

2018 12 23 – Pregnant with Love

Luke 1:26-56

She walked in the summer through the heat on the hill.

She hurried as one who went with a will.

She danced in the sunlight when the day was done.

Her heart knew no evening who carried the sun. *(VU #12 verse 1)*

We've already heard today's Bible story told in two different ways: first in the words of the song that we sang for our Community Learning Time and then in the scripture reading that Janet and Kacey just shared with us. It's a beautiful story of a young woman named Mary and her older cousin, Elizabeth. In this story the two women have one very important thing in common... what is it? *(leave time for an answer)* Yes, they are both pregnant. And both pregnancies are a little unusual aren't they?

Today's story begins with the angel Gabriel visiting Mary in her home in Nazareth of Galilee. The angel says to her, "You'll conceive and bear a son, and give him the name Jesus, [which means] Deliverance." Mary has trouble believing what the angel is saying to her and she replies, "How can this be, since I have never been with a man?" And the angel explains that it will be the Holy Spirit, the power of the Most High, that will create this child within her. Despite her fears and misgivings, Mary says, "I am the servant of God. Let it be done to me as

you say.” With those words, Mary agrees to become the virgin mother of the Holy One of God, the ruler the house of Jacob.

While Gabriel was giving Mary her news, the angel also explained that Mary’s cousin Elizabeth, who had been barren for many years was already six months pregnant. And in the second verse of the hymn we sang:

Fresh as a flower at the first ray of dawn,

She came to her cousin whose morning was gone.

There leapt a little child in the ancient womb

And there leapt a little hope in every ancient tomb. *(VU #12 verse 2)*

OK, so ancient womb is little harsh, isn’t it... but it gets the point across.

Elizabeth was well past the normal child-bearing age. As the angel Gabriel said to Mary, “Nothing is impossible with God.”

So there they were, these two cousins, both pregnant, both expecting a child, one in nine months, the other in three, one a young virgin, the other a woman in the afternoon of her life. This week, as I was studying the scripture, I started to wonder, “What is it like to be pregnant?” What does it feel like? What kinds of things do you think about or dream about? Since I’ve never been pregnant with a child, I didn’t feel that I could answer those questions on my own so I decided to do a little research and I Googled it.

On the Internet I found lots of information about being pregnant. In fact, probably more information than I ever wanted to know. I found out about all that ways that our bodies change: the weight that we put on, the morning sickness, the

shrinking bladder, and the problems sleeping. I discovered just how uncomfortable pregnancy can be. Then, of course, there are the emotional changes – the incredible highs and, for some, the deep lows. There are the worries about the health of the baby, the difficulties of child birth and wondering about what kind of parent we're going to be. And then, of course, there are all the other people in our lives and the way that they treat us as our bellies grow and our ankles thicken. But still, for those of us who have never had a child, it's hard to imagine just what it might be like.

We know that for Mary it wasn't easy. When Mary went to visit Elizabeth, it's very likely that no one else even knew she was pregnant. There she was a teenage girl, engaged to Joseph, supposedly still a virgin and yet she was with child. Mary lived in a time when women could be stoned for extramarital affairs. How was she going to explain her condition to her family and her fiancée? No wonder Mary left her village and travelled into the hills to visit her cousin, Elizabeth. She needed time to gather her thoughts and prepare to share her unexpected news.

Being pregnant can have many different challenges and I keep saying that it's hard to imagine what it might be like. But one of the things I discovered as I was doing my research this week is that every single one of us has been pregnant at some point in our lives and some of us in this place, no matter what our age or gender, are probably pregnant even at this moment in time. That's right there are different types of pregnancies. The word pregnant has more than one meaning.

To be pregnant also means to be filled, to be replete, to be teeming with something: with love, with energy, with purpose, with hope, with new life.

<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/thesaurus/pregnant> How many of you have had times in your lives when you felt like you were just bursting with news that you needed to tell, or a new idea that you needed to try out, or a new love that you needed to grow? And how many times have you been uncomfortable or even scared as you tried to share that good news, or bring that new idea to life, or grow that new love into a lasting relationship? Yes, we have all been pregnant in our lives, pregnant with love, pregnant with hope, pregnant with new possibilities, pregnant with new life.

When I did my research this week, I didn't just go to the Internet. I also asked some of the women in this congregation what it was like to be pregnant with a child. One of the women talked about the feeling of wonder and awe that she experienced at that time, about the miracle of having a baby forming within your own body, about the miracle of that infant growing into adulthood and having a life of its own. When we are pregnant we have so many hopes and dreams for that new life, that new idea, that new love that is forming within us.

Today's scripture reading tells us that Mary believed what the angel had told her and what her cousin Elizabeth confirmed. She believed that she was truly blessed, blessed to be carrying the long-expected Messiah, the one who would come and set his people free. The reading ends with Mary reciting a poem, a song that we now call the Magnificat. In that song Mary shares her hopes for

her son. She explains how he will turn the world upside down by scattering the proud in their conceit, deposing the mighty from their thrones, filling the hungry with good things and sending the rich away empty.

When we are pregnant we all have great hopes for that which is growing within us. Another woman in our congregation told me that when she gave birth to her first-born son all she wanted to do was climb to the top of a hill and hold him up in her arms as if to say, "Look at this new life that I have created!"

At our Advent study group this week we asked the participants to bring their favourite figure from their nativity set and share it with the group. One woman brought Joseph, Jesus' father. In a typical nativity set, the figure of Joseph is standing quietly looking down at the baby Jesus lying in a manger. But this Joseph was squatting on the ground, holding the baby Jesus up above his head for all to see, with the biggest grin on his face that you've ever seen. There was never a more proud papa in the world.

And the good news is that the seed of new life exists within each one of us. We all have that seed within us that is the sacred, that is God, that is Love itself. The only question is what will your seed become, what is growing within you that you cannot wait to show the world?

When you walk in the summer through the heat on the hill,
When your wound with the wind and one with Her will –
be brave with the burdens you are blessed to bear,
for it's Christ that you carry everywhere, everywhere, everywhere. (VU#12)