

Mary

Luke 1:26-80

Year B Advent 4 ; Year C
Advent 4

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Parts by scene

■ = large part ▲ = medium sized part ● = small part

		1	2	3	4	5	6
▲	Joseph - Mary's husband, a quiet and conscientious man	▲			▲		▲
▲	Bartholomew - an old friend of Joseph's	●			●		▲
▲	Elizabeth - a older cousin of Mary's		▲			▲	
▲	Mary - the mother of Jesus		▲			▲	
●	Jerome - a friend of Zechariah's			▲			
▲	Doctor - a doctor who			■			

Scene 1

Bartholomew , Joseph

{In Bethlehem some time after the birth of Jesus, Joseph tells an old acquaintance about the events surrounding Jesus' conception.}

Joseph *[telling his story simply and matter-of-factly]* You see, the same angel that visited me had visited her.

Bartholomew *[humoring him]* You don't say.

Joseph It told her the Holy Spirit would come upon her.

Bartholomew "Come upon" her? The - Holy Spirit?

Joseph So that the child conceived in her would be called The Son of God.

Bartholomew *[incredulously]* The son of... *[with tender exasperation]* Joseph!

Joseph And as proof, the angel revealed that her cousin, Elizabeth, was also pregnant.

Bartholomew Hold on. You mean the wife of Zechariah, the priest?

Joseph Uh huh.

Bartholomew But they're both older than Methuselah! It would be impossible for them to have a child!

Joseph And yet, they did. You can write home and ask anyone. It was a miracle - just like Mary and our child. And not only that, but Mary visited Elizabeth right away, and there was another miracle, another sign. It happened the moment Elizabeth set eyes on her...

Scene 2

Elizabeth , Mary

{Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth.}

Elizabeth Mary, it's good to see you.

Mary *[in wonder]* You're really pregnant! Just like the angel said.

Elizabeth The angel? What - *[suddenly cries out in pain]* Ahhhhhhh!

Mary Elizabeth! Are you all right?

Elizabeth *[in an altered voice, as if someone or something else is speaking through her]*
Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?â€

Mary How did you know I was pregnant, too? And how did you know about - about Him?

Elizabeth *[in her normal voice, weakly]* What?

Mary Elizabeth, are you all right?

Elizabeth I think so. The baby kicked just now - hard. I've never felt a kick like that before! I hope it won't be the norm! Did I - did it actually knock me out for minute there?

Mary *[a little spooked]* No. You spoke. Don't you remember?

Elizabeth Did I? What did I say?

Mary "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"

Elizabeth I said that? To you? Mary! Are you pregnant, too?

Mary Yes.

Elizabeth And not with any ordinary child.

Mary *[in an exalted voice, quoting the angel]* "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

Elizabeth My God! You and I, the Messiah and his...forerunner. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord fulfills his promises!

Scene 3

Doctor , Jerome

Jerome Good morning, old friend. How are you holding up today? This is Simon. He's a doctor.

Doctor Good morning, sir. I was wondering if you'd let me take a look at your throat.

{Zechariah reacts strongly negatively.}

Jerome Whoa! Whoa! Take it easy, buddy!

Doctor If you don't want to be examined, that's your right, but your friends are worried about you.

Jerome He's writing something. Doctor? I'm afraid I can't read.

Doctor *[reading]* "Not a medical condition. Voice will return."

Jerome Are you saying that you've been faking all this?

Doctor *[reading]* "Not faking. Act of God."

Jerome An act of God? But why would God punish you? You're a priest! You're the best man I know.

Doctor *[reading]* "Voice will return. Thank you for your concern."

Jerome Not telling, eh? All right, old friend.

Doctor *[to Zechariah]* If you change your mind, just have someone come fetch me. You don't seem to be in any discomfort, and I suspect it's just stress induced.

Jerome It looks like you've had lots of visitors. Look at all that paper filled up with writing! Or are you working on another poem?

Doctor It looks like a poem to me.

