



## December 19, 2021

### Fourth Sunday of Advent

*"Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."—Luke 1:45*

Dear Friends;

Pregnancy can be a time of miraculous wonder and time of hope. But we should not forget that it can be a difficult time for women who are struggling with conception, miscarriage and other difficulties related to child-bearing. With all our technology and medical sophistication we can forget that pregnancy demands hope and the courage of expectant mothers. This was brought home to me over the last month. I had to minister to two couples who lost their children at and before birth. And I led the funeral rites for those infants. And my heart was touched by the faith of those mothers and fathers.

Today Luke's Gospel presents us with two women who face pregnancies that defy social expectations. Elizabeth is too old, and Mary is a young virgin who has not taken up living with her betrothed. Sometimes we can overly sentimentalize the encounter between Mary and Elizabeth. We highlight the joy and surprise of these two women expecting a child. But it took great courage for each of them to embrace their personal situation.

Their stories remind us of the messiness of the Incarnation. God does not come into a perfect world. But God chooses to work through the world as it is; not as we wish it to be. Earlier in the Gospel, Luke tells us that Elizabeth had not been able to conceive. He stresses her age as being beyond the time for childbearing. In ancient times challenges with fertility and conception were blamed on women. Women unable to conceive were considered "forgotten by" God. Miraculous conceptions were seen as God "remembering" those women.

Elizabeth in old age is presented as being "remembered" by God. Her husband Zechariah while exercising his priestly ministry has a vision of the angel Gabriel. The angel tells him that his wife Elizabeth will bear a son and they are to name him John. Elizabeth does conceive. The Gospel says she goes into seclusion but doesn't tell us why. It may be that she wanted to avoid revealing her pregnancy to others for fear that the child not come to full term. They certainly would have known the risks of an older pregnancy.

In Elizabeth's sixth month of pregnancy the same angel Gabriel visits Mary. He announces that she is to bear a son and name him Jesus. The angel also informs Mary about Elizabeth's pregnancy. Despite their biological circumstances that make pregnancy unlikely if not impossible, both women become pregnant by divine proclamation and action.

Mary in art is often depicted as fragile beauty. Reading the Gospel we see that she was not really fragile. Rather, she was sturdy and strong. Mary's response to the angel, "Let it be according to your word" demonstrates acceptance of her role in God's saving plan. In her first weeks of pregnancy she boldly sets off on foot to traverse the steep Judean hills to attend to her cousin Elizabeth. She is no hothouse flower.

Pregnancy and childbirth, then as well as now, are messy and dangerous. Yet Mary and Elizabeth are willing to risk their lives in giving birth to John and Jesus. John is the last of the prophets who foretells the Messiah; And Jesus the Son of God comes to save us all. Despite the "scandal" of these pregnancies God chooses female flesh to come into the world. Let us celebrate Mary and Elizabeth, pregnant and courageous women, who believed that what God had promised would be fulfilled. And let us be willing to let God use our bodies to bring Christ into the world.

Come Lord Jesus!

*Fr Ron*

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