

Part I: Luke 1, Mary and Elizabeth

E: Mary, slow down! You are walking for two now!

M: Oh, Elizabeth, I am tired, let me inside.

E: Of course, child. Come in and we will both rest for there is a dancing babe within me! The sound of your voice must've contained a melody. He is as filled with elation as I am for you—for us!

M: It is good to be inside; your house is of great comfort to me, you are of great comfort to me.

E: It does seem as though we will be the talk of the town, Mary.

M: Oh, Elizabeth, even when I am anxious, you make me smile. You have been without laughter for so long. I am glad that your humor has returned.

E: Dear cousin, a lot has returned and even awoken in me of late—my joy, my hope!

M: Yes, your womb is becoming increasingly apparent.

E: Just you wait, Mary—soon, you shall be on the end of such comments. And if that old Zechariah suggests again if I might be bearing two children instead of one, he will need to hope for an angel of protection!

M: Surely he suffers enough without a voice. Surely he suffers enough only being able to listen to you...

E: I will hear your words as flattering, Mary, and will hope that soon, you will be as overcome as I when the smell of raw meat hits your nose.

M: Do not spoil all of the blessings that are to come to me, Elizabeth. I would like to have some surprises.

E: Oh, you will have many of your own, regardless of what I share with you. We are both in unknown territory.

M: I am faithful to the Lord, Elizabeth, but I am also scared. How am I to bear this child? How am I to do this alone?

E: Look at me! We are walking on the same path together, so do not feel so alone. And even though for years I have felt disgraced in not being able to have children, I have not run out to share this growing, imposing belly with those who have shown frequently their pity—I admit that even as your elder, I am anxious too. But I believe that this child in me will share enough for this world alone in both sight and speech. He will offer proclamation and your child will offer redemption! See! He is already proclaiming within me.

M: I believe, Elizabeth, but the belief is still new to me. Tell me the stories, cousin. I keep forgetting how they go. Tell me again of Moses and his mother, of Sarah, of Hannah...

E: Remember with me, Mary. You know of Rebekah and Rachel and Esther...

Part II: We Cry

- E: Eve, we hear you cry with birth pangs. We hear you cry for your sons and daughters.
- S: Sarah, we hear you cry in longing.
- E: Jochebed, we hear you cry in fear.
- S: Hail Mary, full of grace. Our Lord is with thee.
- E: Blessed are thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
- S: Rebekah, we hear you cry in your suffering.
- E: Zipporah, we hear you cry with determination.
- S: Naomi, we hear you cry in mourning.
- E: Hail Mary, full of grace. Our Lord is with thee.
- S: Blessed are though among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
- E: Rahab, we hear you cry as war surrounds you.
- S: Bathsheba, we hear you cry in your innocence.
- E: Esther, we hear you cry out with confession.
- S: Hail Mary, full of grace. Our Lord is with thee.
- E: Blessed are though among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
- S: Tamar, we hear you cry as you endure.
- E: Hannah, we hear you cry in relief.
- S: Elizabeth, we hear you cry, even as you are faithful... And we hear you cry, as you rejoice for the child who is and the child who will be.

E: Hail Mary, full of grace. Our Lord is with thee. Blessed are thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

S: Blessed are the poor in spirit. The Lord is with thee.

E: Blessed are those who mourn. The Lord is with thee.

S: Blessed are the meek. The Lord is with thee.

E: Blessed are those who hunger. The Lord is with thee.

S: Rejoice and be glad; God has looked on you with favor.

E: Rejoice and be glad; God has called you blessed.

S: Rejoice and be glad; God has made you strong.

E: Rejoice and be glad; God has promised you good things.

S: Emmanuel—God is with us in our pain. Emmanuel—God is with us in our sorrow.

E: Emmanuel—God is with us in our fear. Emmanuel—God is with us in our delight.

