

“Elizabeth”

*Here we go again. Another night in this house all by myself. Don't get me wrong. I am so proud of my husband Zechariah. He has been working so hard at the temple, especially after being chosen to burn incense. He told me it was the highlight of his life as a priest so far. And the crowds, he said, have been the largest in years. Sin is being recognized and acknowledged, thanks be to God!*

*But sitting here all alone is getting old. I know I shouldn't be salty because obviously this is God's will for us. Besides, life over all these years has been really good. The people at the temple are great. The people in the community are super supportive. God has always provided for us and protected us as we have served others in his name. And yet I know for a fact that I'm the only priestly wife in this area who sits alone while her husband is doing his thing. Hanna, down the street has 3 kids to keep her company. Rachel across the way has 4 kids and 8 grandkids. They're probably singing songs and laughing every night. But not us. Of course this wasn't my choice or Zechariah's. We always wanted children. It just never happened for us. Now we're old enough to be grandparents. Oh, well. We love the Lord with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our might no matter what.*

*Zechariah, is that you? I'm so glad you're home.*

While this might not be the way it began, we do know the rest of the story, don't we? As we heard last Wednesday, God sends this angelic messenger to Zechariah saying “Your wife Elizabeth is going to have a son, and you will name him John. And he's going to help the children of Israel to be ready for the coming of the Lord, the Messiah.” And that's just what happened. After these days, according to Luke 1:24, Elizabeth conceived.

This woman who would have been, and should have been a grandmother at this time in her life, becomes pregnant. Talk about God intruding into her life. This was a big one because Luke tells us that after she found out she

was “with child,” she kept herself hidden for 5 months! And who could blame her? She didn’t ask for this. On top of that, we can only imagine what the reaction of the people around town would have been if they had seen faithful old Elizabeth walking around with a baby bump. “Wait, you’re pregnant?” How? Why? Uhhh!! It wouldn’t have made much sense to them, and it certainly didn’t make much sense to Elizabeth. But it happened. Elizabeth was going to have a child.

You know, sometimes I think we forget that the whole cast of curious characters we are talking about this Advent season were actually real people. And none of this was easy. Elizabeth might have kept herself hidden for 5 months, but thank God a visitor came knocking on her door who was none other than her relative Mary, who was also pregnant. Why was Mary there? We don’t have all the details, but I imagine it had something to do with what all those folks in Nazareth were saying. Nonetheless, Elizabeth praises God for what he has done. She refers to young Mary as the Mother of her Lord. When the sound of Mary’s greeting came to Elizabeth’s ears, the baby, John, leaped for joy in her womb! But this wouldn’t be a quick visit. Mary, we are told, stayed for about 3 months before returning home.

What did they do during this time? Well, I imagine Mary probably helped Elizabeth around the house. I can picture her doing some chores, maybe running some errands, easing Elizabeth’s life, especially when Zechariah was at the Temple. You know, I have been told that childbirth is hard enough when the mother is young and strong. I have also been told what it’s like for a more mature woman to have a baby (My wife and I are both 50 and have a 6 year old—you do the math). So, take it from a father who knows. Help, especially during a wife’s pregnancy, is a good thing!

So no doubt these two women were both much better off after their 3 months together. Elizabeth had someone to help her all the way up to delivery. And Mary, I imagine, received the courage and strength she needed for the hard times ahead. God’s intrusion brought these two women together to give each other mutual support. It’s a beautiful thing.

And all of this got me thinking about this time of the year and our own families.

- No matter what that family looks like, how can we help each other (*Expand*)?
- How can we support each other (*Expand*).
- Is there reconciliation and forgiveness needed (*Expand*)?

Just sending a gift is easy, but actually talking? That's the hard part.

Many of us we have done so much harm. We have said so many bad things. We have looked out for only ourselves. We don't call. We don't text. I'm just as guilty. And yet for all of that, God intrudes. I mean how can we, as Christians, forget that He gave us His one and only Son for us, the one whom He loves?

These two miracle mothers, both Mary and Elizabeth have much to teach us today. They loved each other; they supported each other; they trusted God promises to see them through. And most importantly, they point us in one direction. And that's to God's intrusion as our Savior. That's what this time of anticipation and preparation is all about. **Amen.**