

If you were asked to describe your faith in one or two words, what would you say? As Christians, our faith should be definable to others. For example, my faith gives me peace. I could share that with someone seeking to know what the Christian faith is like. What would you say? In last week's story, Zechariah essentially said to the angel, "Disappointment. I'm old and no blessing has been forthcoming."

Elizabeth, though, after recovering from the news of her Pictionary game,¹ would have said, "surprise!" and then, "ecstatic joy." Those words will permeate her voice as we read her story today. What about you? Does your relationship with God at least occasionally bring you surprise and joy?

If you got such news that you would receive a long-sought-after desire, what would you do? Listen to what Elizabeth did. Read Luke 1:24-25

First Elizabeth went off by herself for five months. We might wonder why? Scripture tells us what was on her mind. She's relishing what God did for her. She saw God's blessing as specifically intentioned to take away all the disgrace of the past.

Elizabeth withdrew to spend time with God. This was a precious, intimate expression of the blessing she felt, before the stage when her pregnancy would be obvious and most likely, very public.

Elizabeth did not cling to the past but embraced this new turn of events.

In the meantime, Elizabeth's cousin, Mary, also receives a visit from Gabriel that she too will become pregnant. Let's continue with the story. Read Lk 1:39-45.

So this was joy upon joy that Elizabeth should recognize through the power of the Holy Spirit that Mary bore the Messiah. Imagine what Mary said. Perhaps she responded, "Elizabeth, how on earth did you know?" It's not like Mary had sent her a text message or called Elizabeth on her cell phone.

Elizabeth had spent five months with God and certain benefits come to us when we spend time with God. For one, she was able to "see" Jesus, even though Jesus was still in the womb. Do you recognize the presence of Christ in your life each day? Jesus is there, attentive and waiting, even though you don't see Him. Do you want to take advantage of that and sit with Him for a moment – for He is always ready to talk and listen.

Next Elizabeth said, "Why should the mother of my Lord visit me? She did not feel worthy. Still, she didn't hold back. She was excited about this baby Messiah; she believed, just like Mary; she let the Holy Spirit come over her unworthiness so she could enjoy the blessing of Jesus' presence.

¹In today's Advent Story modern-day portrayal, Zechariah conveyed to Elizabeth in a Pictionary game that she would have a baby.

Do you feel the same way – unworthy to God? No matter what your opinion is of yourself, let God break through that unworthiness. You can do that by setting aside some space for God each day during Advent. Read these stories of love and blessing, because they are for you. These stories are about God's plan to enter your life and bless you with the presence of Jesus overcoming all unworthiness, disappointment, and loss. Perhaps you can set aside 4 pm, for 4 minutes.

Elizabeth's reaction to Mary served as a sign for Mary. Mary needed her. She was young and inexperienced in life. The bond these two women had would carry them through. If you are young, what older person serves as a mentor to you? If you are older, whether male or female, do you have this kind of relationship with just one other young person? You will make a big difference in each other's lives.

This congregation understands that. Community is one of our strengths. You know how to support one another in the body of Christ. And, you embrace others readily. I have been here nine months, and you make me and my husband feel very much a part of things. Community is very important in the Christian experience and here is how it happened for Elizabeth. Read LK 1:57-66

Here you have a couple who, after disappointment with God, both Elizabeth and Zechariah were so sure of God's blessing, they went with it. They stuck with the angel's words and named that baby John. This was a strong witness to the community around them, who said, "Wow. What will this baby will be?"

When you stick to your guns, accepting God's blessing no matter what has happened to you in the past, it is a witness to others. It will help the next generation to consider living by faith. But how do we do it? How do we leave disappointment and go with God down that new road?

Another Elisabeth knows how. Her name is Elisabeth Elliot. She is 82 years old now and lives in Dallas. Her husband, Jim Elliot was killed in Ecuador by a fierce tribe (the Aucas) who had killed all outsiders who attempted to enter. Jim and four other missionaries were speared to death in 1956. Elizabeth and Jim had been married just three years, and had a 10-month-old daughter. After that happened Elisabeth felt led to return to this tribe. She didn't close herself off after this tragedy, rather, for two years she and some of the other wives, by returning, had a profound impact and helped bring many people in that tribe to Christ.

Then, in 1969 she got married again. But after four years of marriage the second husband died of natural causes. I heard Elisabeth speak once. She said, "My life has been full of blessing, but not necessarily easy." It was blessed because she knew how to embrace each joy that came. After the second husband's death she took in two lodgers to make ends meet. One of them married her daughter, and she married the other man. They have been married over 30 years and they joyfully work for the Lord together, ministering to thousands through books and speaking engagements.

It's amazing what can happen when you look forward with God.

How do you describe your Christian faith? Is it joyful and vital? Elizabeth embraced the joy. Sheer joy comes from trusting the message God gives you that God will bless you and intends to use you. You have a calling and it is to minister to the community around you. Let's strive to enjoy and rejoice in this holiday season. And then, let's embrace what God leads us to do and go with it. Then we will know that indeed, the hand of the Lord is with us.

AMEN