

“Meditation”

Matthew 1:18-23 & Luke 1:26-45

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Prayer for Understanding Holy God, we come to your Scripture today hoping that it will feel a bit like an open door, like Elizabeth welcoming Mary, like coming home. We want to fall into it. We want to find sanctuary here. We want to breathe easier just hearing these words. And we want to find ourselves laughing because this good news is just too good to keep inside. So hover close to us now. Open the door to our hearts so that we might find sanctuary in your words. Gratefully we pray, amen.

Matthew 1:18-23 NLT “This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly. As Joseph considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet: “Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and they will call him Immanuel, which means ‘God is with us.’”

Luke 1:26-45 NLT “In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. Gabriel appeared to her and said, “Rejoice, favored woman! The Lord is with you!” Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. “Don’t be afraid, Mary,” the angel told her, “for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!” Mary asked the angel, “But how can this happen? I am a virgin.” The angel replied, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. What’s more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. For the word of God will never fail. For nothing is impossible with God. Mary responded, “I am the Lord’s servant. May everything you have said about me come true.” And then the angel left her. A few days later Mary hurried to the hill country of Judea, to the town where Zechariah lived. She entered the house and greeted Elizabeth. At the sound of Mary’s greeting, Elizabeth’s child leaped within her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, “God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed. Why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should visit me? When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what God said.”

After receiving the angel’s extraordinary news, Mary is inspired by the love of Elizabeth, who uses her gifts of hospitality and encouragement to wrap Mary in God’s love. Occasionally angels bring us good news of great joy. Often God’s love is experienced through each other. You might say we are called to be angels for one another. Mary retreated to Elizabeth’s home to digest her new calling. She sought refuge, physical safety, and emotional protection. She received a safe haven, a home for her heart to sing praise. Sanctuary and safe space are so crucial for everyone, especially the mother of Christ while she prepares to become a home for God. Sanctuary is anywhere God’s love dwells freely and abundantly.

Human angels provide refuge from the storms of life, keep the embers warm when one’s fire is all but gone, provide sanctuary until one can carry on their journey home to abundant life.

Where are your safe spaces? Perhaps a circle of friends, a peaceful grove of trees, a song, a book, a photo, a piece of art, the home of grandparents, the arms of a loved one. Where do you feel safe, welcomed, and rejuvenated? Where are your sanctuaries, places where God’s love dwells freely and abundantly? Who are your angels, persons who share peace, hope, joy, and love, who help you feel at home? Close your eyes and imagine you are in your

sanctuary, with your angels. Take a mental picture. Whenever life gets crazy and messy take a deep breath and recall that mental image of your sanctuary with your angels.

Mary sought such a place, after she heard the news of her pregnancy. As a pregnant teenager, poor and unwed, dangers and uncertainty—both physical and societal—surrounded her. With haste, she journeys to Elizabeth’s house. Elizabeth—and the child in her womb—welcome and affirm her. For three months, that home and the arms that received Mary became her safe haven. Elizabeth’s welcome, blessing, and care were safe space, just what she needed as she prepared for the important call ahead. Mary would give birth to Jesus and would educate him in his formative years. The world saw the imprint of this young woman in the life and teachings of her son, Jesus. Mary herself was sanctuary and Jesus’ first earthly home.

How are you a sanctuary and a home for others? How do you create safe places and refuge for others? In the midst of someone’s raging storm, how do you listen, help them carry the burden and provide a safe haven? How are you like Elizabeth, an angel among us, providing sanctuary for anyone in need and glorify with your actions God, the one whose love, freely given, is our sanctuary, our home? How do you help others find their home?

As Mary seeks and finds refuge in Elizabeth’s embrace, she, in turn, becomes a sanctuary for God. Also known as the theotokos, Mary is the “God-bearer,” the dwelling place of God. When we receive safe refuge, we have the capacity to provide sanctuary for others.

The good news, Emmanuel, God is with us, providing sanctuary for each of us. God’s love is creating space so we can be filled with extravagant love and sustained on our journey home to glorious eternal life.

“Come On Home”
a poem by Pastor Susan Are Speed

We all know the feeling—
the shaky ground,
sinking sand,
water-is-rising,
sun-is-fading feeling
that makes steady breathing
an entire miracle,
and holding back tears
a marvel in and of itself.
And when those days come,
I call my parents.
And I call my church,
and I call my friends,
and they say in unison
what God has said
from the very beginning,
which is, “Come on home.”
Is there anything more healing
than an open door?
If you’re seeking sanctuary,
if the waters are rising—
listen.
It may be hard to hear,
but God is always saying,
“Come on home.”

I hear God saying, “come on home” through...