

## SERMON- Advent 4C

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~~Micah 5:2-5a~~

Good Shepherd

December 19, 2021

Luke 1:39-45, (46-55)

Canticle 15 (Luke 1.46-55)

### OPENING:

Men are.....,

or at least this man is....

deeply jealous of the conversation and connection that women often have about pregnancy and their children.

I am admitting that because we just overheard the most famous conversation around this subject in all of history.

Mary and Elizabeth, cousins—but two women in very different life situations—come together and talk about their shared experience of being pregnant.

Through that connection, they support one another and grow from it.

Because of it, Mary and Elizabeth are able to see life more clearly and to realize the truth of their vocation and their unique connection to God.

That conversation and connection is all the more important today because we join in on it, in that (later this morning) we are about to welcome Cecilia into the church through the sacrament of Holy Baptism

and because, in less than a week, we are to welcome the Christ child into the world.

SO we ALL (men and women, mothers and fathers, parents and non-parents), are gathering to share the good news of birth and life, just like Mary and Elizabeth.

### GENDER

So I'd like to talk about all of that—about welcoming, about baptism, about Advent, and about children being born.

And I liked to do that through the prism of gender, recognizing my limitations based on my own experiences and my chromosomes.

Recognizing that, famously, Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, is struck mute by an angel so he cannot speak throughout Elizabeth's pregnancy.

Recognizing that famously Joseph, Mary's husband, does not speak in any of the Gospels.

Yet I am going to try to say something about it all, with some fear and trembling.

## ADVENT

It's called "Mansplaining"—that's what I am trying to avoid. You know, the male tendency to condescend and patronize with our all-encompassing knowledge of a subject that we might know little about.

Here's an example of mansplaining around this church season, apparently alive and well in the pulpit in the Episcopal Church, no less. It occurs when male preachers lecture about how you (plural, usually meaning women) are not doing Advent right.

Sarah Condon, a prominent Episcopal priest blogger, republishes a Facebook post every year describing it:

**“MALE PREACHERS!**

This is your seasonal reminder that shaming your people about the 'Christmas rush' is really just shaming mothers.... And none of us like it.

Unless you are the ones buying the stocking stuffers, remembering Advent calendars, planning for school parties, organizing the food for Christmas Eve/Day, figuring out what gifts are Santa and what gifts are not, helping with the Christmas Pageant, ordering Christmas cards, having the patience of Job while your children decorate gingerbread houses, Christmas stress eating cookies, hoping to God your jeans fit, and navigating family emotions all whilst managing an ocean of bucolic expectations, then I do not need to hear your opinions about how I am mispending my time during Advent.”<sup>1</sup>

I love that.

Maybe that's why Mary hightailed off to her cousin's house, she did not want to hear Joseph talk and her family talk about "What she needed to do" to prepare for the birth of the Son of God.

Now, to be fair, that the author of that Advent diatribe is an Episcopal priest shows that we have come a long way. Now, theoretically, the modern-day Mary's and Elizabeth's can sing their songs without interruption and without divine help.

## **ELIZABETH as PROPHET**

Remember though, that Elizabeth is a preacher's wife, Zechariah being a priest. It might be good to 'inquire within' about what the preacher's wife, the preacher's spouse, might say in this situation.

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<sup>1</sup> [Sarah Condon | Facebook](#) (Post from December 9, 2019)

So I will share with you Michelle's advice on preaching  
She says: "Don't exegete, don't do the seminary thing...  
where you tell us something we don't know about, that we don't care about."  
Instead, "tell stories, talk about yourself, make it personal, connect it to our lives  
and be funny."

Good advice?

I tell her, 'that's hard, that's actually really tough work, for the preacher.'  
It's much easier to tell someone something they don't know, and probably don't  
need to know.

*Did you know that, in the American Civil War...*

*I bet you don't know this... I am going to tell you it... so you will then know it...  
that there was a massive religious revival that went on in the army camps, North  
and South, and that thousands were baptized by military chaplains.*

*Did you know that they were full immersion baptisms, done by men to men, and that  
scholars think that is an example of men reclaiming the sacrament as a masculine  
act of choice that meant something different than the sprinkling that would occur at  
a home baptism? Did you know that?<sup>2</sup>*

I bet Mary probably had a priest or two to tell her all sorts of things that she did not  
know and did not need to know during her season of Advent.

My guess is what she needed, instead, was someone who would make it personal,  
tell stories, connect what it all meant to her in her life.

Again, much harder work.

But I feel that's the type of work that Mary did by travelling to Elizabeth's house,  
by herself, all those miles.

And the "sermon" that she got from Elizabeth was exactly what she needed.

## **FATHERS:**

Maybe I can get back to safer ground by talking about fathers for a second.

So, the flipside of my aforementioned jealousy is that, in my experience,  
Moms are able to unite almost instantly at birthday parties and playgrounds and  
daycare, while Dads often sit there and stare uneasily at each other, hoping it will  
all end soon.

Women often are able to talk about the most important and intimate aspects of their  
being, while men struggle through sports and the weather.

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<sup>2</sup> Kurt Berends. "Wholesome Reading Purifies and Elevates the Man- The Religious Military Press in the Confederacy" in Miller, Randall M., Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson, eds. 1998. *Religion and the American Civil War*. New York: Oxford University, 141-2, 160n25.

So I worry that Joseph and Zechariah were not connecting on the same level that their wives did, that Zechariah did not invite Joseph out for a beer and commiserate about becoming dads.

It seems like they might have had a lot to talk about, at least a little bit in common, and that bond could have transformed them. Imagine what songs that they could have sung together, what poetry could have been created from Joseph and Zechariah getting together and communicating about something beyond.... what's cooking on the grille.

Maybe they did of course. But Luke is silent about it, and I think that silence says something.

It's a reminder for men, and for everyone, not to be silent when it comes to those important moments in our lives.

The truism: "Actions speak louder than words" is okay.

But not for it to serve as a smokescreen; words are important too, words are good. The Hebrew word for "to create" and "to say" are the same thing, because for the Hebrew God to say something was to make it so.

So for Joseph and Zechariah, and for me and for all men, and for all of us.

"I love you"

"I am proud of you"

OR "What is it like for you being a father?"

OR "What can I help you with?"

All good words, courageous, connective, transformational in their own right.

### **CONCLUSION.**

I've buried the lead, I am afraid. During our Christmas Pageant on Friday, our two welcomes will converge: as baby Cecilia will play the part of Baby Jesus in our Christmas Pageant! What a moment it will be, maybe the 1<sup>st</sup> time in all of the history of Christendom this will happen. What a story to tell.

Today, Cecilia will be the newest member of God's church, the **latest** to be baptized into this Family. It's fitting that she does so on the day we celebrate the Visitation, Mary and Elizabeth coming together, because that was the "**first** gathering of the community of Jesus", the first time that there was Church, the first time we were together to share stories, to speak courageous words, to welcome and to be welcomed, and to be transformed.<sup>3</sup> **AMEN**

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<sup>3</sup> "Fourth Sunday of Advent" Commentary 2 on Luke 1:39-45 (46-55) in *Connections: a Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship*. Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, and Cynthia L. Rigby, eds. 2021. Louisville, Westminster John Knox.