

# From Generation to Generation: We see God in each other.

## Fourth Sunday of Advent

Luke 1:39-58.  
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

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Before reading today's Gospel passage, I want to put it into context. The Gospel of Luke begins with a story of the angel Gabriel visiting an old Jewish priest named Zechariah. While attending to his duties in the temple, Zechariah is told his barren wife Elizabeth will bear a son, whom he will name John. Later we learn this child will become John the Baptist, the one who will prepare the way for the coming of the long-awaited Messiah.

Six months after that visit, the angel Gabriel visits a relative of Elizabeth, named Mary, who is thought to be Elizabeth's much-younger cousin. Engaged to Joseph, Mary is told that she will conceive a son by the Holy Spirit and name him Jesus. This story is often called The Annunciation and is depicted in countless works of magnificent art. After an explanatory discussion, Mary replies, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Our Gospel reading for today immediately picks up where this story left off. I will be reading, **Luke 1:39-48; 56-58**. The verses in between, verses 46-55, were read just a few moments ago. That section is known as Mary's Song, or the Magnificat. With its theme of how the lowly will be lifted up, it has been used from generation to generation as a protest to call for liberation from oppressive powers.

[Read Luke 1:39-45; 56-58]

**Who do you tell, or go to visit, when you receive some remarkably good news? Or, perhaps when you face a new milestone or threshold in your life? Why do you choose to go to that particular person or persons? Most likely it's because you know they will share in your joy and excitement, or perhaps your fear and uncertainty.** On the other hand, think about how you respond to the person who comes to you with news of great joy, or in need of support. That exchange has the potential to become a genuine blessing to both of you. Today's Gospel story allows us to put ourselves into the roles of both Mary and Elizabeth, and how they became a mutual blessing to each other.

Throughout the season of Advent this year, we've been using the resource from the folks at A Sanctified Art. As you know, the overall theme is "From Generation to Generation". It has allowed us to take a good look back at those who have come before us, reflecting upon their impact and influence in our lives, sometimes unawares. It also allows us to look ahead at what it is we are passing along to others now, and to future generations. Concerning the exchange between Elizabeth and Mary the resource shares the following.

After receiving the news from the angel, Mary retreats to her cousin Elizabeth's house. When Mary arrives (perhaps unannounced), Elizabeth doesn't just welcome her—she is filled with the Holy Spirit and speaks a blessing upon Mary as her own child leaps and kicks within her womb. She sees how God is at work and names it out loud. In this moment of profound solidarity, Mary and Elizabeth see the divine in one another. This connection inspires Mary to sing her radical hymn of praise [The Magnificat], declaring how God's liberating love remains steadfast throughout the ages.

**From generation to generation, we can see how God is at work in our relationships. We find God in each other. The way we see the divine in each other impacts how we live and move in the world. When we view every human being as a child of God, we generate a different world.**

Some of you may be familiar with the word and concept of "**Namaste**". It's a word usually associated with the eastern religious traditions such as Hinduism and Buddhism. The word is used as a greeting and sometimes as a parting goodbye blessing. It is most often said with hands held together with a slight bow. Loosely translated from the Sanskrit it means "**The God in me recognizes the God in you**" or "The Divinity within me perceives and respects the Divinity within you."

**Namaste is indeed a profound theological recognition that the Sacred Presence of the Divine, what we call God, dwells within all of God's creation.** This understanding is found deep within the Celtic tradition, and that of many indigenous peoples. **Imagine if we entered into every interaction with each other by acknowledging that we honor, recognize, and appreciate that which is Divine within the other person.** This especially applies to those with whom we disagree, or choose not to associate. **How could we not treat others more ethically and with lovingkindness?**

In other religious traditions, there are similar-meaning words and concepts, such as *shalom* (in the Jewish tradition), and *salaam* (in the Muslim tradition). Each is used as a greeting and blessing of deep and abiding peace and wholeness. Unfortunately, there just isn't much of a sacred greeting or blessing in "Hey, how's it going?" or "Hi, how you today?" or "Bye now, talk to you later." Our typical cultural greetings or goodbyes, given the lack of a Christian counterpart word in English to namaste, just doesn't cut it by comparison. Therefore, **how can we be more intentional about expressing, or even finding a way, to see the sacred, the Divine, within all things, especially all other people? With the recognition of God's Presence within those we meet, whether we know them or not, it can lead us to treat them with deeper compassion, care, dignity, and respect. For when we forget to do so, it's easier to be disrespectful or dismissive.** Like Elizabeth and Mary, it was an acknowledgement of their interconnectedness and close relationship.

