

**AN ORDINARY WOMAN: AN EXTRAORDINARY GIFT**

Luke 1:39-55  
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Community Church, Congregational of Corona del Mar  
December 16, 2018

**See text for 1st verse of "[Breath of Heaven](#)."**

There are times in the Christian walk when no one but you really knows what God is doing in your life. When that happens, life can be pretty scary. When Mary accepted the task of bearing the Christ child, she began such a walk. Most people simply were not prepared to comprehend what was happening in her life, the unexpected gift God had given her. A maiden woman, unmarried, poor, not noteworthy at all, pregnant with the Son of God? Why would she be chosen by God? She had no special gifts, no experience caring for babies or raising children, no wealthy family to support her unexpected and undoubtedly embarrassing pregnancy, no renowned family to explain why she would bear the King of Israel, no dashing fiancée to whisk her away to foreign lands where she could bear this illegitimate child in private. Why such an ordinary girl to bear God's special gift to the world?

God elevated a girl that her neighbors and friends might have called "insignificant." But, Mary was far from insignificant to God. God chose Mary because God wanted the best for this precious gift to the world. God's most profound works are often done by ordinary people who have extraordinary spirit. God's most amazing gifts are often brought to the world by people who are simply open to the movement of God's extraordinary Holy Spirit. Such people are significant to God. Ordinary people, open to God's extraordinary Spirit, bring God's Spirit to the world. Such people, like Mary before them, are bearing the Christ child.

Three years ago, when my husband was diagnosed with cancer, lots of ordinary people reached out to support us. Those people who got us through were the most significant people in our lives that year. Church friends from all over the country (including friends from this church) were "*Ordinary People ~ Extraordinary Gifts*" ~ Luke 1:39-55 © 2018 Mary Scifres ~ [www.maryscifres.com](http://www.maryscifres.com)

praying; friends from my son's school, other PTA moms, and neighbors brought meals, helped with transportation, and sat holding my hand in numerous waiting rooms. Ordinary, yes, but open to the extraordinary spirit God has given them.

This church is full of significant people. Ordinary, yes, but open to the extraordinary spirit God has given them: Martha, Becky, Leslie, Vicki and so many others who transform our worship space each week into an Advent miracle of beauty; Rodger, Alan, our soloists and choir, and their generous talents that bless our worship services week after week and prepare extra hours each December to bring worship services full of music for the entire Christmas season; Tom and Cindy and Joanne and our Trustees and their tireless work caring for our church finances month after month; Jeff and Wade and Pat and Ron and so many others who usher us in and keep the background of worship running seamlessly; Denise and Kathi who teach our youngest children in Sunday School; Kathy and Lisa and James and their patient, steadfast leadership of our youth and children and adults in preparation for the Christmas play.

In this very room, the list could go on and on of how many people here manage to carve out time and give of yourselves, your money, your talents, and your belongings to make your church, your community, and God's world a better place, showing the world that God is among us. Ordinary people doing extraordinary things because an extraordinary God is living in your hearts; **you are significant**. When you serve in ways like this through God's powerful Spirit, you – like Mary before you - are bearing the Christ child.

We are all called to bear the Christ child. When we accept this call from God, we find an extraordinary spirit within ourselves, and we are able to offer extraordinary gifts. At Advent, we are reminded of this calling to walk with Christ in our hearts and in our lives. And when we embark on this journey of bearing Christ, God's Word comes to us. We can bring forth God's best, as Mary did. *"Ordinary People ~ Extraordinary Gifts" ~ Luke 1:39-55 © 2018 Mary Scifres ~ www.maryscifres.com*

We can do extraordinary things because we are extraordinary to God, each of us created in God's own image, each of us created in that common image, in a uniquely beautiful way, each a little different in how we reflect God's light. Each of us can do extraordinary things because Christ's Spirit lives in each of us.

Now that doesn't mean that living the Jesus journey is always easy. This journey of bearing the Christ child isn't always popular; it isn't always logical. When we continue on the Jesus journey led by the Spirit even when no one else understands where we're going or why we're going there, we are most undoubtedly preparing to do extraordinary things.

When Mary heard, "you shall bear a son," she said "Yes" to the Spirit. She believed in God's gift and began preparing for the birth of a child. It wasn't logical. It wasn't easy. It certainly wasn't popular. But she trusted God anyway, believing God's Spirit as it had come to her, and she prepared to devote her life to this Spirit and to this child. How did she prepare? As women have done for millennium: by turning to other women, beloved mothers and aunts and sisters of the heart. And so, Mary traveled to visit with her older cousin, Elizabeth.

