

## “With God, Anything Can Happen”

Based on Luke 1:39-45

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Rev. Dr. Kevin Orr

This is a hard time of year for preachers. It's Christmas. And the story of Christmas has been told so many times, in so many ways, that it is extremely difficult to say anything really new about it. What new twist can be found? What new kernel of wisdom or insight? The scripture passages we hear today and will hear tomorrow are some of the most over-interpreted scriptures in the Bible. So what can anyone say about the story that is original? You all have already heard it. It seems all we are left with is the story itself and maybe that's enough. Maybe we just need to rehearse this amazing story once again, of how God came to the world as one of us, taking on human flesh from within the womb, and simply marvel about it.

Consider how marvelous this story is. Some may even say it is absurd. Mary has just had a conversation with the archangel Gabriel, telling her that she would get pregnant by the Holy Spirit, and will have a boy who is the Son of God. That is some big news for a teenage girl who, according to an old tradition, had spent all her life within the Temple in Jerusalem. Of course, when you get news like this, that you are expecting a baby, you don't just sit on that news. You have to get up and tell somebody. And the first person you tell is likely the most important person in your life. Notice that it wasn't Joseph. Maybe that was for obvious reasons. She would have some 'splainin to do! But no, she gets up and hurries to a small village in the hill country of Judea, to a relative who must be the most important person in her life, Elizabeth. Elizabeth may have been Mary's aunt, which would make John and Jesus cousins. This is what has been traditionally understood. At any rate, Elizabeth was clearly someone who was dear to Mary, who she was comfortable sharing such amazing news. Can you see this girl, sneaking out of the Temple, out of the watchful eyes of the priests, and running with excitement to tell the news to Elizabeth? These days she probably would have just given Elizabeth a call. Doubt if she would have posted it

on Facebook though. “I’m pregnant and God is the Father.” Would you click “like”, “love” or the “ha ha” emoji? Would you respond with “congrats”? That would be pretty weird.

No, with a story like this, one only tells the closest people that they can trust; someone who would believe them and not think they are crazy. Elizabeth was one of those people for Mary. I suspect Mary could trust Elizabeth with this news because Elizabeth had some news of her own. The word was out all around about how Zechariah had seen an angel that told him his wife Elizabeth, well past child-bearing years, would give birth to a son who is to be named John. Surely Mary thought that if Elizabeth had her own miraculous pregnancy that she would understand what Mary is going through. In fact, there was no one else in the world who would understand what Mary was experiencing than Elizabeth. So Mary had to go to Elizabeth to share her news.

But what happens next is even more amazing. As Mary approaches Elizabeth, John kicks her. Now there is nothing amazing about a baby kicking their mother’s uterus. What is amazing is what Elizabeth says. She doesn’t say, “Oohh, I felt that one.” Instead, she said, “The child inside me leaped for joy as soon as I heard you say hello!” And, the scriptures say, the Holy Spirit fell on Elizabeth. Now this is something impressive. In those days the Holy Spirit rarely fell on anyone. Only prophets received the Spirit for the purpose of speaking God’s message... Thus sayeth the Lord. And 99% of those prophets were men: Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Micah, etc. But here is old Elizabeth, the priest’s wife, who has been granted the blessing of carrying a special child who will prepare the way for Jesus, little baby John who starts the preparation now by leaping in the womb. Not only does Elizabeth have within her the greatest prophet of all time, she becomes a prophet herself.

Elizabeth is a prophet because as soon as she saw Mary and felt John leap in her womb she knew that Mary was pregnant. Mary had not yet told anyone she was pregnant. She just found out herself! Elizabeth already knows. Right away she is singing a song of blessing over Mary and the baby in her womb. The little prophet John is oozing the spirit of prophecy I guess! And there you have it, two women carrying two

miracle babies. Here, in an unnamed village in the hill country of Judea, you have an old woman and a young woman embracing each other with joy. One has inside her womb the greatest of all prophets. In the other womb is the Son of God, our Lord and Savior. Amazing.

So, why did it happen this way? This is why some think this whole story is so absurd. Here is the account of how the greatest prophet of all time and the savior of the world came into being. It isn't among the powerful. It isn't in Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria or Rome. It isn't among the elites. And men are only ambiguously involved. Zechariah is only involved by divine intervention and Joseph had nothing to do with it at all! No, this amazing event, an event that turns the tide, that ushers in the salvation of the whole world, is first experienced and shared by an old woman and a young girl in a small village in the hills of Judea. This is how God decided to break into our world. And we are left to puzzle why, of all the ways God could have come into our world, that God chose this particular time, in this particular place, with these particular women.

As hard as you may try, the question of why this way and not another can't be answered except to conclude that this is how God does things. God tends to act in ways that we don't always expect or notice. God's thoughts are not our thoughts. God's ways are not our ways. God has a bigger view of things than we will ever perceive. We are left to marvel at how it happened, that two women on the margins of society are the first to realize how it is that God will come to save the world. It's just amazing. I don't know what else to say about it.

If there is one message we can take from this, it is that God can work through anyone who has a heart open to God. It's not just the wise people, or the people of great talents, notoriety and wealth. It is anyone who is open to the possibility that God could use them for ministry. And it's not the size of ministry that counts. It is true that large ministries can have large impact. People who have successfully grown ministries from just a few people to the participation of thousands can be inspiring and may have some things to teach us about God and about the practicalities of growing a ministry. Leaders of these large ministries have people coming up to them all the time asking for guidance or encouragement,

they have tons of Facebook friends and thousands of Twitter followers. They command a lot of influence for good. God definitely uses people like that and the large ministries they shepherd. But if the Bible shows us anything, it is that God tends to work through people no one really knew before. Elizabeth and Mary were ordinary people, at least on the outside. But on the inside they were open to the possibility of being used by God to accomplish amazing things. What is possible for us is obviously not the same as what was for them. But we can follow their lead and allow ourselves to be open to what God may want to accomplish through us. Whether God's intention is for you or me to one day birth a massive ministry that reaches thousands or even millions or it is to bless just one person today, that's up to God. Who God is looking for is people who are open to God's leading, who are willing to say "yes" to God, and then see what happens. And those people are often people like you and me, just ordinary folks.

Elizabeth carried a prophet in her womb. Maybe you have a prophetic word inside of you that needs to be expressed. Mary carried in her womb our Savior Jesus. We believe that by accepting Jesus Christ as our Savior that he dwells in our hearts. We carry Jesus with us wherever we go. Every day we have an opportunity to share Jesus with others, by what we say but mostly by what we do. We can announce the good news that no matter what, God is with us. So perhaps this is something we can take with us as we rush toward Christmas: that when it comes to being available to be used by God, used by God to express God's holiness and God's love, that all of us are included. When God is looking for faithful servants, God is looking at you and me. Just like Elizabeth and Mary, you and I can be in on what God is up to, something that most people miss entirely because we aren't famous and don't have huge platforms. Being famous isn't required to be selected by God to do something that can change the world, at least the world of one person.