

Love the Star
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Luke 1:39-55

39 In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴²and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'

46 And Mary said,

'My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸ for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

⁵⁰ His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;

⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,

⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'

“Stars, keep the watch. When night is dim / one more light the bowl shall brim.” We are all stars, Elizabeth, Mary, you, and me. Mary knew this because it was told to Abraham. Mary says of God's goodness, “He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.” That promise to Abraham was this: “I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, and will give to your offspring all these lands; and all the nations of the earth shall gain blessing for themselves through your offspring.”¹ In our own shining as stars, we seek to bless others with the same light which blesses us. And this light which blesses us is another star, which shines brighter still. That star, Christ, did not

¹ Genesis 26:4

arrive that other stars, Mary, Elizabeth, you, and me, might feel diminished in its presence but that they would see how much more brightly they might shine.

Elizabeth and Mary respond to the coming of **love the star**, not with despair or dejection, but marvel and praise. Elizabeth marvels, “And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?” And so it is for us. It is not unnatural to ask “how is it that Jesus came for me?”, but ask in wonder and awe of God’s greatness, not in doubt of yourself. If we ask the question in this way, a response like Mary’s is natural: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.”

God has looked with favor upon us. We may not see how it is that from now on all generations will call us blessed but I humbly suggest that is because we cannot see how it is that we have been blessed. I am not suggesting that any blessing outdoes or overlooks the horrors and the sorrows of our age, or of our personal lives. That would be foolish, irresponsible, and even contrary to the biblical witness. Human living means human sorrow alongside human joy, human pain alongside human healing. Jesus’ life was witness to this, as were the lives of so many others in the Bible.

What I suggest is that there is blessing to be found, too; there is good, there is brightness in ourselves and in others. You may have recently seen or heard this quote from Fred Rogers, Presbyterian pastor and beloved host of children’s television: “When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.’”² We find blessings when we look for the helpers.

We find blessings in each of you who brought mittens or a hat or a toy to adorn our Mitten Tree. We find blessings in the people who care for and teach the children in our church family. We find blessings in the people who ready the candles for Christmas Eve and who wash the laundry for The Caring Place and who fix our leaky faucets and maintain our property and vacuum the sanctuary. We find blessings in each of you who make coffee and bring cookies and cake and lead Bible studies and adult education. We find blessings in each of you who usher and who lead our worship and who proclaim the Word of God and who serve communion and who give glory to God by leading us in song with voice and organ and violin, piano and bells. We find blessings in each of you who recruit volunteers for the various ways we help in the community and who buy the items that allow the guests at the Hebron House to make a meal and that allow us to contribute to the Food Pantry. We find blessings in each of you who keep our plants alive and who maintain our website so we can reach out to others and who visit those who cannot be with us. All that others might know we respect the places and the times where and when we worship God and that, above all, we care about God’s children. These are just

² <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/198594-when-i-was-a-boy-and-i-would-see-scary>

some of our helpers. We see how great our own help can be in the examples of the help Jesus shared with others. And our greatest blessing will always be our greatest helper, Jesus.

At times we may question or even despair over the smallness of the help we can give. Our brothers and sisters in the Jewish faith in which Jesus grew, in understanding what God is saying to them through the Torah, have replied through the Talmud to such a question in this way: “Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world’s grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.” You have been created a star among many, with a light of your own meant to shine.

Some came together Friday night to witness to that, to witness that even the smallest light breaks the darkness. In this darkness of winter we welcome a bright star. In global darkness, in our national darkness, in our corporate darkness, in our personal darkness, we welcome this bright star. And, as is often God’s way, this brightness shines in the unlikeliest of places. In a young virgin, nobody important as far as the world was concerned. In a woman beyond child-bearing years, and yet still bearing a child. In you. In me. In bittersweet memories. So stars, keep the watch. When night is dim, one more light the bowl shall brim, Shining beyond the frosty weather, Bright as sun and moon together.

Let us pray: God of light, shine that we might shine with you, we pray. Amen.