

Green Hill Presbyterian Church  
“Leaping for Joy”  
Thomas G. Speers, III  
Advent 4—December 23, 2018

Lesson: Micah 5:2-5a; Luke 1:39-45

Last week I was surprised as I walked down the lower school hallway at Tower Hill. As I walked, there were four different young students who came skipping down the hallway and in my experience, encountering young people skipping always induces a smile. I spoke to one teacher about what I had seen and she smiled and said: “When you are skipping it is hard not to smile.” Those skipping children basically were leaping for joy.

Our gospel lesson today tells the story of Mary travelling to visit her cousin in the hill country of Judea. She had just learned from the angel Gabriel that she would bear a son and she also learned that her relative Elizabeth was going to have a baby. Maybe that’s why she left. Maybe she wanted to get away knowing that some people would question her being pregnant. She wasn’t married after all and in that society, she could have been stoned for getting pregnant before her marriage. Maybe she was afraid how Joseph would react. Maybe she just wanted to be with someone else who would understand what it is like to be pregnant. She set out and went with haste to the hill country and the moment she opened the door, as soon as she simply said hello, she was greeted with joy by her older cousin Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s voice, the child leaped in her womb.

Elizabeth sings out exuberantly: *You’re so blessed among women, and the babe in your womb, also blessed! And why am I so blessed that the mother of my Lord visits me? The moment the sound of your greeting entered my ears, The babe in my womb skipped like a lamb for sheer joy. Blessed woman, who believed what God said, believed every word would come true!*

The baby and his mother leap for joy because God is reliable, because God is good all the time. Elizabeth sings because new life is bursting forth all around her and Mary has the sense to believe that God is indeed faithful. Soon enough she will discover that her life won’t be easy. A decree from Caesar will send this very pregnant woman far from home and the good places to stay will be booked up. She’ll give birth in a barn surrounded by smelly animals. God simply works with what is before us and brings forth new life.

Baby John is one of God’s more recent miracles and we don’t know what his future will hold but we do know that God has claimed him. His baptism today is one way for his parents to thank God for this most extraordinary of gifts. In the same way that the angel invited Mary onto the dance floor so many years ago, God is inviting John as he grows up to join the divine dance in our amazing, beautiful, hurting world. God is always inviting us to join in God’s creative movement in the world.

Barbara Brown Taylor writes that “the only thing that is absolutely sure in this scenario is that we have a partner who is with us and for us and who wants us to have life. Mary’s trust in that fact is rally all she has. What she does not have is a sonogram, or a husband, or an affidavit from the Holy Spirit that says, ‘The child really is mine. Now leave the poor girl alone.’ All she has is her unreasonable willingness to believe that the God who has chosen her will be part of whatever happens next—and that apparently, is enough to make her burst into song. She does not wait to see how things will turn out first. She sings ahead of time and the angels with her.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene Peterson, *The Message*. NAV Press © 1993

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, *Singing Ahead of Time* in *Home By Another Way*. Cowley Publications. © 1999.

Following the example of Mary and Meghan, and mothers across the centuries, we are invited to bring forth new life into our midst. We can join with Elizabeth and her baby in skipping like a lamb for sheer joy, because into our broken, imperfect and hurting world Christ comes. He comes:

Into sorrow, to bring forth joy.  
Into hatred, to bring forth love.  
Into conflict, to bring forth peace.  
Into sickness, to bring forth healing.  
Into sin, to bring forth salvation.  
Into death, to bring forth life.  
Into the world, to bring forth Christ.<sup>3</sup>

Blessed are you. Blessed are your children and blessed be God who is still inviting us to dance. When you are skipping it is hard not to smile.

Let us pray: While we are waiting, come. With power and glory, come. Jesus our Lord, Emmanuel, while we are waiting, come. Come that we all might leap for joy in discovering you are with us. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Martha Highsmith, Christmas sermon December 24 2018. McClure Memorial Presbyterian Church in Castle Hayne, NC.