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Advent 4 2012

Luke 1:39-56

When I read this passage one phrase came to mind: “pregnant pause”, and as I am wont to do, when I want to find the precise meaning of anything, I turn to Wikipedia to find out what it means. You may not realize this, but you can find out many things from Wikipedia...some of it correct. I also double checked with the Merriam Webster dictionary online and discovered a reasonable good explanation of this phrase. A “pregnant pause” can be defined as:

“...a pause that builds up suspension in the listener/viewer, for a greater dramatic (or comic) effect of what follows after the pause.”

Edit: Merriam-Webster: *“rich in significance or implication; the pregnant phrases of the Bible.”*

Another reason I like this passage is that I, like Mary, had a baby on Christmas. When I went into labor with my oldest child my OB/GYN told me to wait until midnight before going to the hospital. That way, he assured me, your insurance company will be more likely not to give you a hard time. According to him, the hospitals would charge for an entire day even if you arrive at 11:59pm. Now, I can't attest to that since I am not in the healthcare industry, and I am sure that those of you who are will let me know one way or the other if he was correct, or if he just wanted to finish his Christmas Eve dinner before he had to rush off to deliver a baby who was arriving several days early on a major holiday. So I had to indeed take a very “pregnant pause” before rushing off to the hospital...but that few hours of respite before entering the hospital allowed me to slow down and take stock of what I have to take with me and what could be left for others to do. It was, in effect, a little gift of precious time to sit and think before an event that changed the course of my life from being a married woman to being a mother...entirely two different things.

There are similarities between that forced time of waiting and our liturgical season of Advent, this time of preparing for the arrival of the Christ.

And yet again, I go to Wikipedia to find their definition of “advent”... “a time of expectant waiting and preparation”. Yet for so many of us it is a time of stress and

unrelenting rushing about. We are busy cleaning our homes , making lists, purchasing gifts, wrapping gifts, baking cookies or pies or cakes or any combination of the above, connecting with friends and family, attending celebrations, coordinating social obligations, attending pageants, concerts and school programs, many , many things that cause stress rather than measured expectation.

Two weeks ago I had an opportunity to officiate at a relative's wedding in the US Virgin Islands, a happy and fortunate responsibility. Happy because the bride and groom were so very much in love with each other that it just spilled over onto all present. The expectation and joy in their eyes was so wonderful to see. And fortunate, because it forced me to actually slow down my own December madness.

Christmastime in the Caribbean is very different from the cold, sleety times we have in New York. At first I found it disconcerting to be hearing Christmas music when the thermometer read 80 degrees, and a mainland transplant told me it took her years to get used to a balmy Christmas, but the locals seemed to take it in stride and have their own unique ways of celebrating the Nativity. But for me that best part was the gift of slowing down...the gift of looking forward with expectation to the coming of the Light of the world, especially at this difficult time of storm and struggle, incomprehensible violence and sorrow. At this time we need to all step back...breath in and out...Take the time to build in the silent anticipation, the remembrance of things past, the anticipated joy as we join together and intone, "O come, O come Emmanuel".