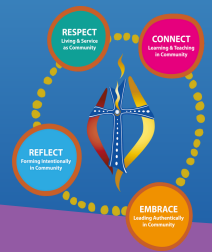


Family Prayer - Hospitality

by Nadine Grant, Formation: Identity and Outreach



As I make my way over the land near to where I live, and my feet touch the ground, I often feel in awe of the First Nations Peoples of the land on which I walk. I imagine the footsteps of the men, women and children that were etched on this country for millennia before mine, and marvel at their navigation skills as they journeyed to connect with other people and places. I wonder what stories, songs and dances were shared with their loved ones in honour of their ancestors and for the emerging generations. I am blessed as guest on their land.

Context

Is it still okay to 'drop in'?

In the first chapter of the Gospel attributed to Luke, Mary rushes to visit her cousin Elizabeth. The author gives no definitive reasons why the 'drop in' occurs but does tell us that Mary stays three months with her relative. In a culture that promotes perfection in lifestyle and appearance through images posted on social media, has the humble 'drop in' lost favour? If so, does this accentuate our isolation and restrict opportunities for genuine encounter with others and therefore with God?

Scripture

Gospel attributed to Luke (1: 39-56)

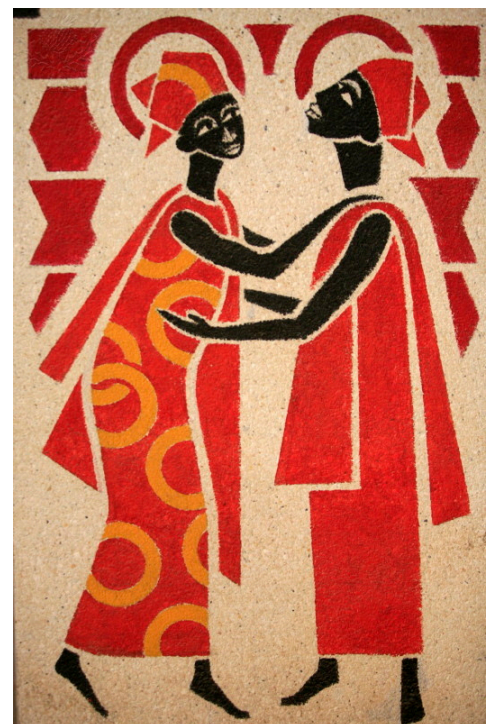
The Visitation

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

And Mary said:

"My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.
His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors."

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.



Fresco of the Visitation, designed and painted in 1963 by Dom Georges Saget, Keur Moussa Abbey Church, Keur Moussa, Senegal, West Africa, Africa. Accessed from: https://quest.eb.com/images/search/the%20visitation/detail/151_2517598

Reflection

I was a little deflated to read a recent article from the ABC news site titled “What’s the etiquette of dropping in to someone’s house?” The notion that there are now rules for drop ins such as “pick your audience”, “read the room”, or “never go empty-handed”[1] seems foreign to me as I grew up in a generation of feeling comfortable visiting family and close friends unannounced. These rules clearly did not exist in first century Palestine either as Mary had no medium of communicating to Elizabeth that she was “on her way”, or of asking “was it okay to drop in and stay a while?”

We hear in Luke’s gospel (1:39-56) that Mary went in haste to visit her cousin, and then stayed for three months, and I can’t help but wonder her reasons. Was it excitement, fear or simply the desire to share her news with a wise friend? Imagine the emotional strength Mary and Elizabeth gained from spending weeks together. Perhaps they spoke of everything that had happened and was to happen or perhaps they shared companionable silence.

Beyond the theological significance of this passage in Luke’s gospel, the meeting between Mary and Elizabeth points to the importance of genuine human encounter.[2] Luke writes (1:41) that upon hearing Mary’s greeting the baby leapt in Elizabeth’s womb and she was filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, connecting, even binding the women in love and compassion for one another. The gift of the Spirit was experienced as the warmth of God’s love in a most familiar situation, that of two friends, two waiting mothers coming together to help one another. In our culture of connecting through technology, the warmth of a hug or the tone of a look are lost in a text, and I fear that we are in danger of becoming socially sterilised, of losing the opportunities for genuine encounter with one another, for genuine transformation through the Holy Spirit.

Taking inspiration from Mary, I will spend some time to reconsider the power of the ‘drop in’. In a ‘drop in’ we have the capacity to be as gracious as Mary was and as welcoming as Elizabeth. We have the opportunity for genuine encounter through reaching out to others with joy and with service making these words of ancient scripture alive through our generosity and kindness.

Prayer

God of encounter,

Give us the courage to be someone’s Mary to Elizabeth or Elizabeth to Mary,

Amen

Call to Action

Contemplate the following questions[3] as a family.

1. Having heard Elizabeth’s good news from afar, Mary ventures a long distance to visit her cousin. When is the last time you shared good news with a relative or friend? What did you share?
2. On seeing Mary, Elizabeth feels John leap for joy within her womb. Can you remember an experience where all that was within you leapt for joy?
3. Mary’s visit is an extraordinary blessing for Elizabeth. Can you remember a time you experienced a powerfully uplifting visit from a friend?
4. Mary and Elizabeth form an early Christian community even before their children are born. Who do you seek to build community with?

References

[1] Madeleine Spencer, “What’s the Etiquette of dropping in to someone’s house?” ABC News, accessed 23/5/24, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-05-23/etiquette-of-dropping-in-to-friends-house/103852588>

[2] Marie Azarello, *Mary the First Disciple: A Guide for Transforming Today’s Church*, (Ottawa: Novalis, 2004,) 60.

[3] James O’Brien, *Daily Prayer, Season of Joy: Week 2, The Visitation*, November 2019, accessed 31/5/24, <https://www.pray.com.au/season-of-joy-week-two-the-visitation/>