

IV Advent Year B Luke 1:26-38 The Rev. Gail Davis December 18, 2011

Two women meet in the hill country. Given the time and place, 2,000 years ago in a Judean town, they are looked upon by society as insignificant because they are women and they are poor. Elizabeth, the older one, is the wife of a priest, but she has been barren up until now. This is yet another reason that she is considered insignificant. And here she is, late in life, finally pregnant, and this too is an embarrassment.

The younger one, Mary, is a poor young girl from Nazareth; she is pregnant with her first child but unmarried. She visits her cousin; maybe to get away from the gossip that surrounds her condition. Maybe even to give Joseph, her betrothed some time to think about the situation. They certainly are not considered women of privilege.

Elizabeth recognizes something in Mary that is beyond the ordinary, something revealed to her by the Holy Spirit. She calls Mary “the mother of my Lord,” and gives her a blessing. Zechariah, who has been silent ever since the beginning of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, would probably say that Elizabeth is crazy if he could talk.

In his book, *Peculiar Treasures*, Frederick Buechner wrote:
“She struck the angel Gabriel as hardly old enough to have a child at all, let alone this child, but he’d been entrusted with a message to give her and he gave it. He told her what the child was to be named, and who he was to be, and something about the mystery that was to come upon her.

‘You mustn’t be afraid, Mary,’ he said. And as he said it, he only hoped she wouldn’t notice that beneath the great, golden wings, he himself was trembling with fear to think that the whole future of creation hung now on the answer of a girl.”

The whole future of creation hung now on the answer of a girl. Imagine all the angels gathered around, looking down, holding their collective breath. “What will she say? Will she do it? C’mon Mary, say yes!” Because they all know the way God works is only by allowing people to freely to answer “yes.”

God respects our freedom, and has, since those days way back in the Garden. If it were not so, God wouldn’t have to come up with new ways to reach out to us, to ask us again and again to say yes-freely say yes to God. And now those ways had to be culminated in this very moment, when an angel stands before a girl, answering her questions, his knees knocking together, trying to keep the quiver out of his voice, as he and all the angelic host and even God in wait. Will she do it? Will she say, “Yes”?

We know the answer Mary gave: “Here am I, servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word.” Here am I servant of the Lord. With this answer, all the heavens rejoice, and the plan is set in motion that would cause a new light to shine in the darkness, new hope, new peace, new freedom. These are words that change everything.

In her hymn of praise to God, Mary is obedient. She hears, she obeys God's messenger and realizes that the promise from God of this child is for all humankind. With her hymn of praise, she recognizes that because of this child:

- The humble are being raised
- It is those who feel awe before God their maker that are shown mercy
- The powerful are brought down
- The lowly are lifted up
- And the hungry are fed.

In other words, she understands that this child is a promise from God, who always shows mercy and compassion for the poor.

Now, this is not the first time in the Bible that God chooses the lowly to bring forth the kingdom of God. Speaking of stories about women, especially the ones who are in the direct lineage to Jesus, most, if not all of them are in some way compromised. Tamar was abused, Bathsheba was an adulteress, Rehab a prostitute, and Ruth was a foreigner who used questionable means to secure a place for herself and mother-in-law.

I believe we are to be reminded that Jesus is fully human as well as fully divine. I also believe that God is telling us that there is hope for all of us, no matter how lowly we have been, no matter how imperfect we now are.

I believe that we are all (including you men ☺) to understand that like these women, and like Jesus himself, we are all accepted as children of God because of our faith and our own struggles to overcome adversity. These people are reminders for us when we get too full of ourselves and of our own perceived righteousness.

The exercise of free will has always been at the top of God's priority list when it comes with dealing with people. We always have the option of saying no. That's the way God has been from the beginning. God even allows people to continue with their own disobedience, turn them over to their own ideas of how to make their own way, to get their own way, to find themselves in the prison of their own designs, hit bottom if necessary, if only to give them a firm place from which to say, "Okay, yes, I give up. *Your* will be done.

This is the time of year when the Sun is as far away as it can be from the earth. I know that in our hearts we sometimes feel as if God and God's Son feel far away from our spirits. I say to you, as Paul said to the Philippians while he was in prison no less: Rejoice! The Lord is near! Because Mary said Yes to God, because Mary heard God's message and obeyed, Emmanuel will come. Like Mary, Rejoice! Christ is our Light that shines in the darkness. Rejoice!

