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Create meaning from both great joy and great loss

by Angie O'Gorman

I was selling my novel, *The Book of Sins*, at the Call to Action conference several weeks ago when a woman came over and asked in a hushed voice, "is your book all about Jesus?" She was slight, gray-haired and kept looking over her shoulder as if to make sure no one was listening. Her name tag said she was a member of a religious community. I can't remember the state she was from or her name. She bent in and whispered, "I don't do much with Jesus anymore. My spirituality is very different now."



Even in hushed tones though, she was quite adamant that she'd had it with Jesus. I explained the novel was not about Jesus *per se* but about capitalism's buy-out of Christianity, although yes, Matthew's Gospel plays a supporting role for a group of women surviving Christianity's collapse. Her own struggle for inner freedom was too delicate even for that. She needed more time for her emerging spirituality to solidify, to anchor in her. She raised her open palms as if to ward off an intruder and graciously said no, her faith was taking her elsewhere. And she left, as quietly as she had come, an odd mixture of freedom and fear wrapped around her.

I wanted to stop her, hold her face in my hands and say, "Go for it. Give birth to something wonderful, transforming, life giving. Take your time, but go for it. It's God." But of course I didn't, afraid it might seem an aggressive sales tactic. Still, I wish I'd asked where she was journeying from Sunday of Advent what set her on her way at this moment in her life.

Now I realize this nameless woman has become for me the face of Elizabeth in Luke's Gospel. In equal parts apprehensive and expectant, fretful and determined, both are older women receiving good news of new birth. In the nameless woman's eyes I see Elizabeth's confusion, the fear of something new and unexplainable. Something perhaps better kept hidden. Something that might embarrass others in its departure from the norm. Older women don't give birth. Oh yea?

From Sunday of Advent

2 Samuel 7: 1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16

Psalms 89: 5, 4-5, 27, 29

Romans 16: 25-27

Luke 1: 26-38

Full text of the readings

It is one of the best things older women do. Have you experienced this? The way older women can bring forth new life in themselves as well as others? Create meaning from both great joy and great loss? Make sense of mystery and birth the depths of belief? I suspect Elizabeth had a much easier time with the news of her pregnancy than Mary did with her own. The younger woman may well have feared her handlers more than God. As Holly Near says in her song, *1000 Grandmothers*, "An old woman holds a powerful force when she no longer needs to please." That force is freedom, holy wisdom, creativity, the freedom to birth.

I figure Elizabeth realized she was pregnant, knew it wasn't because of Zacharias and decided to wait the great God out until the future revealed itself. Zacharias must have realized Elizabeth's pregnancy was a physical impossibility and thus, not due to another man. I suspect he decided to let well enough alone and keep an eye on developments from afar.

The woman who spoke to me in hushed tones is also waiting the great God out, taking care to do nothing that would imperil the birth. If you read this sister, know that you are far along, it is near time for delivery. The signs are in your eyes and your voice and the emerging ownership that slips out now and then between your fears. Advent is near complete. Your time is due.

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