

Advent 4 (C)  
Year C 2021 Luke 1: 39-45 [46-55]  
Dec. 19 2021  
Rev. Betsy Welliver Sentigar  
Christ Church Towanda, PA 18848

To our lonely and fragmented souls, Luke bequeaths a wonderful pre-Christmas gift: a small story about a genuine connection between two pregnant women of different generations. In this text we see God at work in a deeply personal way that also just happens to change the world! The work of the Holy Spirit is made manifest as the baby in Elizabeth's womb (John) responds to Mary's greeting. As well-timed baby kicks often do, this one opens up the recipient to a new awareness and understanding of unfolding events. Here, John the unborn baby is prophet! An unlikely miracle in Elizabeth's pregnancy prompts reciprocity in the virgin Mary's womb! There is a quickening that

Together Mary and Elizabeth witness God's amazing work in the world. A new creation is about to be birthed into the world, dismantling systems. Elizabeth empowers Mary to speak her own hymn of praise that we recognize as the Magnificat.

God gives Mary and Elizabeth two things that they lacked: community and connection. He removes their isolation and helps them understand themselves more fully as part of something larger than their individual destinies. Together they are known more fully and begin to see more clearly than they do as individuals. This is the Advent message of hope and understanding that starts out slowly and quietly.

The development of hope within community takes time. How many Mary's and Elizabeths (or Zecchariahs and Josephs) might be sitting in pews waiting to connect more deeply with people around them? How many long to connect their small story with the larger story of God? How might our churches encourage the cycle of recognition and response that widens the reach of the Holy Spirit?

Much can be learned of sitting quietly with our brothers and sisters as the world pushes relentlessly toward a louder, larger, and ever more expensive December 25. In our postmodern context, the texts of Advent are counter cultural.

Churches of the Christendom era enjoyed an easy familiarity with the wider culture; Christmas trees, carols sung in school concerts, Christmas cards sent by politicians to their donors. Now, often big flashy events are largely focused around the twin diols of celebrity and consumerism. For good and for ill, the church has been marginalized. Those of us gathered now represent the marginalized. Like expectant mothers in the Near East, we are here spending our time listening and waiting. Those who are alienated by their culture just might be visited by the Holy Spirit.

Doubts and hurts are close to the surface for many of us. Sitting with people, silently, in church, with God, with others are accepted as they are and where they are.

Experiencing acceptance in worship may find one asking as Elizabeth did, "And why has this happened to me?" This very human sized story prepares us for the grand, history-changing birth that is yet to come.

Linger as you will. Be strengthened, prepared and deepened for the glorious Christmas celebration to come.