

She Went
United Church of Broomfield
December 24, 2023

Luke 1:39-55 NRSVue

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 fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

⁴⁶ And Mary said,
"My soul magnifies the Lord,
⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
⁴⁸ for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.
Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,
⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name;
⁵⁰ indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones
and lifted up the lowly;
⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty.
⁵⁴ He has come to the aid of his child Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

The gospel reading for today gives us a glimpse of Mary that is as simple as it is inspirational. We are told that she heard that her cousin was pregnant. There was not a whole lot of prenatal care available in those days. We do not really know how close Mary and Elizabeth lived to each other. We are simply told that when Mary heard, she went. You can let your imagination fill in the details. But as Luke tells us, Mary heard that Elizabeth was pregnant, and she went to her. Perhaps Mary heard that there was a need. Elizabeth was older, beyond normal child-bearing years, and a pregnancy may have been a challenge. Mary was not content to send her good wishes. She went. It may not have been easy for her. We do not know how far along she was herself in her pregnancy, but Luke tells us she went.

Is this really that much different from the opportunities that are put in front of us? We hear of needs every day. Some family member or friend may be in need of help in one way or another. Will it be said of us that we sent a card that we picked up while we were at the grocery store — which of course is nice — or will it be said of us that we went?

The message here is about responding to the call of God as embedded in the needs of other people. Most of us here today know of someone who could use what we have to offer. That someone may be alone, having lost a loved one, and would appreciate beyond words having someone to be there in a caring way, perhaps just to have a cup of coffee and simply listen. One of our neighbors or former neighbors may be looking at the walls in a convalescent home. A card to hang on his or her bulletin board would be both thoughtful and probably appreciated. But how about a visit? Even your parent or your grandparent may enjoy company for lunch.

Luke tells us that Mary went into the hill country to visit her relative Elizabeth, but listen to what happened when she got there! Two women, each holding the life of another in her womb, each waiting to give birth, greet each other. Let that picture sink in for a moment. What was happening here? Elizabeth was ecstatic. She recognized God within her relative Mary. “The moment I heard your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy!” She was filled with the Holy Spirit. This meeting of Mary and Elizabeth can be a model for our meetings with others.

What would happen if we recognized, as Elizabeth did, the God who lives in a person we meet? What would happen if, as Mary did, we recognized that God lives in us? This is about more than knowing it in our heads. It is about feeling it in our hearts. Neither Elizabeth nor Mary was making an academic statement. They were speaking from their hearts. They spoke God to each other. They did not speak about God. They spoke God. That is a language worth learning. We cannot learn it with a disc from Rosetta Stone or a book from Berlitz or some other language course. It is language learned in quiet and in prayer and, like every other language, it is learned in practice.

If you want a teacher, you might consider finding a quiet place to sit and in your imagination put Mary at your side. Then ask her to help you learn this language that she knew so well. As with most languages, one sitting will not be enough to learn it, but regular sitting can make us more fluent. If you think that you do not have the time for that kind of thing, you may consider something Scott Peck, author of the longtime best seller, *The Road Less Traveled*, said in a talk he was giving. The talk was on prayer, and a woman in the audience who was not very shy at all asked him how often he prayed. When Dr. Peck said that he prayed every day, she asked him how long he prayed, and the patient doctor told her that he prayed an hour daily. Then she asked that since he had a psychiatry practice and since he traveled and did conferences and since he wrote books, how he could afford to take an hour a day to pray. His answer was as profound as it was simple. He said, “Because I do all of those things, I cannot afford not to take the time.”

Granted, some of us live on a treadmill – constantly moving. We may not have the luxury of an hour to ourselves. We may be running a car service for our families – transporting kids to all sorts of activities and events. We may be working two jobs to make ends meet. What if we traded one TV show a week for some quiet prayer time? What if we learned to grab mini moments? Spent less screen time with Instagram or TikTok? Let your imagination be your guide and you might surprise yourself.

Because Mary did learn God language, she was able to respond to Elizabeth in the way that she did. “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. The one who is mighty has done great things for me.” She knew that the goodness that came out of her was from the God who lived within her.

God lifted Mary out of obscurity to be the mother of our Savior. God lifted her out of fear and confusion so she could say yes to the angel at the time of the Annunciation. God lifted her out of the cold in Bethlehem and out of her aloneness and devastation at Calvary as her son died on the cross.

When, like Mary, we learn God language and when, like her, we learn to trust God working within us, we, too, can be lifted up. We can be lifted up from a sense of obscurity to the realization that no one is obscure in the eyes of God. We can be lifted up from confusion to greater clarity, as Mary was after being told she would be the mother of the Savior. She moved from, "How can this be?" to "Here am I, the servant of the Lord" (Luke 1:34, 38).

We have all been in circumstances where we have wondered how we might get through something that is thrown in our path. And when we can listen closely, we will be told as Mary was, "The spirit of God will come upon you" (Luke 1:35). With the Spirit of God within us we can be lifted out of those times when life feels cold. We can be lifted out of the losses that burden our souls. We can be lifted out of our sense of aloneness. We can be lifted to God because God will do great things for us. We hear, see, feel, and sense LOVE.

It is the destiny of each one of us to ultimately be lifted to God, perhaps not in the way Mary was, but our destiny is the same. In the meantime, our calling is also the same. It is a calling to bring God to that part of the world we touch. Love deeply, completely, and extravagantly. Later in Luke's gospel, as Jesus is teaching and healing, a woman proclaims to Jesus, "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you"? And what did Jesus say in response? "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it" (Luke 11:27-28)! Mary lived and loved the Word of God in her life and we are called to nothing less.

Amen