Jerome That's the spirit! God may silence your tongue, but you can still express yourself with your pen. *[to the Doctor]* You should hear his poems. They're really wonderful. He and his wife both write them!

Doctor Really? *[to Zechariah]* May I read this one? He says, "a poem for my son."

Jerome May God grant it!

Doctor *[to Zechariah]* I should tell you - as a doctor - there are lots of superstitions about how to tell the sex of a baby in the womb, but none of them work. Believe me!

Jerome The trouble with you doctors is you know so much about biology that you forget that's not all there is to it. You leave out God!

Doctor I'll concede that if God wants this baby to be a boy, it'll be a boy. But I'll also add that, even though most parents are certain that God wants them to have a boy, He apparently really wants exactly as many girls in the world as boys. *[to Zechariah]* Well, may I read this? Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago) salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us"

to show mercy to our ancestors
and to remember his holy covenant,
the oath he swore to our father Abraham:
to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,
and to enable us to serve him without fear
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.
And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,
to give his people the knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins,

because of the tender mercy of our God,
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven
to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the path of peace.

Scene 4

Bartholomew , Joseph

{Joseph and Bartholomew continue their talk.}

Bartholomew My God. Then it's all really true!

Joseph Of course it is. What else were you thinking?

Bartholomew *[with a laugh]* What *wasn't* I thinking! *[seriously]* I'm afraid I entertained some pretty harsh theories. That you were lying, that you were delusional, that you were going mad. I'm sorry.

Joseph *[in a quiet voice]* I thought those exact same things about Mary.

{A pause.}

Bartholomew *[trying briskly to snap out of the pensive mood]* Well! So. The Messiah. *[with a laugh]* I'm sorry, but I just don't know what to say!

Joseph I try not to think about it. I try to be a good father and leave it at that. But just last night I looked down at the baby asleep in Mary's arms, and I wondered, Is the life of our Savior really in my hands? What would happen if I failed to provide for him, or let him get into an accident? There are tools all over the house! Saws and hammers and nails. I - I prayed to him, and asked him if he really needed me, how something like that could be possible.

Bartholomew *[breathlessly]* Did he answer?

Joseph He farted. It almost woke a cry in him, and Mary shifted in her sleep, and I panicked for a moment thinking he was going to slip out of her arms, but no, they settled in again, and I settled in next to them with him between us, and so we slept together.

Scene 5

Elizabeth , Mary

{Back to Mary and Elizabeth.}

Mary Elizabeth, I want to write a poem. Like the ones you and Zechariah write. Will you help me?

Elizabeth Of course. What would you like the poem to be about?

Mary This. What's happening now. The miracle.

Elizabeth Well, that should be easy! You know, Zechariah has been working on a poem, too. They can be a matching set!

Mary I don't know how to begin. Can you start it?

Elizabeth Sure. How about, "My soul magnifies the Lord"? Now you speak a second line.

Mary "My spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

Elizabeth Good! Now how about, "For he has sent our Redeemer into the world, the one who will -

Mary *[shyly and impulsively]* No! *[apologetically]* I'm sorry! It's a very good line, but I want this poem to be about...me, about how I feel.

Elizabeth *[patiently]* All right. How about this? "For he has looked down upon the humble state of his servant." All right? Now you speak the next line.

Mary *[cautiously]* "And from now on...all generations will call me blessed."

Elizabeth *[a little put off]* Oh. Uh, all right. Uh... "for the Mighty One has done great things for me"

Mary "And holy is his name."

Elizabeth *[cheerful again]* Good! "His mercy extends to those who fear him"

Mary "From generation to generation."

Elizabeth Very good! "He has performed mighty deeds with his arm"

Mary *[with a sudden vengeful edge]* "But the proud he has scattered in the vanity of their thoughts!"

Elizabeth *[uncertainly]* Mary! That's - that's very...powerful.

Mary *[gaining steam, speaking almost in that other angelic voice]*
He has brought down rulers from their thrones,
but has lifted up the humble!
He has filled the hungry with good things,
but the rich he has sent away empty!

