

A Story of Two Women
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Today, just one week after the tragedy of Newtown, the liturgy provides us with a tiny seed of hope that our lives can be different. This seed of hope is found in the story of two women: one a young girl, the other an old woman.

The old woman has been faithful to God in every way; but she has been unable to conceive a child. She and her husband have followed all of the commandments of God blamelessly; but they have no children. But now in her old age, long beyond the time for bearing children, the old woman has conceived a child who will be the last and the greatest prophet of the OT.

The other woman is a young girl who has not had any relations with a man, but she has already conceived a child through the power of God's Spirit, a child who is the very Son of God, a child who will redeem the world. Both women are pregnant with new life. Both women are filled with an inexpressible joy. Both women quietly wait for the fulfillment of God's promise in their lives.

The young girl, who will be the mother of God's Son, makes a difficult journey to the hill country of Judea so that she can assist the older woman. Although this young girl will bring forth the savior of the world, she serves the older woman. For her part, the older woman knows that as great as her child is, his role will be to prepare the way for the younger woman's son. When Mary comes to Elizabeth's home, therefore, the child in Elizabeth's womb leaps for joy. The mothers and the children in their womb rejoice. The mothers and the children in the womb understand what God is about to do.

The two women wait in quiet hope and joy. They wait with the joy and anticipation that only an expectant mother understands. They cannot rush or shorten the time of their pregnancy. They can only wait in joyful hope for what God is about to do.

During these days in which our hearts are filled with grief and sorrow for what has happened, the example of these women teaches us to hope once more. These two women—the young girl and the old woman—teach us that the promises and mercies of God are not exhausted. Although we do not know how or when, God will restore life and peace to us, and to those who suffered so much last week. Although we do not know how or when, God will give us hope and joy again; for the promises and mercies of God are not exhausted.

Although Mary is the mother of the Messiah, she teaches us how to serve the elderly. She teaches the young to be respectful of those who are old and infirm. For her part, Elizabeth teaches those who are old that God works in surprising and unexpected ways in the young. Both women teach us the importance of living in harmony and peace with each other.

Both women teach us the importance of life. They teach us how fragile life is and how it must be nurtured and cared for. They teach us that there is no gift more precious than life. Finally, these women give us what we most need during these days of sorrow and pain; they give

us hope and the promise of joy. They remind us that God's promises and mercies cannot be extinguished. They remind us that every child is a sign of God's love and grace. Every child is part of God's plan to bring salvation to the world. Every child has a role to play in God's redemptive plan. And so, although we may find it difficult, let us pray:

God our Father, we wait for the joy of Christmas with hearts that are heavy and burdened with sorrow. Help us to find hope in Mary and Elizabeth. Remind us that your promises and mercies are not exhausted. Teach us to find new hope and joy anew in the children of Mary and Elizabeth. Comfort those who are filled with so much sorrow. Heal those whose hearts are filled with anger and bitterness. Strengthen and comfort them. Renew our faith and trust in the goodness and beauty of life. Teach us to trust and believe as Mary and Elizabeth believed and trusted. Amen