

The kick of an unborn child. Some of you know that sensation - life within you growing into a person you do not yet know except for kicks and thrashing. I suppose many mothers-to-be have found meaning in the movements of a child growing within. Mothers sense and know things – they just do. Maybe they tell others – I suspect often they do not. Already in the womb is a personality being shaped – expressed? Does a mother know the child that she has never seen?

Mary came into the house of Elizabeth and we are told the child in Elizabeth's womb leaped for joy. Elizabeth, an older woman who had been without a child all the years of her marriage now carried a son who would be named John. John would be a prophet of God – calling the people to live by faith in God, baptizing them as a sign of their repentance. Elizabeth's son was a miracle child – a given-by-God child.

And Mary? She was carrying a child within also – a miracle child – a given-by-God child. The angel Gabriel had announced to Mary that her son would be called Son of the Most High and that he would receive the throne of his ancestor David, the ancient king.

Luke tells us that 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.”

A skeptic – a doubter - would say these two women had over-active imaginations. A fetus' kick becoming a leap for joy – an out of wedlock pregnancy a miracle. But Elizabeth and Mary trusted God was at work in them.

Mary burst into song: 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.”

So much faith, so much hope, so much praise when these children were not even yet born. These days some expectant mothers play music for an unborn child to hear. Many believe that already in the womb a child is shaped by sound.

Could it be that John and Jesus were being shaped by the faith and the praise of their mothers? Certainly the faith of Mary and Elizabeth will be shared by John and Jesus. They say faith is not taught but it is caught – that what parents teach their children is not nearly so important as what parents themselves believe and practice. God did not drop John and Jesus down from heaven fully grown, full of knowledge but God placed them in these women to be born and raised in homes where God's praise abounded. God is at work through these mothers' faith.

And not only through them. God is at work through all of us as we live in faith and praise. We learn from one another how to live before God. Young watch old – friends learn from friends. We learn from one another how much of ourselves to give to Jesus, how much of our lives to be entrusted to God. We learn from one another whether there are parts of life that can be exempted from God – or whether all of life is to be lived in faith and praise.

Mary sang a song that day – expressing faith in all that God was doing through this child she would bear. We heard the beginning of the song earlier in this sermon but now will hear the rest of it: God's 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.

Soon Mary's baby would be born – born the lowliest one of all – without a bed except the place where cattle fed. He would die rejected – stripped – alone. But God would raise him to the place of highest honor and every lowly one with him. Mary's song would come true in Jesus.

It had come true already in her. God had honored the lowly servant – the young girl Mary. All generations would one day call her blessed. But that would be years away. On that day the sons were not yet born and everything belonged to Elizabeth and Mary by faith. Just the way Jesus belongs to you this day, by faith.

You have heard what God has done in Jesus – the Holy Spirit enables you to understand what God is doing in your life every day through Jesus. And your response is faith and praise. Faith that you also are a given-by-God child. Faith that everything won by Mary's child belongs to you – faith that leads you to declare: the Mighty one has done great things for me and holy is his name. Amen.