

Artist Statement: Two Mothers

Inspired by Luke 1:24-45' *Acrylic, ink, and mixed media collage on canvas*
A couple of months before I took on this project, I was forced into early labor and birthed our second child. Needless to say, I was still pretty raw with emotions and was processing the trauma. During that time, I found myself in isolation. Our days were spent driving back and forth to the NICU to check on our 3 lb. infant. It was terrifying and tiresome.

But during that time, so many wonderful people sought us out. We were gifted food, baby clothes, childcare, and rest. But the greatest gift was the comfort I received from other people who had given birth. There was this sacred sharing of birth stories and postpartum depression. Parents passed on beautiful garments that they, too, received after birthing a premie. Some of these pieces looked like they had been passed down many times before, like each thread held a memory from a different family.

We were connected. It is because of this connection that parents share that I felt instantly connected to paying homage to Frida Kahlo's *Two Fridas*. Rather than being connected from veins of the heart, Mary and Elizabeth would be connected through the uterus. Nearly a quarter of Black women between ages 18 and 30 have fibroids while also being the racial demographic with the highest maternal death rate in the United States. More than 100,000 women undergo some form of mastectomy each year. Globally, an estimated 14% of girls give birth before the age of 18. Where do these realities meet the heart of scripture? How do we see the struggles of infertility or empathize with the vulnerability that comes with not being a socially-accepted pregnant person? While Elizabeth is crowned with holy gray hair and a dress marked with the blood of previous miscarriages, Mary sits next to her holding a childhood doll, draped in the jewelry, flowers, and silks of a traditional Middle Eastern Jewish bride. Their stories and experiences are vastly different. But Mary sought out her kin. This reminds me that we do not need to do the hard things alone. There is power in connection. With you, there is joy. —

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What does the logo mean?

The image of a comforting embrace, and perhaps in the space between the people, continents and bodies of water come into view. These two people could represent characters we follow this Advent season: Elizabeth & Zechariah, Mary & Elizabeth, Mary & Joseph. Or maybe the figures are more broadly representative of God & humanity or of the personification of joy & weariness. Two people—one radiating joy and the other wading into weariness—hold the world together.

How does this all work?

You have several meditation options. You can read the prayer on the next page, you can focus on the images on the front of this bulletin and use Visio Divina (instructions below), you can listen to the music, or you can practice all three. You are welcome to the coffee and cookies available in the Narthex. If you want to spend some time chatting, join us in the office.

Visio Divina

Visio Divina, latin for “divine seeing,” is a method of meditation, reflection, and prayer through a process of intentional seeing. Visio Divina extends the 6th century Benedictine practice of Lectio Divina by the use of visual imagery. Traditionally, Visio Divina was accompanied by Benedictine iconography and illuminations, however, different faith traditions have adapted the process over time, utilizing both secular and nonsecular images.

Suggestions to consider throughout the visual meditation:

- 1) Focus on your breath. If your mind begins to wander, inhale and exhale slowly. Stay mindful of your breathing as a way to bring you back into the present moment.
- 2) If you find yourself not knowing what to think, or trying to figure out what the art means, remember that you are invited to simply be an observer. As you look, jot down simple observations about what you see, or ask yourself questions such as, “Why did the artist choose that color?” or “Why did the artist portray the story in this way?” or “How does this art make me feel?” Perhaps your questions will lead to more questions and more observations and then you’ll be getting somewhere.

God of today and
God of tomorrow,
We come to you
this day to thank
you for the way
that joy binds us
together. Thank
you for contagious

laughter, for inside jokes, for stories around dinner tables that can make us laugh until we cry.
Thank you for comedy shows, for the familiar sound of a loved one’s chuckle, and for the universality of smile lines. What a gift you have given us. Remind us that joy is better when shared, so today we thank you in particular for the Elizabeths and the Marys in our lives.

Thank you for the people who spark joy in us. Thank you for the people who pull us out of our shells, who teach us how to dance and show us how to laugh. Thank you for those who declare, “Blessed are you.” In a moment of gratitude, we silently lift their names to you now.
Holy God, although we know that joy is better when shared, there are days when that is easier said than done. Like Elizabeth, who stayed in isolation for months after receiving her good news, we too have a tendency to choose fear over joy. Without the help of someone at our door, we can often keep our joy to ourselves.

So gracious God, when those days come, when the waters of fear rise, when isolation steals our joy, comfort us. Comfort us like a shepherd with their flock. Gather us into your arms and carry us to safer ground that we might experience joy in the ways you have in store for us. And until that promised day, like Mary and Elizabeth, we will do our best to keep finding one another.

Like Mary and Elizabeth, we will do our best to open the door to one another, to you, and to the joy that connection brings. Amen. written by: rev. sarah speed | sanctifiedart.org

