



---

WHO'S YOUR MARY?

---

Luke 1:39-56



December 15, 2013

Have you ever had to keep a secret? One of those secrets that's so cool it's all you can do to not blab it all over the place? When I left my position in Florida as full time youth director to go to school in Denver, it was a bittersweet experience.

Bitter because I was leaving my community – my chosen family – not knowing if I would ever be back for anything but a short visit.

Sweet, because I was moving forward in my life. I had found a purpose.

Bitter - because I wouldn't get to see my kids grow and develop through their high school years.

Sweet - because I had heard the call of God and my next steps involved being accepted and attending seminary

Bitter – because my next steps involved relocation, and saying goodbye to people I love, and Pardon my candor -- saying goodbye sucks.

Sweet, because people never tell anybody how important they are and how much their presence means to them, until it's time to say goodbye. You haven't lived until you've been group hugged by 25 weeping teenagers! A couple of the more macho high school boys actually had a contest to see who could hug me the hardest!

The first time I was able to go back and visit, was the next December for their annual Christmas dinner theatre, and I decided not to tell anyone I was coming so I could surprise everyone, especially the kids. I had had the lead role for several years and this was one place where they felt that they would really miss my participation. I enlisted the help of my good friend John who arranged a ticket for me to attend the show on opening night. This was perfect because the youth of the church wait tables for the dinner theatre.

John and I managed to successfully keep the secret of my visit and you should have seen everyone's faces! I wanted to tell everyone, but at the same time I didn't want to ruin the surprise. It was totally worth it, but keeping that secret was hard.

I'm not saying that my surprise visit to Florida was anything like Mary's surprise visit to Elizabeth. In fact it was completely different except for the hugs and encouragement I received when I arrived. I was surprised by the enthusiasm of

the youth – who tried to see who could wait on me at the dinner. Mary was no doubt surprised at the enthusiasm Elizabeth showed.

Impregnated by the Holy Spirit and carrying the son of God – the long-awaited Messiah - Now that's some surprise! I imagine she wouldn't want to tell her parents right away. That seems kind of like a no-brainer. She certainly wouldn't be too keen on the idea of telling Joseph, either, what with the whole 'stoning in the town square' thing and all...Who could she tell? No doubt she was confused about what the angel had told her, terrified even. Who could she talk to?

But wait – didn't the angel say something about cousin Elizabeth being in her 6<sup>th</sup> month? That was in itself a miraculous event because Elizabeth and her husband Zecchariah the priest were well past child-bearing years...

That could have been just the excuse Mary needed to get out of town for a while and go see her older cousin. Maybe help out with the birth of her baby, John.

According to Luke, after the angel announced her to be with child, Mary went "with haste" to Ein Karem where cousin Liz lived with her old husband, Zach. I would guess that before she told her parents – or even Joseph – she went to Elizabeth because she felt pretty certain that Elizabeth would believe her and help her. A second reason to visit Elizabeth was that Ein Karem was only 4 miles from Joseph's home in Bethlehem. As a teenage girl, I think she would want to have Elizabeth there for moral support when she told Joseph. "Liz, you have to be there when I tell Joseph! What if he freaks out?"

Mary needed Elizabeth alright, but Elizabeth needed Mary, too.

As her husband Zachariah so tactfully told the angel, Elizabeth was "getting on in years" – he was "an old man," and the two of them had dealt with the pain of infertility all of their married life. If they were anything like my friend in Florida, it's likely that they had conceived and miscarried several times, and the chance of Elizabeth miscarrying at her advanced age was very high, even without the history. Women who go through this have to suffer broken heart after broken heart. Is it any wonder that Elizabeth opted to go into a kind of seclusion until after the second trimester rather than subject herself to yet another public miscarriage.

If Mary left Nazareth “with haste” she couldn’t have been more than a few weeks pregnant. Assuming that she hadn’t told anyone before she left, she spent about nine days on the road traveling, holding on to this secret, wondering what was going to happen to her.

What I do, is make up situations in my head and try to imagine the outcome. They call it projecting and people in recovery are told in no uncertain terms to “Not do that.” We all do it – our brains keep us up at night tossing and turning, imagining situations that will probably never happen.

It wasn’t safe to travel alone so Mary probably hooked up with a caravan of strangers – and maybe some acquaintances from the area that were also headed toward Bethlehem. It would be unlikely that Mary would share her concerns with someone she hardly knew, so when she got to Elizabeth’s, “Hey, Liz - -it’s me, Mary!” Imagine how she felt when she heard Elizabeth’s greeting: “Hail Mary! Blessed are you among women!”

That would be rather surprising since Mary hadn’t told Elizabeth anything yet. Before she even had a chance to share her incredible story and fears, Elizabeth already knows Mary’s secret and is filled by the Holy Spirit, and three times she says it: “You are blessed among women, your child is blessed, and you are blessed for believing.”

And Mary’s whole mood must’ve shifted 180 degrees. Imagine the great sense of relief.

From a state of confusion doubt, Mary’s fear gives way to joy. This is the first joy we’ve heard out of Mary. Up ‘til now she’s been willing – she’s been submissive -- but now, thanks to her cousin and mentor’s encouragement, Mary breaks into this radical song about how God lifts up the humble and the rich will be turned away empty, “My soul magnifies the Lord! My spirit rejoices in God my Savior!”

Luke tells us that Mary stayed three months with Elizabeth – long enough to help with the delivery of Elizabeth’s son, John the Baptist.

One of the greatest things we can do, as far as affecting some change and making the world a better place, is to mentor.

Shortly after I sobered up the last time, I got in my head that I should be a big brother or a mentor of some kind, so I heard about an organization called Hugs for Kids. This group's focus was to find mentors for kids in high risk situations and intervene before abuse happens. When I got the call that they had matched me up with someone I was pretty excited and nervous.

I think God was laughing because I think the joke was on me. Not only did I get matched up as mentor to one 8-year old boy, I was matched up with twin 8 year old boys – both diagnosed ADHD. They were small for their age and, obviously, quite a handful. It was easy for me to see why their single mom, struggling to make ends meet, might get a little frustrated with them from time to time.

Well, my time with the boys consisted of going to the movies or going canoeing on the lake – we went to the playground a lot. I never felt that I was doing very much, but I showed up...regularly. But more importantly, Cristina – their mom – came to me one day in tears and said “I don't know what I would do without you.”

I thought I was there for the boys. I was only half right. My mentoring of those two boys had the effect of helping their mom make it through the days, weeks, and months, of trying to be a good mother to these twin terrors. But not only did this mentoring thing help the boys and their mother – it helped me. Serving others – making someone's day a little bit brighter – this is what we are here to do. This is God's desire for us – “to love one another as I have loved you” it says. I was blessed because the more we serve others – the more we help others to feel that they have real value, and that they are loved – the more loved we feel. The closer to God we are.

Mary needed Elizabeth – Elizabeth needed Mary. The twins and their mom needed me – I needed the twins and their mom.

Who is your Mary? Who is your Elizabeth? Even if you're not intentionally mentoring someone, right this moment someone is looking to you for encouragement and love. Someone needs to know that they have value – that they are worthy.

And you? Who is your Elizabeth? Who do you turn to? Who have you turned to in the past? Think about the people in your life, both past and present. Who made

that difference? Is there or was there someone in your life who made you feel like singing?

The mentoring relationship is a win-win relationship. We are our brothers' keepers, and it's up to us – it's our sacred duty -- to make sure people know that God loves them and that they have value.

That might make a good New Year's resolution wouldn't it?