

Aldersgate United Methodist Church

December 21, 2025

“Let It Be Us”

Scripture: Luke 1:26-45 (NRSV)

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” ²⁹ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” ³⁴ Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” ³⁵ The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶ And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God.” ³⁸ Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

Mary Visits Elizabeth

³⁹ In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰ where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴² and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³ And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴ For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

Sermon – Let It Be Us

This Sunday we hear the scripture reading commonly referred to as “the visitation.” Mary receives some remarkable news from Gabriel the angel as the annunciation unfolds – annunciation... that’s “church speak” for *announcement*. But it’s not just one announcement we hear in Luke’s gospel this morning – there’s even more news. Elizabeth

receives some surprising news too. First Mary hears she has found favor with God, so much so, that she will conceive the son of God. And if that's not shocking enough, consider the next bit of news... the aging couple of Elizabeth and Zechariah are with child as well (the child that will be known as John the Baptist). The whole thing sounds wildly absurd.

How might we react if an angel came to us with such news? I suspect my first reaction might be to question my state of mind – am I dreaming – have I lost all connection with reality? Me? Are you speaking to me? NO! But what we hear of Mary's response is quite different. At first, she questions – “how can this be, I'm a virgin?” But then she goes on to say, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” She responds with YES! – perhaps still pondering and perplexed – but she embraces the news with “YES.”

Our theme for this Sunday is PROMISE. In our call to worship we spoke of this – “we wait as people of God's promise, we listen as people of God's promise, we follow as people of God's promise. God is with us.” US – God is with Mary, and Elizabeth, and Joseph and Zechariah. God is with US (humanity). We hear how we are all recipients of a real, tangible promise – the promise that is message of *almost*. It's that feeling of leaning in, holding on a little longer. Hoping and watching. And so, we wait...

If there is anything most of us don't enjoy, it's waiting.

We wait in traffic. We wait for test results, we wait for the call about a possible job offer, the apology, the breakthrough. My dog Benny would add, “we wait for mama to decide it's officially dinner time.” We wait for healing, for clarity, for peace in a troubled world.

Waiting stretches us.

Waiting exposes us.

Waiting reminds us that we are not in control.

And yet—over and over again—**God chooses to work through waiting.**

Today's Scripture from Luke's gospel immerses us in two women's waiting: Mary and Elizabeth. Their stories reveal that God's promises often begin in places of delay, uncertainty, and holy anticipation.

The angel Gabriel appears to Mary with incredible news:

"You will conceive... you will bear a son... He will be called the Son of the Most High."

But when Gabriel leaves, nothing around Mary looks different.

Nothing in her world has changed—yet everything has changed.

The promise has been spoken, but the outcome has not yet appeared.

That is how God often moves in our lives:

- God speaks guidance before we see the next step.
- God plants hope before we see restoration.
- God whispers "Be not afraid" before the circumstances give us any reason to relax.

A promise from God is often the seed, not the harvest. And seeds always ask us to trust the unseen.

Maybe you are in that place today—a place where the promise has been given but not yet fulfilled. A place where you believe God is not done, but you don't yet see what God is doing.

Mary shows us that faith doesn't wait for proof. Faith holds onto promise while the outcomes are still forming.

I can especially relate to the response from Zechariah when he learns Elizabeth is with child. He sounds terrified and overwhelmed and skeptical, and starts questioning what's happening, asking the angel, (Luke 1:18-20) "How can I know that this will happen? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years." The angel replied, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur."

Yikes – he’s rendered mute. The question is often, is God punishing Zechariah for asking questions? What most biblical scholars attest is happening is more of a grace-filled response from God. This period of waiting for Elizabeth and Zechariah is a holy moment...and is the case *with holy moments, or tragic moments, or grace-filled moments...they are spiritual spaces beyond words*. Sometimes we think waiting means God is withholding. But often, waiting means God is **preparing**:

- Preparing us for what we’ve prayed for.
- Preparing others around us.
- Preparing circumstances we cannot yet see.

Waiting is not God’s way of delaying us—it’s God’s way of shaping us. For example, imagine the disciples waiting after the crucifixion and between resurrection and Pentecost.

Waiting has always been God’s workshop of transformation.

Maybe God is growing something in you in this season—patience, courage, compassion, resilience, forgiveness, or deeper trust.

Maybe the waiting is not evidence of God’s absence but evidence of God’s work.

As people of faith, we also understand waiting can be difficult and if we go through periods of difficulty alone, promises of God’s loving support and presence can feel far away. Advent is a season of hopeful anticipation but does not need to feel like a period of isolating introspection. We learn that after the angel leaves, Mary doesn’t isolate herself, she *goes with haste* to Elizabeth.

She goes to someone who can understand.

She goes to someone who is also living in a miracle.

She goes to a person who can hold her story with grace.

As United Methodists we call this...**connection, fellowship, the communion of saints**.

We wait better *together*.

Elizabeth greets Mary with blessing:

“Blessed are you... blessed is the fruit of your womb... blessed is she who believed.”

Elizabeth becomes Mary’s confirmation, reassurance, and encouragement.

Friends, when God gives us a promise, God often places people in our lives who help us wait with faith.

People who say:

- “I see God at work in you.”
- “You are not alone.”
- “Don’t lose heart. God is faithful.”

And here’s the other side of that truth: We are called to be Elizabeths for others. Let it be US (humanity) who carry God to others – who stick together through the times of “almost” or “what if.” It’s as simple as the Wesleyan concept of prevenient grace – that grace that goes before all else, God’s presence in our lives before we even are aware or ask for God’s grace. God’s grace comes in many forms and is at work in us and around us in so many ways.

Someone in your life may be carrying a fragile promise, and your encouragement might be what keeps them going. Your blessing might rekindle their hope. Your faith might strengthen theirs. We journey together with promise and waiting in these weeks of Advent. Who can we invite into the Christmas story as it’s unfolding in our faith community? If we are completely honest, our nativity creche isn’t terribly accurate – we place the figures in positions as if we’re already at the moment of Christmas (Christ’s birth). But advent invites us to move at a slower pace and see how God visits us as well. We too are “extras” in Jesus’ nativity story. A couple weeks ago I told you about the book I’m enjoying as my advent reflection and how the author takes us to the traditions she learned in Provence, France where they create the creche new each season, bringing their own “little saints” into the story – inviting God into their village – their lives fresh and new each advent. She goes on to explain that they take brown paper and crinkle it up in their hands, creating makeshift hills to place behind the manger. It creates the impression of rough paths in distant hills. Then they place a few tailor-made Santons (little saints) off in the distance, not yet here. The distant Santons include the pregnant figure of Mary

on a donkey, with Joseph by her side. They create things to scale as a reminder advent is ultimately about keeping time, a reminder the holy family has not yet arrived. Advent, when donkeys and kings, and most importantly, the babe are still “to come”— (the literal translation of the Latin *ad + venire*). Are we there yet? *Almost!* In the kin-dom of God, **no one waits alone—unless we allow them to. Be assured: God’s gift is worth waiting for – I promise.**