

**The Still Point**  
**A Time of Meditation and Reflection**  
**Fourth Sunday of Advent**

... At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;  
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,  
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,  
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,  
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,  
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance...

T.S. Eliot, *Burnt Norton*

Peace on each one who comes in need;  
**Peace on each one who comes in joy.**  
Peace on each one who offers prayers;  
**Peace on each one who offers song.**  
Peace of the Maker, Peace of the Son,  
**Peace of the Spirit, the Triune One.**

**Opening Prayer**

Come, O come Emmanuel,  
you are the way, the truth and the life;  
Come, living Savior  
come to your world which waits for you.  
Hear this prayer for your love's sake.  
**Amen.**

**The Gospel**

*Luke 1: 39-55*

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.  
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.

His mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;

he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,

according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

**Poem:** from "Appalachian Elegy"

*By bell hooks (b. 1952)*

listen little sister  
angels make their hope here  
in these hills  
follow me  
I will guide you  
careful now  
no trespass  
I will guide you  
word for word  
mouth for mouth  
all the holy ones  
embracing us  
all our kin  
making home here  
renegade marooned  
lawless fugitives  
grace these mountains  
we have earth to bind us  
the covenant  
between us  
can never be broken  
vows to live and let live

## **Meditation**

There are many ways to look at the story of Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth. Often readers focus on the personal relationship between these two women, one considered too old to have a baby, and the other too young. For each of them, God's intervention, heralded by the visit of an angel, opens up the possibility of new and transformative life. Sometimes overlooked is the reality that this visit, and this relationship, is not only personal; it is political. These two women are prophets, empowered by the Holy Spirit to show forth God's truth. Elizabeth shows us the wonderful identity of Mary's child – the incarnation of the Holy One as one of us. And Mary, in the tradition of the prophets of old, tells us in concrete terms what the coming of God's reign of love and justice looks like.

The poem bears no direct relationship to the story of Mary's visit to Elizabeth. But the activist poet bell hooks – who died this week on December 15 – invites us to reflect on the generations of women who have resisted oppression and spoken truth to power. Sometimes that resistance means taking refuge away from the centers of power – “renegade marooned lawless fugitives” in the hills where angels make their home. If we allow ourselves to encounter the revolutionary implications of Mary and Elizabeth's prophetic words, we may be able to imagine that they too might have had to take to the hills.

## **Questions for Reflection**

What portion of Mary's radical song brings you hope?

What images in the poem connect you to the gospel story?

Below is an image of the Visitation by the 15<sup>th</sup> c. Italian painter Piero di Cosimo, from the National Gallery of Art. It is followed by a closeup of Mary and Elizabeth's hands, the center of the picture. How does this view of the two women's hands change or enrich your reading of the gospel passage and the poem?

## **Prayers**

We bring before God someone whom we have met or remembered today

We bring to God someone who is hurting tonight and needs our prayer

We bring to God a troubled situation in our world

We bring to God, silently, someone whom we find hard to forgive or trust

We bring ourselves to God that we might grow in generosity of spirit, clarity of mind, and warmth of affection

We offer our thanks to God for the blessings in our lives

We name before God those who have died.

Gracious God, you hear all our prayers: those we speak aloud, those we hold in our hearts, and those prayers for which we have no words. Hear the prayers of your people, and grant them as may be best for us, for the sake of your holy name. **Amen.**

Accept our thanks for all you have done, O God. Our hands were empty, and you filled them.

May Christ's holy, healing, enabling Spirit be with us every step of the way, and be our guide as our road changes and turns, and the blessing of God our Creator, Redeemer and Giver of life be among us now and remain with us forever. **Amen.**

***Poem and Reflection offered by: Rev'd Elizabeth Randall***