

Scientists tell us that there is a most amazing and, thus-far inexplicable, phenomenon called “quantum entanglement.” If two particles of energy are kept in close proximity to each other for a long time, they form a relationship, a kind of bond that defies the imagination. The connection between these two particles is so strong that if you take one particle to a laboratory in Los Angeles and move the other one to a lab in New York City, whatever you do to the particle in L.A. will instantly happen to the one in New York, too. Einstein called it “spooky.” It also defied his theory that nothing can travel faster than light. Yet somehow, once particles form this kind of bond, it cannot be severed no matter how great the distance between the two might become.

A similar but opposite thing happened between Mary and Elizabeth. In this case, two separate people formed a relationship across a great distance—a relationship that finally drew them together. Yes, they were cousins to begin with, but you get the feeling that the difference in their ages meant they had never been all that close. You know how it goes at family get-togethers. The cousins already in college hang out together while the younger school-age kids do the same and the two groups don’t mix and mingle much. Neither did Mary and Elizabeth live terribly close to each other. But something remarkable—something filled with holy mystery—happened to both of these women, so that despite their geographic and chronological distance from each other, these women formed a bond at a distance—a bond that would last the rest of their lives.

In this part of Luke’s sprawling opening chapter, Mary reveals that the recent cosmic events in which she has been caught up have taught her a thing or two about what God is up to and how God, you might say, generally operates. Mary is fully aware of her humble status, especially given her time and culture. She was property as much as anything, belonging first to a father and then later to a husband (a husband who could divorce her at will which she herself could never initiate no matter the circumstance). She didn’t belong to a famous family. She hadn’t grown up in a big city. She had absolutely no prospects whatsoever to make a mark in the world or to ever be remembered beyond the next generation or so. Yet miraculously and startlingly, God visited her with news so stunning, it would take at least the rest of her mortal days to try and comprehend it all. As she tries to sort it out, she glorifies the Lord with a song, in which *she invites us to see what she sees*.

But her reversal of circumstances, the lifting up of the lowly and the exaltation of the humble, showed Mary that this is exactly how God works. Maybe she remembered her Bible stories, remembered how God picked Abram and Sarai to receive the covenant,

remembered how God was forever choosing the younger child over the much more highly regarded older child in the Genesis stories, remembered stuttering Moses and vulnerable Ruth and the baby of the family named David. Perhaps she recalled how God had chosen Israel and not mighty Babylon with its hanging gardens, nor did he choose impressive Egypt with its towering pyramids.

Perhaps she remembered all this and then connected the dots to the child growing in her womb, a child so important that even her older cousin Elizabeth referred to him as “*my Lord*.” Mary was bearing Elizabeth’s *Lord*! She was bearing the Savior of the nations! Little Mary. Mary, meek and mild.

And as she pondered all this and treasured all these things in her heart, she connected a few more dots—to see that those who for the time being in this world fancy themselves as titans of finance or masters of the multitudes—those with enough money to cause others to kowtow to them in one spectacle after the next, the so-called rich and powerful folks—Mary now knew, they would be on the losing side of history if at the end of the cosmic day their wealth or worldly power was their *only comfort in life and in death*.

They might gain the whole world but lose their soul, Mary thought, perhaps in anticipation of something her own son would one day say. But if, indeed, they forfeited their own souls, they’d be sent packing, empty as a back pocket and without so much as a stitch of hope. “What has happened to me is a sign of what will happen to the whole universe one day,” Mary as much says in her unsettling song.

*Mary could see it. In fact, Mary saw it with startling clarity.* God loves the poor and favors the disenfranchised. His eye is constantly on the forgotten and invisible members of society. And in the kingdom of God’s Son, all the wrongs that have produced the perpetually poor and the perennially invisible will be righted. All the injustices under which people suffer now, will be ironed out by a righteousness that covers the whole earth. Mary could see it clear as day! So the Advent question that Mary raises for all of us, as Christmas comes once again, is this: “Do we see it, too?”

It’s interesting to me that Elizabeth called out to Mary, says the Scripture, “*in a loud voice*” (v. 42). That is curious because so far, most of the action in Luke has taken place in the quiet shadows. Zechariah emerges from the Temple *mute*. When Elizabeth became pregnant, she stayed *in seclusion* for five months. Mary likewise does not appear to have made any *public* pronouncements about what Gabriel said to her. Indeed, she likely didn’t dare speak of it to anyone. In fact, it may be that she visited her cousin Elizabeth because she was the *only* person she could talk to, the *only* person she could trust. Once Mary

arrives, the things that had been done in secret are revealed in a most public way. Elizabeth is not shy about proclaiming God's truth with *a loud voice*. Maybe that's where her boy John got his preaching voice!