**See 2nd verse of "[Breath of Heaven](#)."**

Mary stepped out in faith, accepted this extraordinary gift and call from God, and traveled to Elizabeth's -- to find support and wisdom, love and companionship, from her aged cousin. Mary's journey of faith was well-rewarded, for in Elizabeth, she found not only a warm welcome and a friendly reunion, but also an affirmation that she had heard God's voice clearly and responded appropriately.

Elizabeth did not greet her with questions about due dates or which of their pregnancies was the most difficult. Immediately, Elizabeth's baby "leaped in her womb." Elizabeth and her child felt God's pleasure and joy as they recognized that Mary was now carrying the Christ child, the long-  
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awaited Messiah. And what better way to express the joy, the excitement, the fear and trembling, the anticipation, than with a leap, a leap of joy, a jump of fear, a leap of faith.

Have you ever felt that leap of recognition, that wondrous amazement when a friend calls just when you need to hear their voice, when a letter comes just when you thought no one cared, when you hear someone saying exactly what you'd been thinking but were afraid to say? You know the times, when you feel that happy-funny feeling in your stomach, when you breathe a sigh of relief at good news, when your head can hardly catch up with the joy your heart feels at a pleasant surprise.

When I think of Elizabeth's jumping for joy in her womb, I think of how little lambs react shortly after they are born. They're not like kittens, my animal of choice, who hang around in little bundles near their mommy for many days, shutting their eyes tight, denying that they've entered the world of light and noise. No, lambs are wide awake. They totter around for a bit, getting their balance straight, and before you know it, they begin hopping in the funniest ways, ambling around with the joy of new life they've discovered, leaping with the recognition that they are in a world of light and adventure.

Elizabeth couldn't leap the way her baby did for she was an old woman far along in her pregnancy. But, she leaped in her own way when she exclaimed, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" We don't have to be young, to leap around with praise and glory for God and God's work in the world. In these words, Elizabeth is leaping for joy at God's amazing work. She has recognized that Mary has received a huge blessing, that Mary's life has purpose, that Mary is moving toward becoming a new person, a new child of God, as she prepares to give birth to God's own Son.

This purpose of Mary's is no longer one she faces alone. Mary's new-found purpose now becomes a part of Elizabeth's blessing and purpose. Mary's gift is catching, just as the gift of any life with God is catching. This is a blessing to be shared, so that all people will step forward with Mary and bear the Christ child; will step out in the faith walk that charts unknown territory; will leap with joy; may even leap with fear and trembling but also with a certain vision that good *will* triumph, that although people may not understand what in the world God is doing, we trust that God will prevail and eventually people will hear and recognize God's voice and will live with Christ in their hearts and lives.

Mary's blessing is not simply that she believes, but that we all might believe because she first believed. Mary recognizes God's voice; she believes God's word and leaps with joy, and also with fear at the task ahead of her. But Mary recognizes that she is not alone. She not only has Elizabeth, but more importantly she has God. God is with her, and Emmanuel - the God who is with all of us - has the power to reverse fortunes in this world.

**See refrain and 3<sup>rd</sup> verse of "[Breath of Heaven](#)."**

We, like Mary, are called by God to bear the Christ child. When Christ is born in our hearts and in our lives, we find ourselves, ordinary though we may be, able to do extraordinary things. To sense when a friend needs our support as Mary needed Elizabeth's; to recognize when our gifts and talents have a place in a worship service or a church committee; to find that extra ounce of energy to read a bedtime story or listen to our child late into the evening; to look for Christ in the people we pass each day on the street; to recognize that God is present in people who are different from us or who disagree with us; to offer the hand of forgiveness to a friend or family member who has hurt us; to feel at peace with our lives. Ordinary people, able to achieve extraordinary things because of the extraordinary gift of Christ Jesus living within us.

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We, like Mary, praise God when we recognize the Christ child within us, and we *can* respond with our lives and our gratitude. When we respond, we are leaping for joy, and God laughs joyfully as we leap. And even when our leaps are tentative or filled with fear and trembling, God helps us to keep our balance and to leap more courageously. We are not alone when we hear and respond. We have one another. We have the Spirit. We have the God who loved us enough to send us a Child, the Christ, the One who is Love Incarnate, Love With Us, Love in our lives.

**Pray refrain from "[Breath of Heaven](#)."**

You may find it meaningful to listen to the song set to a video based on Mary's story from the film *The Nativity* - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ular4xtYzdo>

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#### REFERENCES

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