Elizabeth *[in alarm]* Mary!

Mary *[unsteadily, seeming to snap out of whatever mood she was in]* Yes?

Elizabeth Are you all right?

Mary *[with quiet assurance]* I've never felt better.

Elizabeth *[deferentially and almost a little fearfully, as if Mary were now the elder and Elizabeth the child]* The words you're speaking...I never heard you talk like that before. Is - is the poem still about you? Your feelings?

Mary Yes!

Elizabeth *[a little faintly]* We should...we should probably bring it to a close.

Mary *[confidently]* "He has given help to his servant Israel,"

Elizabeth *[almost out of gas]* "Remembering to be merciful,"

Mary *[triumphantly]* "To Abraham and his descendants forever!"

Elizabeth *[out of gas]* "Just as he promised our ancestors.â€

Scene 6

Bartholomew , Joseph

{Bartholomew and Joseph conclude their talk.}

Bartholomew *[in a worried voice]* That's quite poem. And she composed it?

Joseph *[simply proud]* Yes. With Elizabeth's help, she said, but I like to think she did it all by herself and Elizabeth just wrote it out for her.

Bartholomew *[in a concerned tone]* I think - I hope! - Elizabeth did more than that.

Joseph Why?

Bartholomew Well - this just doesn't sound like Mary!

Joseph Really? How so?

Bartholomew For one thing: she's a very humble girl, isn't she? Very modest?

Joseph Oh yes. I told you about the birth, didn't I? I kept expecting her to complain, to blame, to rail against me for not managing things better. She's the mother of - well, you know - and yet, she wouldn't claim so much as a patch of straw from a sheep.

Bartholomew So, does this sound like her? "From now on, all generations will call me blessed."

Joseph It's the truth.

Bartholomew Yes, but is it a truth you'd guess she'd proclaim for herself? Wouldn't the Mary you know more likely focus on God than on herself?

Joseph I suppose so.

Bartholomew And would you say she was a hard or vengeful or judgmental person?

Joseph Not at all! She's kind and gentle. Forgiving.

Bartholomew Then are you sure it wasn't Elizabeth who wrote, "He has scattered the proud in the vanity of their thoughts"? Or "The rich he has sent away hungry"? Would Mary send any soul away hungry, rich or poor, good or evil?

Joseph I guess not. Well, she did insist that Elizabeth helped. I guess I wanted to believe that was just false modesty in my pride to be her husband. Is it not such a good poem, then?

Bartholomew No! I never said *that!* It's actually quite good. Very...elusive.

Joseph But is it a boastful poem? Or a cruel one?

Bartholomew No, no. Or no, not quite. Or not merely. *[a pause]* Okay, let me try that again: what makes the poem good - or what makes it interesting, anyway: what makes it real creative writing - is the juxtaposition of the apparent self-centeredness of "all generations will call me blessed" or the harshness of the judgmental lines with the cool, detached, even humble tone of the poem. A poem written by an actually conceited or vengeful person wouldn't sound like this at all, and wouldn't be at all interesting. It's almost as if it was written by something inhuman, but in a good way. An angel maybe.

Joseph This is all over my head. But you're basically saying there's nothing to worry about, right? I mean, nothing about Mary.

Bartholomew I'm not sure I'd say that, either! Well, speaking of angels, you've met one, so you tell me: did you find it comforting or terrifying? or, somehow, both?

Joseph *[quietly]* I see what you mean. *[sighing]* I didn't want this, you know. I never wanted to be visited by angels. I never wanted my wife speaking like one. *[with growing agitation]* I don't see how I can do this! I can barely read well enough to make out the words of the poem, and here you are telling me it's "inhuman." How do I deal with that, Bartholomew? What am I going to do?

Bartholomew *[slowly and compassionately after a pause]* Go home. Look down upon your son sleeping in your wife's arms. Then settle yourself in beside them and have a good long nap yourself. And when you wake, all will be well.

You can read my thoughts about this play and respond with your own at
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