Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the infant leaped in her womb” (Luke 1:41).

Song 2:8-14; Luke 1:39-40

The Lectionary repeats Sunday’s Gospel about Mary’s visitation to her cousin Elizabeth. In the encounter between two pregnant women, one beyond her child-bearing years and the other pregnant with the Word of God, the greatest longing of the human heart is fulfilled. The very Source of all love has come among us, alive in our flesh, grace perfecting nature, lifting us toward our new destiny, -- life with God. The two women are the first to celebrate this mystery.

The Lectionary repeats this poignant story but pairs it with a different first reading from the Song of Songs. The connecting image is the leaping of John the Baptist in his mother’s womb and a lover leaping like “a gazelle or a young stag” as he pursues his beloved.

The Song of Song almost didn’t make it into the Hebrew canon because of its erotic power, but the Bible won out over prudery and lets our imaginations fly without embarrassment to recall our own leaping hearts when and if love has ever overtaken us. God’s embrace of this world and the joining of divine and human is a passionate love story. But it is also a great mystery that unfolds over time. Pursuing God is more like a game of hide and seek, more glimpse than gaze, absence than presence, longing than fulfillment, at least in this life.

O my dove in the clefts of the rock,

in the secret recesses of the cliff,

Let me see you, let me hear your voice,

For your voice is sweet, and you are lovely.

Mary and Elizabeth's joy is maternal, and they already know the suffering that lies ahead for them and their beloved children, whose radical freedom and shared fate are already foretold. John will disappear into the wilderness and Jesus to the road and the cross. Both their sons will reveal their love by obedience unto death. John will leap against the sudden blow of the executioner's axe as he enters eternity headless. The body that Jesus received at conception will jump against the nails when they pierce his wrists and feet. There is no greater love than to lay down your life for your friends.

One final leap will complete the Christmas story at Easter, when Jesus escapes death, leaving behind his shroud and mask, rising to new life to show us what it means to be fully human. Don't be afraid to live fully in your bodies, so vulnerable to life's wounds and risks when surrendered out of love for one another. Leap for joy.

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