

Getting ready for baby: Luke 1.39-45

Elizabeth is one of the neglected characters in the Christmas story. Today's TFTD comes from our Lay Reader Rachel Roberts.

Don't forget to go to the church website to experience the Advent Calendar online! You'll find a story, a song and a craft activity linked to today's TFTD. Just click on the link below:

<https://www.stphilipandstjames.co.uk/advent>



“When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leapt in her womb”. Luke 1:41

There is something rather sobering about looking out of a hospital window, watching the world outside. Everyone is moving purposefully, going to work, getting on the bus, hugging friends ... but not you ... you are stuck inside, unable to get out, wondering if life will ever get back to normal.

That was me, many years ago stuck in St Mary's Hospital, waiting for the imminent arrival of Bill and Ben (as we called the twins pre-birth). You see, in the wonderful world of midwifery, you are considered geriatric once you hit 35. And if to boot, you are expecting twins well then ...you become the plaything of doctors ...the ultimate excuse to wire up every part of your anatomy to some monitoring device. You turn into this giant incubator, your own individuality cast aside.

But looking back, that is hardly what matters. Because what matters is that precious moment which marks the turning point in your pregnancy. Elizabeth, the personification of the first-time older mother, had that moment ... a moment immortalised in Scripture. By the grace of God and/or by some miracle of modern science what you thought was not possible, has become possible. You have spent most of your pregnancy hovering between hope and fear. And then unexpectedly all of that angst has melted away as you experience for the very first time those little lives move inside you and the joy you feel is indescribable.

This is the point in your pregnancy when you dare yourself to hope, and you allow yourself to begin to make preparations. You dream of matching outfits, you think about what colour to paint the nursery, ... and in the quietness of the night, you wonder whether yours will be a natural birth ... (no chance!) ... but that is not what really matters. Because what matters to the older mother of twins is being prepared for the paradox of a life full of unexpected challenges: which baby do you feed first, when both are hungry, which toddler do you run after first when they scurry off in different directions, and which child do you hug first when both simultaneously need your undivided attention?

And then there is that final turning point in pregnancy when "getting ready for baby" means something quite different. It is, when like Elizabeth, like Mary, like expectant mothers the world over, you prepare yourself to meet your new baby(ies). You wonder what they will look like, what they will sound like and who they will take after. You dream about the kind of people they will become, what they will achieve, and it breaks your heart to think that they might one day suffer.

Advent is like pregnancy, a time of anticipation, of preparation and turning points. There is that turning point in Advent, when you realise that among all of your pre-occupations you have neglected what really matters.

Because what really matters throughout Advent is getting ready to meet God in Christ as a baby at Christmas. It is, in that encounter that we find new strength for the year ahead, and all the unexpected challenges it will bring. Goodness knows what 2021 has

in store for us. A return to the freedoms of a pre-Covid era or a new reality of increased economic hardships? A bit of both, I suspect.

What will increasingly matter in the times ahead, will be, that reliance we find in Christ, to respond to the sufferings of this new reality among those in our community but mostly beyond. And goodness knows where that will take us.

.... And just in case you were wondering, Bill and Ben were delivered safely. They will be 18 just before Christmas And if you have any bright ideas on how to make their coming of age extra special in these Covid-19 ridden days, then please do share those with me.

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