



# One Page Sermon

## By Pastor Robb McCoy

### December 12, 2021

#### Third Sunday of Advent: Caring with Joy (Luke 1:39-56)

This is a wonderful story of two expectant mothers. Elizabeth, a woman of some age and distinction, receives Mary, a woman of meager means and in a vulnerable position. Remember, Elizabeth is the wife of High Priest—Zechariah. She is an older woman who was respected and is now well into a miraculous pregnancy. She was highly honored and now receives her younger relative Mary.

Mary is unwed. She is from a small town of little distinction. She is pregnant. Her position—as the Gospel of Matthew points out, is one of extreme vulnerability and shame. The fact is, her visiting Elizabeth at all might have been a risky thing to do considering that she might bring her shame into the household of her highly honored relative.

In order to appreciate this visitation I think it is important to remember these power structures, this system of cultural shame and honor, and these very different situations these women were in. Both expecting a baby, the culture that surrounded them would receive them very differently.

And then Elizabeth does something remarkable. She feels the flutter of her own child and interprets it as a sign of joy. The Holy Spirit enters her, and she knows that Mary's pregnancy is not the source of shame, but it is a sign of God's blessing. She says to Mary, "Why do I have this honor, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"

In this moment Elizabeth changes the story. Instead of a visit of fear and shame—perhaps Mary had left her home to escape the prying eyes and mean whispers of a gossiping community—it becomes a visit of celebration. Elizabeth, in this moment, shifts the system of honor and places it all upon Mary. Then she calls Mary's child "My Lord," and is the first one bestow this honor on Jesus.

Mary's response fits into a long tradition of women singing songs of prophecy and praise. Mary's song is modeled after Hannah's song in 1 Samuel, and a part of a tradition that dates back to Miriam, who declared God's greatness after the Exodus (in what some scholars believe to be the earliest piece of literature that exists in our Bible, Exodus 15:21).

Mary's response to Elizabeth is a song of triumph, praise, acceptance, and transformation. She sings of a world that is renewed and a social order that is reversed. Her song is no meek and mild resignation to her fate. It is a bold proclamation of what God has done and will do.



Yet it didn't come until after Elizabeth affirmed her. Go back a little and you see that Mary was also visited by the angel Gabriel. He told her what is coming. At first Mary questioned the angel. She was confused and wondered. She questioned the angel, challenging him with what she considered to be an impossibility. He encouraged her, gave her further explanation. Her response was simply, "Let it be." She then got up and hurried to Elizabeth.

I want to think for a moment about the model that Mary gives us. First, she is called by God to an enormous task. She then questions and wonders. She gets a response from God that is encouraging. She then goes to a friend and receives even greater affirmation. She then accepts what God is doing, and declares that she will "magnify the Lord" and recognizes the ways that the world will be changed by God through her.

This feels like a good way to handle tasks that are set out before us. 1. Hear God's call (God may call us all to both great and simple tasks. What is on your heart? What are the ideas you have to help, serve, or make Christ's Kingdom more known?) 2. Wonder, question, ponder (go to God in prayer, consider options, don't move forward blindly but interrogate your ideas). 3. Receive assurance from the Spirit (through prayer and discernment). 4. Get affirmation from your community (find your Elizabeth and your community who may make it happen—pastors, partners, friends, etc). 5. Respond and change the world.

There great and small tasks that we face every day. There are things we feel called to do and accomplish. Following Mary's model of discernment, affirmation, community, could be a wise model for us all to Magnify the Lord together.