

Angel-quality truth (Luke 1:26-38)

Mary and Elizabeth knew the basic truths of life.

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December 20, 2017

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A college friend got a job after graduation as a writer for Prison Fellowship. She met a lot of incarcerated women about her age, and some even younger, and they would tell her about their children.

One day, a prisoner asked my friend, "Do you have any children?"

"Oh, no, I'm not married!" she exclaimed.

A general chuckle arose, and the woman cleared things up for my friend: "You don't have to be married to have a baby."

No. You really don't. But circa 1983, doing one without the other, in our socio-economic strata, seemed impossible.

Mary knew the basic truths of life. She could not get pregnant without "knowing" a man.

A childhood friend embarked on a midlife relationship several years after a divorce. During fertility struggles in that marriage, she had been told it was beyond unlikely that she would ever conceive again, even with assistance. She redirected her hopes toward the child she already had, a new marriage, and the work she felt called to do.

At age 41, she experienced weeks of low-grade nausea; she put it down to a virus at first, then began to wonder if something more serious might be wrong.

When her doctor suggested a pregnancy test, my friend reacted with surprise. "Everyone told me that could not happen!"

Her doctor smiled, kindly. "Sometimes we get these things wrong."

Elizabeth knew the basic truths of life. She could not get pregnant at her advanced age.

God had other ideas in mind for both of them.

It is tempting to write off the kind of things that happened to Mary and Elizabeth as ancient folk tales, foundational myths, even religious fiction intended to make a point about the babes they bore and the faith we follow, as understood 70 or so years after the births in question. Yet I suspect that, whatever Luke intended, there is some divine truth for all of us in these women's stories, truth that transcends gender and age.

I'm in my middle-fifties. I have made a lot of assumptions about what is possible and what is realistic in what's left of my life. I use what I consider to be reasonable criteria. While they might not meet actuarial standards, they do incorporate my not inconsiderable education and life experience, the sum total of what I know about the world.

I trust I know the basic truths of life, the things that are within and beyond the norm for a woman my age.

Still, "...nothing will be impossible with God."

Don't worry, I'm not about to announce a pregnancy, and I hope an angel isn't waiting to surprise me with one. Yet I suspect there will be some other conversations of unlikely wonder still to come in my life, some moments when angel-quality truth is dropped.

Maybe the news will sound good from the jump. We want and get something for ourselves or others, the opportunity or the relief or the miracle. Sometimes the goodness is murkier. We might learn that our notions of truth were limited by our social location, our cultural biases, or our racial identification. We may find

something beautiful in the middle of loss or learn something about ourselves despite being diminished.

I hold that possibility open for all of us.