

Leaping Hearts

The Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year C, RCL. Luke 1:39-45(46-55). December 23, 2018. The Episcopal Shared Ministry of Our Saviour, Salem and Trinity, Alliance in the Diocese of Ohio. The Rev'd Jerome H. (Kip) Colegrove

During this Advent season, I've been referring to the theme of the God who keeps coming at us, the God whose arrival is immanent, the God who is always approaching us and who is, therefore, approachable *by* us – and who, indeed, wants us to draw near to him so that he may draw near to us.

A classic story that enshrines a response to the approach of God is the story of Mary's meeting with Elizabeth in today's reading from the Gospel according to Luke. When Mary enters Elizabeth's house and greets her, the child in Elizabeth's womb leaps. This portrays an enthusiastic response to the approach of God: the unborn John the Baptist recognizes the unborn Jesus, who is God incarnate. It's not simply that the women (and consequently their children) were relatives (probably cousins of some sort) and thus had some sort of special bond of empathy; it's that John, the prophet-to-be, anticipates his prophetic announcement of the immanent arrival of Jesus, God's anointed one, the redeemer of Israel (and indeed the savior of the world).

The special bond which pregnancy generates among women is here incorporated into the theology of relationship. God has an awesome and exalted aspect, but what is important for the healing of the world and the rescue of real people from sin, death and evil is the intimate involvement of God in the living processes of our day-to-day lives. Without overwhelming us (which would force our hand, relationally speaking) God takes enough initiative to get our attention, so that we notice his approach, his advent, his coming toward us. If we respond with joy and affirmation – if we say Yes! – God will keep drawing nearer. Ultimately, we are to be reborn from within by the life of God gestating within us, as our Lord did within Mary. That life will transform us, as St. Paul puts it, into children of God and heirs of God's kingdom. (Romans 8:17)

So in Advent we are not just getting ready to celebrate Jesus' birth; we are celebrating our own rebirth in and through Jesus. More specifically, we are celebrating that quality of insistent but respectful approachability that is so characteristic of God Almighty. It is that unwillingness to withdraw from a world that is in so many ways dismissive of him – indeed, so often outright hostile to him – that makes God, if we will accept him, the very best friend any human being could possibly have. Never abandoning...always reliable...with us to the end and beyond the end to everlasting beginning: that's God. That's our Lord Jesus Christ. Do our hearts not leap to see him coming?