



September 27 – Elizabeth

When my next younger brother was a junior in high school, he approached me as a confidant. The information was that his girlfriend was pregnant. He needed someone to know, and that was me. In hindsight, I am so thankful that my first word was, “Congratulations.” It was about two months later that he was set to tell our parents the news. I was upstairs and ready to come to his aid if things got heated with Mom and Dad. I didn’t hear anything. Then about 20 minutes later he came upstairs and I thought he had chickened out.

What happened on the main floor was one of the biggest lessons in my life. He shared that when he told Mom and Dad, it was Dad that responded first. His response was that they knew something had been bothering him and were thankful to finally know. This was followed by, “How can we help?” This was quite different than the mother’s experience. He did not get yelled at. There was nothing about teenagers being out of wedlock, or how this was going to ruin their lives. It was all love and care. By the time my nephew was born, the three of them spent most of their time at our parents’ home.

Witnessing all of that experience with my brother and his girlfriend, I see this encounter with Mary and Elizabeth through a different lens. Mary is a teenager who has become pregnant out of wedlock. Culturally, she is lucky to be alive. She could have been executed for being pregnant. We know through other Gospels that her fiancé was less than supportive. He was trying to figure out how to leave her quietly. The pressure is mounting and Mary goes to the one person Gabriel told her about as proof. Mary goes to her cousin Elizabeth who is 6 months pregnant with the child who would grow up to become John the Baptizer.

The Gospel according to St. Luke spends much of the time talking about the reaction of the child in Elizabeth’s womb, and the song that follows. It focuses on Mary’s response to all of this and her testimony of faith. Then as almost an afterthought, it states that Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months. I may not be the greatest at math, but I do know that 6 months plus three months equals due date for the child. I do not believe that an author who is striving to give a historical account would list such a specific amount of time unless it was meant to cue the hearer in on the reality that Mary was there when the next verses take place, the birth of John the Baptizer.

Mary and Elizabeth are there for each other during these three months. Mary functions as a bit of a midwife for Elizabeth. We know that Elizabeth was older at the time, which increases the possibility of complications. Mary served in a vital capacity. As a relative, she would have been counted on for many things during the last trimester of Elizabeth’s pregnancy. This is especially true since Elizabeth’s husband, Zechariah, was struck mute for the duration of the pregnancy because of his lack of faith.

The other side of this is the care that Elizabeth gave to Mary. She functioned as a mentor, even a parent figure, to a teenage girl who was expecting her first child. Elizabeth would have helped walk her through the very delicate first trimester of pregnancy. I can only imagine the various ways that these two women supported each other during these months.

This influence went far beyond those three months together. In the same way that Mary helped prepare the way for the arrival of John, it was John who paved the way for Jesus. I have a difficult time believing that John the Baptizer just woke up one day and decided he was the one set aside to prepare the way. I believe it is much more likely that his mother, Elizabeth, had many conversations with him over the years about these three months with Mary. I believe that she helped prepare John for this role. I even believe that, much like Jesus’ mother, is the one who gave him the nudge to get out there into the wilderness and prepare the way. Elizabeth was not out to get the credit. She was set on being faithful. May we all learn something from the example of Elizabeth. Amen.