

December 14, 2025

Advent #3 (also Children's Christmas play)

"Mary and Elizabeth"

Luke 1:39-56

### **Intro:**

As we have already had the privilege of hearing a wonderful reminder of how we need to not let the busyness of the Christmas season take our focus away from the gift of Jesus, I will not make you sit through a lengthy sermon.

I would, however, like to take just a few moments to reflect upon two women who figure rather prominently in the Advent narrative. I am referring to Mary and her cousin Elizabeth.

We all know Mary's spot in the story, but Elizabeth doesn't get a lot of attention. Which, honestly, is one of the reasons why she is important to reflect upon. So let's start there, shall we?

### **A Tale of Two Women:**

Elizabeth is the mother of John the Baptist, but his story doesn't really come into play for another 30 years. It is Elizabeth's remarkable story that we need to put in front of us right now. Elizabeth is married to a Jewish priest named Zechariah. They are both faithful servants of God, they don't have any children (because Elizabeth was barren), and they are both advanced in age.

Let's pause for a moment... It is Mary and the miraculous virgin birth story that we all share at Christmas, and we should! But we can't forget that just six months before the angel Gabriel visits Mary and completely turns her world upside down and inside out, he visited Zechariah and announced that there would be a miraculous birth involving his wife Elizabeth. Sure, this was not a Holy-Spirit-conceived pregnancy, but it was miraculous nonetheless. Here was a woman who, in spite of her desires, was unable to have children and who as a result likely suffered all sorts of public and private shame and ridicule. Having children was

seen as a sign of God's favour and contributed to a person's and family's standing in the community. Now that same woman, who is well past child-bearing age, is going to have a baby. It is a Christmas miracle! There is rejoicing among her family and her neighbours and friends (once they all get over the shock). Elizabeth gets to know something deep about God's grace.

Now we switch to Mary. Here is a young woman just entering into the prime of her life. Many years of hope and family future lie ahead of her. She is engaged to a reputable man. Life ahead of her is looking rosy indeed. And then she also gets a visit from Gabriel. But the message she gets is not the good news that we all like to view it as. This assignment from God means a significant departure from the good life she is looking forward to (or so she would think at first). Becoming pregnant during the engagement period was cause for serious shame on herself, her family, and her husband to be. He would be in his rights to cancel the engagement, causing Mary to become an outcast in the community. The whispers, judgemental looks, and closed doors would follow her for the rest of her life. Accepting God's plan is quite a decision for her, and could quite suddenly leave her very alone in the world. It is with the greatest of courage that she submits to the will of God.

So, where does a young girl go who is facing the probability of having nowhere to go? Luke tells us that she goes into the hill country to visit her cousin Elizabeth. This is not a pleasant vacation to the lake. This is a self-imposed exile. Mary is distancing herself from her family so they won't have to bear the weight of her shame. Elizabeth is a God-fearing and righteous person, and if there is anywhere that Mary would be able to find grace and acceptance, it would be at her house. Also, Mary knew about Elizabeth's miraculous pregnancy and perhaps thought that Elizabeth would be able to help her through her own experience.

### **Conclusion:**

Have you ever had an experience where you are convinced that no one else could possibly understand what you are going through? It is lonely.

Imagine how uniquely lonely Elizabeth must have been – no one in her world could possibly understand what it was like to have a miracle baby like she was having at her age. Mary was also in a very unique situation – no one else is miraculously pregnant without having intercourse.

God placed Elizabeth and Mary together so they could share their similar experiences – to support and encourage and relate as they both waited for the miracle to come to fruition in birth. They both understood that these babies were gifts from God. And they were both able to support and encourage one another as they shared the joy of knowing that God had noticed them and blessed them. It is out of this joy that Mary's song of praise – the Magnificat – comes.

As we wait and prepare in this Advent season, take time to notice the people in your life that God has placed there specifically to share and understand life with. Take time also to realize and know that God, in fact, has taken notice of you! What a joy that is!

Let's pray.