

Singing the Song, Sharing the Spirit
Luke 1:26-56

In early October of last year, I was walking the streets of New Haven, CT with Jamie and our friend Rebecca when my cell phone rang. On the other end of the line was Sarah Lollar – and I had just discovered that I would be moving to Colorado to be here with you.

Of course, I immediately shared the news with those dear ones before me – but that simply wasn't enough. I started dialing the phone to tell everyone I could think of.

Have you ever received news that sparked an emotion so strong – excitement, worry, anticipation – and that feeling was so powerful that you just couldn't keep it to yourself; that if you *tried* to keep it to yourself you might burst?

I imagine Mary, a young Jewish woman, descendent of Abraham and inheritor of Israel's promise, just hearing the message from the angel Gabriel: "The Messiah is coming! The one your ancestors have waited for! The hope for the world is going to arrive in *your time*, Mary ... but wait, there's more! YOU are going to bear that child".

What could she possibly be feeling? Hope turned to incredulity? Wonder transformed to shock? Disbelief into terror?

How would YOU feel?

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I worked for a while as chaplain on a cardiac unit at Yale-New Haven Hospital. While there, I got to know a young patient in her late 30s. I would visit Julie often, as she was confined for several months hopefully awaiting a heart transplant. Her own heart had begun failing about 7 years earlier, and so for 7 years she'd been trying to prepare for this eventuality.

As you probably suspect, getting the news of an available heart is not something you plan; it comes *suddenly, unexpectedly*. And all the preparation in the world can't prepare you for the moment that news comes.

Julie shared with me *her* reactions when that news came to her.

**Excitement** that she might be able to regain an active lifestyle.

**Apprehension** because she wouldn't know the outcome until after surgery and rehab.

And **utter fear** because hers was the only heart she'd ever known.

What could she do with all of these emotions when surgery had to be immediate? Julie did 2 things simultaneously: she grasped her best friend's hand with all her strength, and she called her family.

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Different news brings different emotions to different people. But one thing that is almost always the same is this incredible urge to share...and to share with our most beloved...to reach out to someone willing to experience the moment *with* us.

Immediately after the angelic visitation in Luke we read that Mary took this 3-day journey to be with her cousin Elizabeth.

Mary – so much like us – needed someone with whom to share it all. Someone who would share her fears and joy and the waiting. And more practically, the pregnancy. Technically, neither Mary nor Elizabeth *should* be pregnant: one was unmarried and the other was too old! They could share the physical changes that would occur and share wisdom they would obtain.

And they could share the GOOD NEWS that makes each of US rejoice ... God choosing to live among us.

Because Elizabeth *did* share it. Even before Mary could try to express her tumble of emotion, Elizabeth knew! “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb” she exclaims. She knows and experiences all of those feelings with Mary. In her greeting, Elizabeth conveys that ultimate connection of a best friend or a spouse or a parent who is willing to step into that whirlwind of another’s experience and let it take hold of them, in order to join with that other.

And when she did this – when Elizabeth opened herself to that intimacy with Mary’s news – SOMETHING HAPPENED.

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I’ve always enjoyed the 1960s animated Christmas special *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. In it, and its book counterpart, Dr. Seuss carefully avoids any reference to Jesus or Bethlehem, angels and shepherds. Many might easily argue that it lacks a “true” Christian message.

But there’s a song that the Whos sing in Whoville every Christmas – even that Christmas after the bitterly lonely Grinch stole all the trees and who-instruments and who-toys and even the roast beast.

Even then, the Whos stand in the middle of their village in a circle, hands linked as they sing, “Christmas day is in our grasp, so long as we have hands to clasp”.

As you perhaps know, SOMETHING hits the Grinch when he hears the sound of that community gathered as one. And the tale tells us that his heart grew “three sizes that day”.

When Mary stepped into Elizabeth’s home and greeted her, Elizabeth’s heart didn’t grow 3 sizes; but the child she was carrying – the *life within her* LEAPT!

The spirit of God entered Elizabeth and brought the words to her lips: “Why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?”

Who are *we* that Christ might come to us?

Who are *we* that we join together to share a moment of being filled by the Holy Spirit? Aren’t we preparing for the coming of the Christ this Advent?

The *moment* Elizabeth knew of the inevitable coming, she was filled.

Where is that leap within us?

Here in this church we have chosen to come together.

I see faces that have been here less than the year I have;  
and I see faces who’ve been here longer than I’ve been alive.

We have come together here,  
sharing our preparation,  
sharing our joys and sorrows,  
and looking to experience what will cause  
that leap of the spirit in us.

Look around at each other. Really *see* the faces with whom you have chosen to begin your Advent journey this year.

We’re all here for a reason.

Wanting to share that leap with one another...*but many of us could do that with other friends, too, couldn’t we?*

We could stop by a friend’s and share our preparations for Christmas 2005.

We could make a call to family and share the anticipation of Christ’s renewal in each of us this year.

But there is a reason we have chosen to do it *here*, among *this* gathered community, in *this* space.

...Mary had *already* shared what she needed to with Elizabeth, but she had one more sharing to do... a *singing* sharing:

“My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my savior!”

She had to share with her Creator, with her Redeemer, the one who was with her in all things. As do we.

*This* is why we gather in community with God as our center.

*This* is why we hold a time for spoken prayers each Sunday in our service.

Our prayers and our preparation for Christmas are not complete until we join hands, sharing *our* praise with the One who shares it all with us, who helps us through and who loves us enough to *experience* life with us.

This morning and *throughout* Advent, we continue to wait and prepare and expect the coming of Christmas.

But when you join with those you love most –

at home,

by phone

or in memory –

and your spirits sing the song of praise,

“Christmas is almost here,

Emmanuel is coming”,

know that, in your sharing,

*CHRIST HAS ALREADY COME.*

BENEDICTION by Jan L. Richardson

Not to one, but to many [God has] called:

Come

On the dancing wind

Come

From the deepest forest

Come

From the highest places

Come

From the distant lands

Come from the edge of darkness

Come

From the depth of fear

And become

The bearer of God.

Amen