

“Real Miracles Sing”
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St. Luke’s Episcopal Church – Anchorage, Kentucky
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Luke 1:39-55

Mary and Elizabeth were in many ways ordinary people living everyday lives. It’s true that Elizabeth’s husband, Zechariah, served as a priest in the Jerusalem Temple, and there’s a measure of cachet to that, but he was only one among many, a guy who worked on rotation and stayed home most of the time. Mary’s fiancé Joseph tracked his family tree back to King David, but so did plenty of other people, because David was . . . prodigious. So there was really nothing special about Elizabeth or Mary. Neither of them was powerful or rich or well-known, and that’s exactly how God seems to like it.

He almost always picks the people you’d least expect. In a culture where the first-born son was greatly favored, God tended to prefer the younger ones, if not the youngest: Abel over Cain; Jacob over Esau; Joseph and David, each of whom had several older brothers. In a culture where women without children were regarded as cursed, God had a penchant for giving them babies, even if they were well beyond childbearing years, like Sarah and, of course, Elizabeth.

It’s somewhat of a mystery why God chose relative unknowns, the least likely people, to receive his most powerful blessings, but I think we can deduce a message from the pattern. Nobody’s really special until God makes them so. No matter how special a person feels or thinks they are, because they are rich or famous or powerful; no matter whom society calls a “somebody” or a “nobody,” only God makes the call. Only God makes someone special.

In a way, all are called, all are special. God has chosen every person to bear His image and likeness. God loves everyone equally and unconditionally. And that’s something to cherish

above all else. But the witness of scripture is that God picks certain people, often relatively obscure ones, to receive particular blessings designed to accomplish specific purposes.

Mary and Elizabeth are two of those people. They are the Miracle Moms from Nowhere. Now I may have just offended every mother on the planet, and if I may take a step back from the abyss, to me every pregnancy is sacred and beautiful and astonishing with some measure of the miraculous to it. However, a virgin impregnated by the Holy Spirit and a woman of advanced age conceiving a son, those events transcend the natural order of things, especially when we consider who they had in their wombs. And they knew it.

All of us hope and pray for a healthy child who will live a happy life. Some of us might indulge fantasies that our little baby boy or girl will someday rule the world. But Mary and Elizabeth didn't hope or fantasize. They knew. It helped that archangels visited both Mary and Zechariah to tell them who they'd be bringing into the world and what their sons would do, but remember Zechariah basically laughed in Gabriel's face and got struck speechless for his skepticism. So an angel showing up doesn't guarantee belief, but apparently getting pregnant does.

Mary and Elizabeth knew that they were special in unique ways. They accepted that their baby boys would grow up to change the world completely. And without that belief, it could have never happened. In fact, Elizabeth makes it plain. "Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

They knew what God had done in the past. They knew that God's power was alive and active in the world still. They knew that God could and would take an ordinary, everyday life and turn it into something amazing, special, and their response shows how solid their belief was.

The idea of being different, abnormal – the idea of cozy anonymity being stripped away – usually elicits some apprehension, but Mary and Elizabeth expressed no reluctance, just joy.

You can hear it in Mary’s song of praise. She rejoiced that God chose her, and she declared that a new world order would emerge, one of radical change. That’s bold stuff, because big change often means risk. The proud do not like to be scattered. The powerful don’t like being brought down, and will fight to stay on their thrones and keep the lowly from being lifted up. The rich don’t like being sent away empty, especially when there are others, like the poor, who are being filled.

Mary had to know that, but she didn’t care, because all of this would happen “according to the promise” of God – a promise of salvation, restoration, and reconciliation. Might there be scandal? Yes. Would there be resistance? Yes, fierce opposition. But those who fear the Lord receive both mercy and the beginning of wisdom, because fearing God transforms how we look at things. It frees us from fearing anything else. How could you? When you fear God, when you bow in awe and wonder before His might and majesty, fearing anything or anyone else feels ridiculous. Can you be hurt by the vicious proud? Yes. Can they destroy you? Not in the way that matters most.

So here we have two Miracle Moms from Nowhere, bearing in their bodies the future of the whole world, because they believed that God made them special, had chosen them for a higher purpose. Full of joy, free from fear, they received God’s blessing so that it could be shared with others. But we’ve got two interwoven problems. What Mary sang doesn’t seem to have come true. And how on earth could we possibly relate our own life of faith to these Miracle Moms?

Let's start with the song. The proud don't seem to be scattered. To the contrary, the more egotistical a person is, the more people pay them attention, which just puffs up the proud even more. The powerful may no longer sit on thrones, but they haven't exactly been brought down either. In fact, more and more is going to fewer and fewer people while less and less is going to more and more.

The old injustices reign pretty much as they always have, with no sign of abating, and it's been nearly 2,000 years since Jesus was born, killed, and raised from the dead. What happened to the promise, and perhaps more poignantly, what could we possibly do when the Miracle Moms and their special sons didn't fulfill God's purpose?

To paraphrase Elizabeth, "Blessed are we who believe that there will be a fulfillment of what was spoken by the Lord." That single statement resolves both problems at once, and here's how. God blesses with belief anyone who chooses to receive it, and for each, belief makes us uniquely special, not in same way that Mary and Elizabeth were, but in ways that prove sufficient to meet our needs and the needs of a broken world desperate for healing.

When we believe, our hearts open to God's power, and it flows into the world, not unlike a pregnant woman giving birth. And that power is Jesus, love made flesh, pouring through us, bringing ever closer to completion the work he began during his lifetime. We might prefer that Jesus had cleaned up the whole mess himself. It would be nice if there were no more proud, greedy, powerful people who exploit the humble and poor and weak, but by conquering sin and death, Jesus inaugurated a process that persists through people who believe, people like us.

With joy and gratitude, let's accept the gift, as Elizabeth and Mary did, of being chosen, of being special because we believe, of being people who proclaim the promise and help bring God into the world. Yes, there is much to fear. The powers that be don't take change lightly,

nor do they show mercy toward those who strive to bring justice and peace into the world. It can be frustrating, when our efforts are foiled, when our triumphs seem so incremental as to be worthless. But never stop singing, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.”

When everyday ordinary people like us keep singing the praises of God, blessings abound. Our voices vibrate and shake the foundation of the forces that oppose God. In our song, the harmony of hope lifts up the lowly, and in the midst of our defiant music, truth and peace fly into the world.

To the cynical, that sounds silly, and even to the faithful, perhaps too good to be true. But the Miracle Moms knew what was inside of them, how powerful those little packages would someday be. Why can't we, if we choose to believe? Amen.