

Showing

Mary Stommes

Remember when pregnancy used to be a secret?” my aunt Polly said with amusement over lunch with her sisters. Back in the day, a mother-to-be didn’t announce her pregnancy within days of conceiving. Or even months, for that matter. Your sisters might be in on the secret, but your “baby bump” was otherwise concealed beneath yards and more yards of gathered fabric.

Polly is the matriarch of my mother’s family, the oldest of twelve and mother of twelve, so she was speaking from experience. She recalled how in hushed whispers, one hand cupped over their mouths (in case there were lip readers in their midst?), they would say of another woman who appeared to be with child: “She is showing.” Laughter erupted among the octogenarians because they all had been both whisperers and whispered about. Polly then turned to my mom, gently put her hand on Mom’s knee, and said, “We were always showing.” That drew even more laughter—over the course of twenty years, Mom “was showing” fifteen times.

It seemed to me as I sat in the midst of these wise women, they all were showing still. They had mothered dozens of babies between them. Some had buried children and grandchildren and spouses. They had buried a brother, and it was no secret by this time that Mom would likely be the first sister to die. She was showing us how to do that

with grace too. Because death is as natural as birth, and what's to fear about giving birth?

In death there is birth, and in birth there is death. It is a universal truth, not for mothers only. In our beginning is our end, and our end is our beginning. Give the line to T. S. Eliot if you will, but the mystery is as old as God. And we hold it deeply within because of a pregnancy that was announced in Nazareth some 2,000 years ago.

This side of Scripture, it is easy to imagine the Annunciation to Mary as a public event, to think that people throughout all of Galilee and beyond were privy to the conversation between the angel Gabriel and the young virgin. We know how the conversation went, so they also must have. But that was not so.

The people of God were waiting for the Messiah, but it's a pretty safe bet they had no idea their salvation would come in the form of a vulnerable baby, that their salvation depended on a young virgin's consent to bear the Son of God. It's a safer bet still that when Mary said yes, the angel did not hand her a copy of *What to Expect When You Are Expecting the Messiah*. All the more brave of Mary to say yes: "May it be done unto me according to your word."

And in that moment, Mary began to show.

Yes to today. Yes ahead of time to every tomorrow.

Yes to the cradle. Yes to the cross.

To the eternal love that is our beginning and our end: Yes.

We all are pregnant with God's love. We shouldn't be afraid of showing it.

Mary Stommes is editor of Give Us This Day.