we began to recapture our opportunity to create an atmosphere of dialogue among them, to rekindle their zest for education, to reconfigure their hopelessness into creativity, to re-treat their disappointment in God and humanity with examples and messages of faithful service, and to re-create all the positive and beautiful things that Lebanon has been known by. In this politically volcanic region of the world, and amidst the uncertainties of the present and the future, I celebrate our faith in a God who sustains us in everything. This is our belief, our experience, and our hope for the future.”³

Mary, Elizabeth and Paul show us the way to proclaim the good news. They share a way to live by faith as they share their stories of God doing a new thing no matter what the situation “appears” to be from an outside perspective. God cups our faces as Elizabeth did Mary’s and blesses us in our belief that there will be a fulfillment of God’s promises to us in Christ. May the Spirit assure each one of us and help us to share the good news as we know it with the world. Amen.

¹ “Double Vision” in Living by the Word in *The Christian Century*, December 12, 2006. P. 19.

² Ibid, 19.

³ “Ceasefire among the Cedars – Rebuilding Beirut” by Paul Haidostian in inSpire Magazine, Princeton Theological Seminary, Fall 2006.