Part III: Mary and the Women

Elizabeth: Eve, Hannah, Sarah, Rebekah, Elizabeth, Mary. These women are part of our collective story. Handed limitations by the world, they believed not in the status quo but in the expansive imagination of God. Living in a world run by men and not expected to be leaders or prophets, they pushed history forward by stretching the space they were given to inhabit to make room for more people to follow after them. Eyes open, hearts awake, they anticipated that God would move in their everyday, ordinary lives. Because they watched for the Divine, the world changed. Hail, Mary, Eve, Sarah, full of grace. Blessed are you among women.

Peter J. Gomes, once asked “What had [Mary] done to deserve this distinction? Is there some particular virtue or worthy quality in her life that commends her to the attention of God? The angel says simply, ‘Hail, O favored one’ or, as the Authorized Version has it, ‘Hail, thou that art highly favored.’ The salutation tells the tale: ‘Hail, Mary, full of grace,’ for the angel means to say to her that she is chosen not because of her special grace and quality but rather that she is full of grace and filled with favor because she is chosen by the will of God. God does not choose us to fulfill his purposes because we are worthy of such a choice, or because we are good enough to do what he wishes...No. God chooses us for reasons known only to him, and it is the choice that confers the favor. When God chooses you, you are chosen.”

Stephanie: Their times were not so different from ours. We know disunity, terror, and fear but are too often told the anxieties of our world are brand new to this generation. Each of these women knew threatened lives well beyond what we feel on a given day. And yet, amidst great threat and fear and disunity, they watched for God. They believed God would move. They stayed close to the breath-pace of the Spirit. Because they were waiting, God moved, indeed.

We claim we want the same, but so much of the time we are sleep-walking through our routines, obligations, and uninspired days. We don't watch for God's movement for many reasons—we don't believe God will act, we are terrified God will act, we want our own priority list to come true before we turn and look at the priorities of the Divine. Like St. Augustine who prayed, “Make me chaste Lord, but not yet,” we

pray, “Move in this world, O God, but use someone else to do the work. Move in this church, O God, but use someone else who has more energy. Move in my life, O God, but let me get through football season, the school year, tax time…let me get to retirement, to a more financially stable place, to a time that’s less busy.”

Elizabeth: Guess what? The time is now. No excuses. You want to see what God can do in this world? in your life? in the church? You want to pray that God will move and breathe and stir the winds of your own spirit? Only your life can be the partner to your prayers. When Mary heard that God wanted to birth a movement through her, she responded, “Here I am, let it be.”

What is the thing God wants to birth through your life? Do you have an idea, a passion, a vision that keeps burning within your gut? Perhaps you are the one God is waiting to use to transform this old world into a new one. Do you have a sense of how God’s Spirit is breathing in this congregation? Don’t wait to be asked for your voice to be heard; you may be the first one to have a vision of such things. Speak the truth you are sensing and give your best energy to honoring God in this place.

Stephanie: The Lord is with you. Open your eyes, see the possibilities, take the chance, risk the unknown, say ‘yes’ to the new. Hail, sister, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Hail, brother, full of grace, the Lord is with you.

Elizabeth: Hail, Tina, full of grace
Hail, Clay, full of grace,
Hail, Alex, full of grace
Hail, Tim, full of grace
Hail, Scott, full of grace

Stephanie: Hail, Jacob, full of grace
Hail, Sydney, full of grace
Hail, Tom, full of grace
Hail, Mona, full of grace
Hail, Judie, full of grace

Elizabeth: Hail, Connie, full of grace
Hail, Richard, full of grace
Hail, Jared, full of grace
Hail, Andy, full of grace
Hail, Annie, full of grace

Stephanie: Hail, Emma, full of grace
Hail, Turner, full of grace
Hail, Zachary, full of grace
Hail, Julia, full of grace
Hail, Olga, full of grace

Elizabeth: Hail, Kathy, full of grace
Hail, Stephanie, full of grace
Hail, Elizabeth, full of grace

Stephanie: Blessed are you.

Elizabeth: Blessed are you.

Stephanie: The Lord is with you.

Elizabeth: The Lord is with you.