

THE FIRST 15

Monday, December 2, 2024

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Today is Monday, December 2 and we are in the season of Advent. This week we will study the songs of Elizabeth and Mary recorded in the Gospel of Luke.

OPENING PRAYER

Holy and Loving God, my heart is full of joy as I begin the season of Advent anticipating the celebration of the birth of Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ the Lord. As a new day begins, I come to this quiet place and pause to rest in Your presence. I breathe deeply, still my mind and focus on the words of these two beautiful women - Mary the mother of Jesus and her cousin Elizabeth. Let me hear the message you have for me today through the words of these ancient songs. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" Luke 1:39-43

REFLECTION

Here we have a beautiful encounter between two pregnant women - Mary and Elizabeth. One is old and one is young. One is the mother of John the Baptist and one is the mother of Jesus. One bears the messenger and one bears the Message. Both are chosen by God.

We met Elizabeth earlier in Luke's Gospel. Her husband was Zechariah the priest. The couple was childless. Elizabeth was unable to conceive and they were both beyond the years of childbearing. The angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah in the Temple while he was burning incense. Despite Zechariah's startled fear at the sight of him, Gabriel spoke God's message to the old priest. His wife Elizabeth would bear a son and his name would be John. He would serve God in the spirit and power of the prophet Elijah. Elizabeth became pregnant just as the angel had promised.

Six months later Gabriel went to Nazareth to appear to Elizabeth's cousin, a young virgin named Mary. He was a busy archangel. Gabriel told Mary she would become pregnant by the Holy Spirit and the child she would bear would be the Son of God. Gabriel mentioned the miracle of her cousin Elizabeth's conception in her old age. Two births that should not be possible. Two babies born to forever change the world. God's impossible plan was being fulfilled. John the Baptist would point the way to the Messiah, the One who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, Jesus.

Zechariah and Elizabeth lived in the hill country southwest of the city of Jerusalem. Mary traveled from Nazareth to visit her cousin, a distance of about eighty miles, a journey that would take several days on foot or by donkey. The babies met in utero. What a lovely, intimate and memorable encounter. The womb is a profound symbol of new life and potential, of the new and surprising, the unexpected and joyful, a place of promise and hope for the future. Because of Jesus all of life is pregnant with possibilities.

When Mary entered the home and Elizabeth heard her voice the baby leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Elizabeth sang a prophetic blessing - Mary would be blessed among women and the Son she was to bear would be blessed as well. Elizabeth was the first to identify the Messiah. She named Mary the mother of the Lord, the bearer of the Son of God. Elizabeth discovered through the Holy Spirit what Mary already knew. This was no ordinary baby. Mary was to give birth to the Messiah. Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months before returning home to Nazareth.

Ask: What am I waiting for? What are the pregnant possibilities in my life this Advent season? What might God have in store for me and my family that is new and surprising, unexpected and joyful, full of promise and hope? Can I trust my future to God as Mary and Elizabeth trusted?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Holy and loving God, as I enter the season of Advent and prepare my heart for the celebration of the birth of Christ, I remember the excitement of the baby John who leaped for joy in the womb of Elizabeth. As an unborn baby recognized Jesus the Messiah and Elizabeth his mother confirmed the truth, let me recognize You as I encounter the world around me and confirm the truth of Your salvific love. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit and supply my lips with words of blessing and peace. Amen.