

Tripp will attest

that my memory is not as good as his.

He can remember things

with such impressive specificity,

but alas I'm the better storyteller.

However, there is one memory

that vividly comes to mind

this time of year

when we get around

to talking about Mary, the mother of Jesus.

The memory starts out like this:

I'm standing outside our church doors

on the lectern side;

it's a few minutes after 8pm

and it is dark and cold—

though I am not **that** cold

because I've got on my robe

and lately my internal temperature

has been warmer than normal.

I shake a few hands

but in reality,

I give more hugs and repeat Christmas greetings

to everyone coming from

the warmth inside of the church

out into the cold December night air.

A few youth here and there

come out with their Silent Night candles still burning,

ready to set something or someone ablaze.

No one rushes, it's like a family reunion,

Lots to catch up on and old friends to greet.

As people slowly file out

Zabrina Pitts stops,

looks at me intently as I smile

and asks me if I am feeling okay.

My plastered-on perm-a-grin dropped
and for a moment I was honest.

I'm so tired and my feet are killing me, I tell her.
I wondered, she said.
There was a moment during the prayer
when I thought you might drop.
How many more days? She asked.

This is my memory
of the Christmas Eve service
of 2012.
We did three services that year,
a 4pm, a 7pm and a 10pm.

That was the Christmas Eve
that I was pregnant with Arlie
—who was born on January 3.
Zabrina could tell that my feet hurt.
All of you could probably tell
that I was swollen like all pregnant mothers get
as birth draws near.
I was tired
and though normally
the pulpit and lectern seats don't bother me,
I can you tell they are not designed
for the comfort of a pregnant woman
within 10 days of her due date.

That year, I connected with Mary
more than I ever had.

Now I know
that talking about being pregnant
excludes at least half of you in the room.
Which means some of you
will never know what being pregnant feels like.
And truthfully any woman
who has ever been pregnant will tell you,

there aren't really words
that can fully grasp the whole experience.
And Luke's first chapters
are full of pregnant women.

But this gospel shows us
something incredible in these pregnancy narratives,
a deep truth for all of us,
even if we never have been pregnant.

I hope at some point you will read the entire selection for today, Luke 1:26-26—there are some powerful parts of Scripture in those verses. But for today, I will read just part of the story...

What is so wonderfully unique
about Mary's story
is how it our story too.

At first glance,
it may seem like we don't have anything in common
with the story of a 1st century Jewish unwed,
14-year-old pregnant virgin.

How could Mary's unique story
—how could it possibly be our story too?

Well, let me tell you
about one of my favorite images
to reflect on
this time of year.
It is taped up on my desk.
It is a painting of people on a subway.

There are four people in the painting.
One is a lady is sitting on bench,
wearing a bright pink top and hot pink pants.



Her hair is up
and you can see from her seated stance,
hiding behind her pink shirt
is a swollen stomach
—she's pregnant.



Her left hand is steadied next to her against the bench
as though to brace herself
for the train's quick lurches forward
or slowing stops.

There is another woman a few seats away,
grasping an umbrella with a gloved hand.



She's older than the first woman,
her gray hair neatly pinned up
and her string of pearls
are a sharp contrast
to the olive-green dress, she's wearing.

Her other hand, also gloved,
rests on her large protruding abdomen,
indicating that she too
is pregnant.



This is strange and a tad disturbing,
given what appears to be
the woman's elderly age—
how you might wonder, is she pregnant?

However, what is more alarming
are the men in the painting.



Seated closely to the first pregnant woman in pink
is a man—maybe he is her partner or spouse,
their knees are touching
as they sit on the train bench together.
He's wearing a dark suit and tie.
His brow is furrowed
and the look in his eyes
make you think his mind
is far away from the current train ride.
One hand is behind him
and his other rests,
rather lovingly on his...
pregnant belly.



Like. Whoa.

The last person in the painting
is a man who stands
in the closest foreground.



He's got on a tank top and jeans,
his shaved head is bowed
as though he is looking at his feet.
He looks like he might be the youngest in the picture.

With one hand,
he holds the metal pole in the train
to steady himself
since he is standing up
on the subway train.
The other hand is pressed against the small of his back;
it's there of course
to counter the stress and strain
of *his pregnant stomach*.



That's right,
all four people
in the painting of the subway ride
are pregnant.

Young **and** old,
men **and** women.



Behind these four subway riders
are signs for restaurants and dining.
There is a clever sign that should read,
“Are you ready for Adventure Cruise”
—but because of the pregnant **man**
standing in the foreground,
whose head blocks some of the sign
it ends up reading,
“Are you ready for Advent...”
In essence, are you ready for **the coming birth?**

I couldn't love
this odd and startling painting more.
Why?
Not because it is a tad provocative
although being provocative is **very me...**
I love this painting's implications.

I love for how it subtly asks,
are you **ready** for the birth of Christ?

The name of the painting is, Theotokos,
which is the Greek word for God-bearer.
This painting by Tim Mooney,
perfectly articulates

what Mary's *yes*
to God's plan
then says to all of us.

This is how the *unique* story of Mary
becomes the *communal* story for all of us.

The unique story that God chose Mary
to bear the Christ child into the world,
becomes the shared story of all people.
Tim Mooney's painting show us this truth.

The truth that when God chose Mary,
God chose you.
When God chose Mary,
God chose Susan and Jim and Cynthia and Coble and Fletcher and Charlotte
and Daniel.

When God chose Mary,
God chose you.

God has chosen to make a home in us¹
— not home on a mountain,
not home in a city,
not home in an ark,
not even home in a temple.
God has chosen to dwell,
to make a home,
in us.
Each and every one of us,
young and old,
man or woman,
single, committed, married, divorced
—every single one of us
has the potential,
the opportunity and the gift
to give birth to Christ in this world.

¹ With a nod to the Rev. Marcella Glass, <https://marciglass.com/2014/12/21/be-born-in-us-today/>

Mary is our witness—
she shows us what it is like
to bear Christ into the world.
And not only that,
Mary attests to God's with-ness² to world,
for Christ is Emmanuel.

Which means we,
each and every one of us is,
Theotokos, a God-bearer.

And we know this because of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Benediction

If you need a reminder that you are in fact a God-bearer:
if you need a reminder
that in God's choosing Mary
to give birth to Christ in the world
God is also choosing you,
to give birth to Christ in the world—
if you need a reminder, email me and I will email you
the image of Tim Mooney's painting,
Theotokos.

And when you forget
or when you doubt
or when it seems impossible to believe
that you too
are pregnant with God's word
that you too
are to give birth to Christ in this world,
remember the words of the arch angel Gabriel to Mary,
"For nothing will be impossible with God."

² Witness & with-ness come from Kyle Schiefelbein-Guerrero
<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/jesus-birth-announced-2/commentary-on-luke-126-45-46-56-2>