



Advent Reflection for Tuesday, December 6th

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Luke 1: 24-25

After those days Zechariah's wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion. She said, 'This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people.'

Reflection by Emily Newland:

Wrapped in the seclusion of Zechariah's muteness and Elizabeth's early pregnancy, they treasured their secret. It was a time when hCG levels could not be analyzed, heartbeats could not be amplified, and 3D ultrasounds could not show them the specifics of what they already knew to be true. Zechariah knew it because an angel had told him. Elizabeth knew because her body was following the course that she had tried to will into being before this - the missed periods, perhaps some first trimester nausea, and by five months, the unmistakable feeling of kicks coming from inside her.

Elizabeth seems to be the only one in this Gospel without doubt, she who had perhaps spent so much of her life in a state of expectancy. It's a familiar state for anyone who wants to have a baby, especially for women, who live in a body that may or may not be growing a new life, producing symptoms that are real or imagined, questions that one must hold for two weeks of every month until their period comes or a pregnancy test can be taken. And after realizing those thoughts were mere fancy, that the womb was empty the whole time, the experience repeats the next month. Elizabeth's waiting turned from months to years to decades.

On top of the endless waiting, there was the burden of society's expectation that is alluded to here, half a lifetime of carrying everyone's verdict of their infertility as evidence that God did not favor them. Why had they not conceived? In an age where science could not provide the answer, religion and superstition did - God had seen their bad deeds or thoughts, or those of their ancestors, and they deserved this. And the Old Testament God is like that, meting out punishments to the ancestors of those who provoked His rage.

Regardless of how we square the depiction of that God with the forgiving and compassionate one we encounter in the person of Jesus, we do have the parallel story of Abraham and Sarah conceiving a baby in their old age. God's people are so quick to forget the grand narrative, that motifs of confounding nature and of rewarding the faithful please Him particularly, that what God has done before can be done again.

Luke's Christmas story begins with silence and barrenness gestating into proclamations and new life. Before we reach that glorious conclusion, let us meditate on the relief and joy that Elizabeth and Zechariah kept to themselves for a time, that what seems like disgrace and disappointment can be taken up into God's strange story.

Emily Newland moved to New York from the Midwest in 2013 and did not expect to be raising a kid in Brooklyn. On weekends, Emily and Maple are getting lost in the park, taking random buses around the city, or are at Coney Island. Emily works in the language industry (translation and interpretation) and spends her free time investing deeply in tv shows. She attends This Little Light with Maple and her husband, Warren.