To be a Christian is to believe in a God who is God of the impossible, and to belong to a family of brothers and sisters who are there when you need them the most. Because you belong to this family of faith you have someone to go to, who will listen to you when great joy or great sorrow overwhelm you.

The person with whom Mary wanted to share her unbelievable news had certain qualities. First, she was not jealous. Elizabeth also had a visit from the angel Gabriel and she herself was bearing a miraculous child. But when she heard the good news, she acknowledged that the child Mary was carrying was even greater—and she rejoiced. How blessed we are to have even one friend or two like that. When you receive a great honor, it's a privilege to have a friend who enjoys your success; and that joy leaps inside of them, as the baby leaped in Elizabeth's womb. Secondly, Elizabeth was able to affirm Mary's experience and encourage her. She was not in the least skeptical. She said, "*Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her*" (v. 45). When God has spoken to us, we need a friend who will say, "I believe that it is authentic. I believe that God is speaking to you for a reason."

We have the power to affirm and bless each other as Elizabeth did. We need a few people in our lives upon whom we are free to call at any hour—even two o'clock in the morning, if we are in trouble, though they may be less than cheerful at that hour. I heard about a man who came to work with a broken nose, and his friend asked him what happened. "Well," he said, "I called someone at 2:00 AM and said, 'Guess who?' He guessed correctly, and the next day he came by and did this to me." I don't suggest you say, "Guess who?" at 2:00 AM. Just say, "I am calling you at this hour because I need you and I trust you and I want to share my joy or my pain with you."

Mary stayed at Elizabeth's home for three months, until John was born. What else would a kinswoman and a friend do in that society but stay until the delivery day? We can speculate on what they talked about during those three months. I'm sure they covered everything—angels and babies, and God and Israel, and the world. They shared life in its totality. Captain Kangaroo, Bob Keeshan, once said, "*Attention is like a daily bouquet of love.*" You and I need to have love expressed through "attention" when something earthshaking, good or bad, happens to us. We are blessed when someone sits down with us and says, "Tell me what happened," and they listen to us without interruption.

Mary's song of response to the angel is called the *Magnificat*, so named by the Roman church for the key word in the Latin translation in the first line of this prayer of praise offered by Mary. Mary's naturalness, unself-consciousness and humility meant she was able to sing about how proud she was that God had chosen her. In true humility, she glorified God that she was so very blessed. I want to point out that there's a danger in trying to spiritualize the *Magnificat*. These are the most revolutionary words ever spoken. Through the Messiah, mighty rulers on their thrones will be brought down. The humble and the lowly will be lifted up.

William Temple, once the Archbishop of Canterbury, warned his missionaries to India never to read the *Magnificat* aloud in public. Christians were already suspect in that country, so he cautioned against reading verses that were so inflammatory. Jesus, the ultimate revolutionary, completely reverses all human values. What Mary was prophesying about her unborn son is terrifying to the establishment, whoever and wherever they may be. They cannot gladly hear these words. We may attempt to spiritualize these verses, but deep down we all know that Jesus has come to instigate *a revolution* that the whole world needs.

Henry James, a novelist of the past, said in *Ivan Turgenieff*, "Life is, in fact, a battle. Evil is insolent and strong; beauty enchanting but rare; goodness very apt to be weak; folly very apt to be defiant; wickedness to carry the day; imbeciles to be in great places; people of sense in small (a comforting thought); and mankind generally unhappy, but the world as it stands is no illusion, no fanaticism, no evil dream of the night; we wake up to it again forever and ever; we can neither forget it, nor deny it, nor dispense with it; that's what the world is." And that's why Jesus came—to take command, to lead a revolution, an incredible revolution, unlike Mao's or Marx's or Castro's. *A revolution of love*.

Presbyterian pastor Bruce Larson was interviewed by a reporter who had covered Mother Teresa's visit to Boys Town, a Catholic non-profit that began, I think, in Nebraska. Larson asked him about that visit and Mother Teresa's reactions. The reporter said, "They showed her all over the grounds of Boys Town, the dormitories, the classrooms, the gymnasium, the dining hall. At the end of the tour, she turned to the head priest and said, 'You have all this, but do you really love them?'"

Jesus loves us. Really loves us. This is the simple strategy of the ultimate social revolutionary. Our God who is God of the impossible is leading his people in this revolution. *Mary saw it*. It's important that we see it too. Amen.