



TOUCH POINT

Magic, Miracles or Mystery? – Touchpoint for December 18, 2024

Luke 1:39-45 (NRSVUE) 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."

Mary's Song of Praise

⁴⁶ And Mary said,
"My soul magnifies the Lord,
⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
⁴⁸ for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.
Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,
⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name;
⁵⁰ indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones
and lifted up the lowly;
⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty.
⁵⁴ He has come to the aid of his child Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Grace and peace to you from the Mystery in whom we live and move, and have our being.

When trying to understand Advent, it's easy to attack the commercialism of Christmas as a distraction. Commercialism is an easy target for religious folk, but isn't there a sort of commercialism in our Christian institutions at Christmastime? While a bit more overlooked, aren't the massive church productions partly culpable in the commercialism of the Bible story? Or is the Church supposed to be given a pass because it's the boss's birthday?

Let's face it, there's a lot on the line for the annual budget when it comes to giving during Christmas. But let's forget about that for a minute. I love the Christmas season, but I'm feeling like the Grinch, so let's talk about the Christmas story itself.

What about the unimaginable miracles in the story? If we had never heard the story, wouldn't it just make us go, "Wait... what?"

Can you relate to an angel named Gabriel who appeared to a young virgin girl and told her she would conceive a son? (I'm gonna claim Gabe as Latino, by the way.)

Okay, let's go slower. An angel named Gabriel communicated with Mary. Can you relate? I'm wracking my brain trying to remember an incident when I or someone else experienced such a thing. Could it have happened? Sure, but I'm not sure I can relate to it.

Mary conceiving as a virgin? Yeah, not a memory there either, except for the show, "Jane the Virgin". Jane's gynecologist confused her with another patient and gave her *In Vitro* fertilization; she became pregnant and had trouble explaining to her Catholic family she was still a virgin, probably much like Mary the virgin.

Mangers, singing angels, drummers, a star guiding the way, three wise men? Can you relate? Not so much. Is there something more than parables, metaphor and even more than facts?

Many of the mainline denominations are all about Advent. Most Christians celebrate Advent as the coming of Christ in the past, present and the future.

History, in fact, confirms the person of Jesus on Earth. His words, life and message are worthy to be followed. The writers of their experiences were so taken by him that they wrote of their passion and love for Jesus 100 years after his death. His subversive and welcoming message of belonging healed the hearts of the sidelined and shook the ground of counterfeit empires. Their transformed lives spilled onto pages commemorating the birth of peace and the presence of Christ amid the chaos of impossible circumstances. This is documented. But the Christmas story and the miracles?

Bible scholar Marcus Borg writes this about the Christmas story:

"Does the truth of Christmas depend upon the "happenedness" of the miraculous? Or is its truth more-than-factual? For me, the answer is clear. For me as a Christian, Jesus is light in the darkness, the path of liberation, the way of return, the Word of God and Spirit of God embodied in a human life. In him we see God's passion for a different kind of world. That's what his coming and Christmas is about."

In the preface of my friend Michael McCabe's novel, *Padre Cisco: Conversations with a Desert Father*, Rocky says this about the stories the Padre is about to unfold: "While I cannot attest to the specifics of the Padre's stories, I can attest to their truth."

This is what I can relate and attest to in my story: I had my own sort of Annunciation moment in a waffle house once that absolutely changed the course of my life. It was an encounter with a homeless Vietnam vet at one o'clock in the morning, and I swear it was Jesus speaking to me when I needed it the most. He broke through my shattered life and breathed oxygen into me with his candor. It was a Divine Presence. This was, for me, the embodiment of Jesus.

If not for my own personal failures and fallen empire, I could not have identified with him. I might have dismissed the Christmas traditions if not for its subversive, compassionate story.

The unconditional presence of Spirit midwifed my own inner birth. The One who awakens me in the mornings of my distress with the anointing of compassion. In me, the power of pride is brought down and my soul is grateful.

My body, wrapped in the linens of my powerlessness, lay silent. Like in a womb, life-giving blood flows through my body as I await the birthing of the me I always was, but never knew. In the deep, it's as though a star hovers above, waiting to guide me to a perfect light.

Loved ones, like angels, wait for me to allow love, to welcome me out of my resistance... love I kept at a distance for so long. Any theory of Christ's history and eschatology fades into the experience of my present

reality and I am reborn again. Every time.

The Christ of the past, present and future is embodied for one moment of awareness and this is the coming of Christ in me. An advent.

My guess is that these writers knew of this cocooning experience.

This new “coming” together in one moment of heaven and earth, black and white, beginning and end.

I have felt this three times, during the birth of each of my children. In that advent room the coming of Kristi, Joshua and Andrea were all that mattered. The world could go to hell as far as I was concerned. My world was being born. Can you relate?

Amen

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God

Prepare the Way

(Taizé)

Prepare the way of the Lord. And all the people will see the salvation of our God.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

My Soul Proclaims

(Marty Haugen)

My soul proclaims your greatness O God, and my spirit rejoices in you.

- 1) My being proclaims the greatness of God. My spirit finds joy in my savior.
For you regard me in my lowliness and every age shall call me blest.
- 2) Great and mighty are you, O holy One, strong is your kindness evermore.
How you favor the weak and lowly ones. Humbling the proud of heart.
- 3) You have cast down the mighty from their thrones. Raising up those of low degree.
You have filled the hungry with wondrous things and sent the rich empty away.

The Meal

Our Father (The Lord's Prayer)

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

Benediction

Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel

(Salt of the Sound)

O, Come, O, Come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel.
That mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice, Rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee O Israel.