The Advent resource artist, Carmelle Beaugelin, writes, "Mary and Elizabeth have found in each other a sisterhood amid their precarious and unusual circumstances... Despite their difference in age, the two cousins find comfort in the midst of the unconventional timing of their expanding families. All along, as the two women whisper together of the growing promises hidden in their wombs and unconventional lives, **Mary and Elizabeth themselves are cradled by the guiding arms of the God who moves them beyond cousins into sisterhood.**" Perhaps you have experienced something similar in

relationship with another. Some have described this as a threshold moment in both of their lives.

Dr. Christine J. Hong, the biblical commentator for our A Sanctified Art resource adds to this from her personal history.

My parents are Korean immigrants. My mother used to say that back in the days of their immigration, whoever met you at the airport decided your destiny. In other words, whoever greets you at the threshold as you become a new immigrant determines the direction your life moves. I remember her words and reflect on them whenever I reach significant impasses in my life—a new job, a move, when I became a parent for the first time. Each significant milestone feels like a threshold. When I prepare to cross those thresholds, I look for the people and communities waiting on the other side, people and communities to anchor me and hold me in the nebulous spaces of change, uncertainty, and fear.

Let me pause here for a moment to state I can't help but thinking that our new Afghan neighbors, two large families of which our congregation is supporting in a variety of ways, including transportation, tutoring in English, and even helping one father practice his driving, might be going through a similar experience. This is certainly a threshold moment in their lives. And we, among others, are those waiting on the other side. Hong continues.

When my parents crossed over from being Korean to being Korean American, it was the local church pastor (also a Korean immigrant) who greeted them at the threshold, after they made their way through borders and customs at LAX [the airport in Los Angeles]. He picked them up in his car and took them to an apartment complex to get them housed. Next, he took them to meet members of his church who worked at ticketing at LAX. My parents worked the next few years at Korean Airlines ticketing and baggage claim, hourly jobs that paid the bills and gave them footing in a new country. The final stop was the Korean immigrant church that would be their community as they settled in a new country, with a new language, and, in some ways, a new understanding of Christian faith. It was the Korean immigrant church folk who anchored them to this new land. My parents arrived and were greeted by Korean American people who embraced them, settled them, and invited them to participate in building sustaining faith and peoplehood together.

[Hong summarizes,] Elizabeth greets Mary on the threshold, not only of her door but the threshold of something new in Mary's life and for the world. Mary is met by her cousin who greets her with welcome, anticipation, and a powerful blessing. So rich was the blessing that the baby in Elizabeth's womb leapt up and greeted Mary and the baby in Mary's womb. Any fear Mary had was met with the contagious courage of Elizabeth, courage enough for them both. **They were one another's spiritual midwives—birthing together transformation, grounded in one another's courage and steadfastness.** They wondered together in liminal space, on the threshold of a new world. And through their spiritual and relational partnership, Mary and Elizabeth framed the path of partnership for their children too.

**It might be a helpful spiritual exercise for you to recall a threshold moment or two in your life. Who were the people, or the community, that greeted you and supported you through that transition?** It is my hope and prayer that as a community of faith we can be present for each other during the threshold moments in each of our lives, **providing an open door and a place of sanctuary. And in doing so, we express and live out what it means to be the church.**

May you and I always remember to recognize the Divine what dwells within each other, within *all* of God's children, and creation itself.

Namaste.

Resource:

A Sanctified Art, *From Generation to Generation...*, 2022.