

This past summer, I saw a mama box turtle clearing gravel from a walking path to make safe space for her eggs. Each spring and summer, I see the same determined mama wren make a nest in our eaves out of pine straw. And even though I can't see them, there are thousands of other little creatures all around, some furry, some creeping, some nocturnal that are making preparations for their own expected little ones.

Hope, is a mama nesting. It's this mix of assurance, and anxious activity, and poignant waiting, and faith, and dogged determination. But most of all it's seeing, believing, understanding that the not-yet will someday-be.

How wonderful that our seasonal story, and indeed our redemptive story, begins with two remarkable women, Elizabeth and Mary, who see, who believe, who understand, who faith that the not-yet will someday-be.

I wonder how many times Elizabeth had convinced herself that this would be the year she would conceive a child, only to be disappointed again. I imagine how easy it would have been for her to greet such fantastic news with skepticism – her husband certainly did! And it pains me to imagine how many times she must have had to steel herself to hope again.

But here she is!!! One who sees!!! One who responds!!! One who hopes!!!

I wonder if Mary was even old enough to have experienced the kind of pain that makes one skeptical of hope? I imagine it might have been fairly easy for her to dismiss the significance of such fantastic news, because it came so quickly. On the other hand, I imagine it might also have been overwhelming to process such fantastic and weighty news. And it pains me to think of one forced to grow up too soon, and tasked with something so monumental.

But Mary, says, "Here I am, Lord." One who sees!!! One who responds!!! One who hopes!!!

How fitting then that expectant mothers would gather together, creating a nest while they nested.

If their husbands were as inept as me, and most other daddies I know, there's no way these men could have understood all the feelings their partners were internalizing. Expectant mothers are consumed with their task mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically 24/7. Their hope for what their children will become, as well as their anxiety about their children's welfare is not something that turns on and off.

And if you were Mary and Elizabeth, how much time would you want to spend at the well chatting with the other townswomen? Some would ask you to recount all the fantastic details over and over again; others would probably draw judgmental conclusions about how a woman so old or so young was expecting; still others might be so interested, so excited about God's plans that they failed to think about the wellbeing of the women being tasked to fulfil such plans.

Somehow, somehow, God unites two women who need to find support in one another. And what joy they must have shared!!! What relief they must have felt in the company of another who knew and understood the mix of grief, and pain, and hope, and fear, and discomfort, and excitement, and love, and rollercoaster emotions of her cousin.

Elizabeth believes she is blessed, because she's in the presence of one who responds to God's call. And Elizabeth has such trust, such faith, such hope in the future, which is foreshadowed by her son John leaping in the womb at Mary's presence.

And Mary, in the presence of Elizabeth, is able to fully understand the remarkable things God's gonna do in the world.

Unfortunately, the ancient authors don't tell us many details about Mary and Elizabeth beyond the birth stories. I really wish they had. But you know what, they didn't have to provide more details for us to know what kind of people Mary and Elizabeth were.

There's a John and there's a Jesus, because two mamas resolved to help make it so. They imagined who these men could be before they even got to hold them. And they instilled in their boys the same sense of resolve, and of response, and of

Building a Nest
Bob Stillerman
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Luke 1:39-46



a spiritually
progressive
community
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hope, and of faith, and of hard work that they exhibited in their acceptance and embodiment of motherhood. They made a nest in order that their sons might one day thrive.

In the coming season, may we the church at Sardis gather the needed resources to prepare and welcome Emmanuel. And as we nest, may we find hope and comfort in the company of fellow nesters.

Amen.