

High risk (Advent 4B) (Luke 1:26-38)

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There are things I found out about myself while I was pregnant.

Oh, of course, I searched my heart and mind for meaning through the wonder of growing life, etched out bones and sinew across the expanse of my belly marked by the fecund prisms of imagined futures. Spent time literally navel gazing. It was incredibly hard, incredibly gorgeous. But that's not what I mean.

There are things I found out about myself while I was pregnant. Things like:

- Being in my thirties marked me as geriatric, of advanced maternal age.
- I was “lucky” to conceive given that I hadn't had the forethought (read: the finances) to freeze my eggs, as I'd already sailed past the dropoff deadline.
- No matter how active I was or how nutritiously I ate, I would be under constant scrutiny and pedantic judgement around my body mass.
- The melanin in my skin would draw assumptions about both my dignity and my fitness to raise a child.
- Wearing a wedding ring would garner me far different treatment in a pregnant body than others might receive, as would the presence of a cisgender male partner.

I found out that pregnancy would be treated like a pathology, a problem to be solved, even if there were no problems to register. I walked in more rooms than I should have only to find out I was in a space where I was seen as a number, a high-risk patient, a potential liability, no matter how low my cholesterol or clear my bloodwork. Even the expanses of my gratitude, the ebullience of my expectation, couldn't exist uninterrupted by the fear and trembling that Black women are four

times more likely than White women to die giving birth.

What had I done?

I wonder if Mary thought of herself as high risk. Surely that's what others saw. Questionable, perhaps even unlawful, sexual activity and partnership status. Questionable identity of the father. Questionable resources. Questionable maternal mortality rates. Questionable government decrees. Questionable stability. Questionable world that one must be willing to birth a baby into.

For Black mothers of our time, the questions of resistance extend to wondering if your child will live long enough to dream their own dreams, much less fulfill them. It is an indescribable, nauseating feeling to know that your child could one day be envisaged as a monster, as a threat. That your sweet baby may be the victim of state-sponsored violence.

I didn't know I was high risk until a doctor told me I was. Luckily I'd lived enough, was educated enough, had enough resources and connections and a strong community of support to resist the implications of such a narrative. To reclaim my body, my mind, my baby, and my experience. To refuse to live into a fear promulgated by statistics that were given more credence than my personhood.

I left providers who didn't listen to me, who didn't see me. I curated a community of support with my partner, from our doula to our midwives, where I felt safe and seen. I dug in deep with beloved friends who were also in the thick of their pregnancy journeys, my Elizabeth crew. I took care of myself as best I could, and I recited [Baby Suggs' sermon in the clearing](#) to myself and to my baby, reminding her from the start to love her flesh. I continued to work and live into the possibilities of birthing a better world, of naming this process as part of my own work of resistance.

Mary, did you know? I'm sure you did. Perhaps not firsthand, in the finest of nuances and details. But enough for your yes to resonate as the sound of resilience. God is still speaking, has come to us, has come again. It's a reminder that the greatest hopes are worth high risks.