

# CELTIC ADVENT: SOUL FRIENDSHIP

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## Luke 1:39-56

In those days, Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, <sup>40</sup>where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup>When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, <sup>42</sup>and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. <sup>43</sup>And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? <sup>44</sup>For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. <sup>45</sup>And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'

<sup>46</sup> And Mary said,  
'My soul magnifies the Lord,

<sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,

<sup>48</sup> for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

<sup>49</sup> for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.

<sup>50</sup> His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

<sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

<sup>52</sup> He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;

<sup>53</sup> he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.

<sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,

<sup>55</sup> according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.'

<sup>56</sup> And Mary remained with her for about three months and then returned to her home.

## REFLECT & DISCUSS

1. Read the passage slowly. Then take a deep breath and read it again.

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What word, phrase, or image stands out to you?

2. When Mary arrives, Elizabeth had previously been “hiding herself” (Luke 1:24). How might Mary’s visit be a healing connection for Elizabeth, if she was in hiding?
3. In a four-week Advent, the third Sunday is traditionally called “Joy Sunday” (and is represented with a pink candle, instead of the usual purple ones). Notice the “leapt for joy” in verse 44. In her book, *Atlas of the Heart*, researcher Brené Brown defines joy as “an intense feeling of deep spiritual connection, pleasure, and appreciation.”<sup>9</sup> She says joy is “characterized by a connection with others, or with God, nature, or the universe.”
  - a. What kind of connections do you think this “leapt for joy” reveals in verse 44?
  - b. Connection is fundamental to experiences of joy. Consider a time when you experienced deep joy. Who or what did you feel connected to? When have you experienced a joy so contagious that you just needed to share it?
4. In Luke 1:45, the Greek word for “happy” or “blessed” is *makarios*, which means “fortunate,” and was often used to describe rich or elite people who enjoyed good fortune and carefree lifestyles. Consider the irony of this word being attributed

to Mary, a self-described “low-status servant” (Luke 1:48). How might her blessed joy contrast with that other sense of “happy” or “fortunate.”

5. In the ancient Celtic tradition, everyone—lay or clergy—was expected to have a spiritual companion or mentor on their life’s journey. This *anam cara* or “soul friend” was someone with whom you confided the secret intimacies of your heart, and from whom you received spiritual wisdom and guidance. Many of the Celtic saints became that for others, and many of those saints sought out their own. *Anam cara* has grown to mean a friend with whom you are completely free to be yourself, who can see past your pretenses, who can offer you spiritual and moral counsel, and who helps awaken what is best and most true in you. This person is a stable presence over many years, even when there is physical distance.
  - a. How might Elizabeth and Mary be *Anam Cara* for one another?
  - b. Who in your life would you consider a “soul friend”? It could be a spiritual director, church member, best friend, partner, sibling, or parent.
  - c. Did you seek one out, or did they emerge in another way? What difference has that person made in your life?

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