

What about those other messages we must wait for?

- How do we recognize them when they finally come and how do we respond, to both the waiting, and the message?
 - Advent is a season of listening and waiting.
 - how do we wait for the lab results when our doctor finds something suspicious?
 - how do we wait for the college admission office of our top school of choice?
 - how do we wait for a call from a distant loved one or estranged family member
 - how do we wait for the employer to call us back after an interview
- Consider how “the experience of expectancy teaches us the ways of God’s gracious work in human experience.”¹ What an experience it was, for Mary and Elizabeth, for Joseph and Zechariah. Later on the disciples also experienced Jesus in their own way and in their own times as appointed by God.

When the disciples saw the resurrected Jesus, they did NOT recognize him.

- He looked different on the Road to Emmaus in Luke 24.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him;

- The giant leap didn’t happen in July of 1969 when two men landed on a distant rock that we call the moon. The giant leap happened when two babies connected, while inside of two women, who were carrying and later delivered the messenger and the message; the hope, love, peace, joy and the good news.

Do you recognize what God is doing in our midst? How will you respond?

Now to him who is able to accomplish far more abundantly than all we can ask or imagine, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

First Presbyterian Church- Lynchburg, VA

December 23, 2018

One Giant Leap for Mankind

Micah 2:2-5a:1-4, Luke 1:39-45

Luke 1:39-45

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

- Next year we will recognize the 50th anniversary of Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin’s historic landing on the moon. Recall the words Neil used when he stepped out of the landing module and onto the moon when he said, “that’s one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.”
- Thousands of years ago, there was a greater leap with eternal consequences for all who would believe; when the *messenger* in utero, recognized the *message*, also in utero, or to put it another way, when baby John the Baptist recognized Baby Jesus, and John jumped for joy.
- What does one expect when you are expecting God? That question was more for Mary perhaps, and they had not yet written the acclaimed book “*What to Expect When You Are Expecting*”, but in this season of Advent, it’s appropriate for us to ask:
 - What does one expect when you are expecting God?
 - Better yet, do we recognize when God shows up?
 - How do we respond?
 - That is our question today and our focus for the message.
- Could we identify God in a crowd, and would we recognize God, to break that word down, would we re-know God, or re-learn God, re-call God?
- In verse 26-38, before our passage, the story is told of God’s message to Mary by the angel Gabriel that she will
 - “have a son and is to name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”**
- A crown of joy. Later it will be a cross of sorrow and a pain in Mary’s heart
- Mary identifies Gabriel as God’s messenger, receives this message of joy and went with haste to the hill country.
- There is connection and community between the two women, one is young, poor, pregnant, and unwed, the other is older and far beyond the age to have children. Suffice it to say they are marginalized in that day and age. Yet they meet, connect, and celebrate.
- God’s gift then, and now, is community and connection, which were two things they lacked. One could argue they yearned for these things and don’t we all? Perhaps that is why Mary left and went with haste, because she couldn’t wait to see Elizabeth and share the good news.

Consider Elizabeth and Mary’s interaction:

- Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting- recognition
- The child leaped in her womb- response.

¹ New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary, Abingdon Press, VOL IX, pg 56.

- And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit- further response.
 - Mary recognized the angel Gabriel and responded appropriately.
 - When Mary greeted Elizabeth, Elizabeth recognized her but more importantly, her child, who would be John the Baptist, recognized Mary and who Mary was carrying in her womb!
 - That's one giant leap for mankind!
- Note that Zechariah, the priest, was both absent and silent in this passage.
- He had a different response to the angel who came to him when he was serving on duty:
**Zechariah said to the angel, "How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years.
The angel replied, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur."**
- Here God has silenced the priest Zechariah and given prophetic voice to his wife Elizabeth after she was filled with the Holy Spirit.
 - Elizabeth proclaimed, she cried out,
"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb."

What about us, what about things as they are today and what we face day in and day out?
(PAUSE)

Jennifer Skiff asks in the intro to her book "God Stories", "Does God exist? Why am I here? Is there more? These questions nag at us incessantly throughout our lives. But the answers are forever elusive, always just out of reach. Today we are fact-driven people: we need evidence before we form opinions and often dismiss events that can't be logically explained. Yet we desperately want the security that comes with having a certain future. The search for these answers has divided people into two camps; those who look for solace in organized religion and its promise of an afterlife and those who consider themselves spiritual but not religious: they believe their souls are going somewhere but they're just not sure exactly where. Regardless of what camp you're in, we all want the same thing. We want confirmation that what we believe is true. We want proof of modern-day encounters with the Divine.²"

Imagine Elizabeth's encounter, or Mary's encounter with the divine...
(PAUSE)

Since our passage talks about the baby bumps that Mary and Elizabeth had, imagine what pregnancy was like for them in those days.

For those who have had children, think of whether you wanted to know the gender through the wonders of ultrasound.

Think of all the volumes of books dedicated to choosing baby names.

What if an angel came to you and revealed the gender and the name of your child, amazing to consider! (Would you oblige???)

Doctors can use amniocentesis to test for chromosomal abnormalities, what do we do with the information?!

With WebMd and Wikipedia a world of knowledge is at our fingertips about anything and everything related to pregnancies or other medical issues.

We desperately want the security that comes with having a certain future.

Do we recognize this in ourselves, and how do we respond?

How do we respond to messages in general- dealing with pregnancy or otherwise?

- think of phone calls- we have caller ID, so we know who is calling. Are we screening our calls, and what does that look like when receiving a message from the divine (PAUSE).

- think of text messages- we have the luxury to respond immediately, or ignore, or delay the response.

- think of social media and the variety of platforms therein.

- How do you respond to those messages across social media?

- Do you swipe right or left, up or down?

- Facebook, oy vay, think of all the possible responses to a post or picture, you can give it a thumbs up, thumbs down, a smiley face, sad face, wow face, angry face, etc. etc.

- How do we respond to sermons, it probably depends on the sermon.

- How do we respond to emails- to delete, forward, reply, reply all, cc, bcc, or send to, copy, paste, share, edit, file, archive... phew, that IS the question. Or IS that the question?

- How do we respond to hand written letters? Different than electronics...

- How do we respond to that still small voice like when Elijah encountered God on Mt. Horeb?

*** (SLOWLY) With all the information we are bombarded with, how do we recognize the divine in our day to day lives?

With all this chatter and the din that dulls the senses, do we see and hear what is in front of us and around us? Or have we developed tunnel vision, muted mouths, and deaf ears, only focusing on what is in front of us, what is shiniest, loudest, and latest?

What ever happened to front porches? That used to be a place where folks would sit, rock, and talk. It reminds me of a joke:

A guy goes door to door looking for work. One homeowner hands him a brush and a can of paint and offers him \$150 to paint his porch. A few hours later, the guy comes back to the homeowner and says, "I'm finished. But that's not a Porch, it's a Ferrari."

It used to be that on porches, you could get to know somebody as you heard them tell their story and as they would in turn listen to your story.

I imagine Mary and Elizabeth sitting on the porch in their baby rockers...

I wonder what THEY talked about with the baby boys they were having.

Here were two faithful, yet marginalized women, with two of the most significant babies in the history of the world.

Talk about pelvic pressure! Wonder what those baby kicks were like?!

The messenger and the message, womb to womb, what an encounter!

That's one giant leap for mankind.

John the Baptist recognized Jesus and was already preparing the way of the Lord, announcing his arrival, through the Spirit filled prophecy of his mother Elizabeth.

It was a natural response to a holy recognition.

² <http://jenniferskiff.com/god-stories/>