

Christmas: It's Not Just for the Kids
9:00 a.m., Trinity Episcopal Church, Aurora
Advent IV, December 20, 2009
Luke 1:39-45
The Rev. Charles A. de Kay

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Please be seated.

Good morning!

When was the last time you leapt for joy? Can you remember being so moved by events, that you spontaneously found yourself lifting off the earth in pure delight? I invite you to keep these questions in mind as we probe today's scriptures. Our story thus far:

The virgin known as Mary is making a hasty visit to her elder kinswoman, Elizabeth. Mary, now pregnant, must be very curious to see for herself what this odd creature, this angel Gabriel, has told her about God's movement in the family. Gabriel has been traveling the Judean countryside announcing auspicious births – to Elizabeth, known to be barren – will be born a son who brings “joy and gladness,” a son who will be called John, who will be “great before the Lord” and to Mary – known to be a virgin – will be born a son, who will be great, “the Son of the Most High,” inheriting the throne of David, or the united kingdom of the twelve tribes of Israel (who have been promised to be a blessing to all the nations).

Mary graciously accepted her part in God's story, an extraordinary offering of herself, and now pregnant, she must be very curious to see what's going on with her kinswoman Elizabeth. When she arrives at Elizabeth and Zechariah's home, she calls out to them. When Elizabeth hears Mary's voice, sight unseen, Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit, as the baby she's carrying leaps for joy in her womb. It would seem that John the Baptist, from the very start, recognizes Jesus for who he is, before anyone else.

Whenever I hear this part of the story, I'm struck by two things. First, I'm reminded once again, just how close the people of ancient times seem to be to God. These women and men see the hand of God everywhere. In good times as well as the bad, they can see God moving in their lives.

So, often, it seems that today, it takes tragedy – moments when events force us to recognize our own powerlessness, our utter inability to control events – to bring us back to God. Usually these are times of great stress, times of great testing or times of great loss, that remind us that perhaps we are not in charge of everything. By comparison, every one of the characters in Luke's version of events we've met so far, sees God in every blade of grass, every warming ray of sunshine, every cool breeze. God is present in the air that they breathe, the food they eat, the dreams they have. I wonder what it might be like to live in a community where that's the norm?

The second piece that captures my imagination, as no doubt Luke intended for all his readers, is John's leaping for joy inside Elizabeth. What a strange and marvelous detail! Not only are these two mysteriously pregnant women, who have each been brought news by the otherwise rarely seen angel Gabriel, these pregnant kinswoman in relationship with one another, so too, it would seem, are their boys – even before birth. And John's response to Jesus is *to leap*. To spontaneously jump for joy.

At a party last night, I spoke with a little girl who told me of how she had seen Santa Claus. As she told me, her eyes got bigger and bigger, and she started jumped up and down. Spontaneously. Joyfully. Un-self-consciously. Wonderfully. And I mean that last word in all of the connotations it offers. It was wonderful to watch, yes. Her dance sprang from her being so full of wonder, as well.

Christmas is around the corner. Our time of waiting is almost over. We just lit the fourth of four Advent candles on our Advent wreath, as many of you will do in your homes today. The countdown is

almost finished. Now, sometimes I hear that Christmas is really just for the kids. Ooooooh. Dear friends, it's not so. The kids can remind us, perhaps, about what Christmas is about. The kids, whom I often experience as being much closer to God than their adult companions, can show us about the GREAT JOY, the WONDER, the MYSTERY, of Christmas, of the coming of God into our world as a fellow child.

Children can remind their adult friends about God's presence in every blade of grass, every snowflake, every gust of wind. Children can help us to remember God's presence in the air we breathe, the food we eat, the dreams we dream.

Children can show us ourselves, being un-self-conscious – singing songs as they make them up, dancing in public without a care, even leaping out of sheer pleasure and joy. Just like we did. Like John the Baptist in the womb, children can connect their elders with the delight of discovering Jesus, of finding God, once again, present in our midsts.

That delight, however, doesn't come from the children; that delight erupts from deep inside each of us. We may have buried it under a mountain of stuff – stuff like “being an adult” “being professional” “not making a fool out of ourselves” and all of our would-be life-and-death to-do lists. This delight may even be buried so deeply that we have a hard time recognizing it as our own. It is, though. We can, if we want, if we're courageous enough, we can reclaim it. Revel in it. Wallow in it. And, we, too, might be so overcome as to be tempted, like Elizabeth, to shout out loud, “why is this granted me, that my Lord should come to me?” Well, probably we'd say it differently. Most of us don't talk like the people in the Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

No, my friends, Christmas is NOT just for the children. But sometimes we'd be wise to follow where the children lead.

Let us pray. *Holy and gracious God, open our hearts to you, help us to see your movement in our lives. Give us, we pray, a childlike faith that we might know some part of the depth of your amazing love for us. Help the adults to let go of our self-consciousness that we might allow ourselves to rejoice in your choosing us. As we finish up our preparations for your arrival on Christmas, may our hearts be open that they might be filled with the true spirit of the season, your Holy Spirit. In Jesus's name. Amen.*