

Advent 4C
St James and Good Shepherd, Laconia, NH
The Rev. Dr. Janet Lombardo
December 23, 2024

How is everyone doing this morning? Christmas Eve is 2 days away, and as the newscasters will tell you – just 3 shopping days left! Our culture is so caught up in the frenzy of the season that it seems most appropriate that we pause this morning to visit with Mary and Elizabeth. Two pregnant women in very different circumstances.

In our story this morning, Mary goes to visit Elizabeth, her cousin. Elizabeth, pregnant with John the Baptist, is still marveling at how she got pregnant in her old age. Young Mary, betrothed, pregnant but not yet married, goes to see Elizabeth. Imagine Mary, in her shame at being pregnant, getting out of town to see her cousin, maybe to hide her pregnancy. Then to have Elizabeth confirm for her that, yes indeed, her pregnancy is special! That her baby recognizes Mary's baby. Two pregnant women, at opposite ends of their child bearing years, sharing a secret that the world would not yet understand. Sharing, in that moment, love and fear, faith and hope. Impossible, and yet miraculous. Pausing for one moment to rest in God's love, to feel the sense that all things are possible with God. This was not how they imagined their lives would be. This was not expected, Elizabeth never expected to have a baby in

her old age, and certainly Mary never expected to be pregnant at all. Yet here they are, embracing each other with a new understanding that God was there, and they were filled with faith and hope.

Mary and Elizabeth were in a seemingly impossible situation, and yet they knew God was with them. When has that happened to you? When have you known God's presence, against all odds? When have God's strong arms held you? Where do you need God to hold you now? How do you need to ask God to come anew into your life and give to you some of the faith and love that these two cousins shared? Where in your life do you need more faith and hope?

Mary and Elizabeth, two women sharing a private moment, recognizing something was happening here that they did not understand, yet they knew it was holy and special. They knew that God was with them, that God's strong arms held them.

Jesus was not born into a picture-perfect world. Jesus was born in a stable, Jesus was born into a family that almost wasn't. God reminds us this morning what is most important – faith, hope and love. Faith to follow God's call to us, hope that the world can and will be a better place, and love to persevere, even when things look grim.

We have so much to be grateful for, so much to be thankful for. We sometimes forget that, in the rush to get more things, in the rush to make everything perfect. This Christmas, take time to appreciate all that you have. Take time to give thanks, not for the perfect Christmas, but for the opportunity to celebrate the greatest gift of all. To celebrate the birth of Jesus, to celebrate the gift of faith, hope and love. To remember Mary and Elizabeth, calmly, quietly sharing a private and holy moment. Letting God take away their fears, letting God be present with them in the stillness of the moment. Find some quiet this Christmas to let God in, to let God give you the peace that passes all understanding.

Christmas is about Jesus' birth, Christmas is about the miraculous, Christmas is about faith, hope, love, joy and new discoveries. Expect the unexpected, and rejoice in your imperfections! Nothing ever seems to go according to plan, but God reminds us that, from the very beginning, new things come to be, often in unexpected and miraculous ways.

Thanks be to God!