

1

Back in the days when I was born, my parents had no idea whether I would be a boy or girl until I arrived in the world, but when my children were born, the ultrasound technology gave us the option of knowing the sex of our children before they were born. We opted for the surprise rather than finding out ahead of time.

Nowadays, gender-reveal parties are all the rave, where expectant parents plan a party and reveal whether they will have a boy or girl using a pink or blue cake or balloons filled with pink or blue confetti. Some have gone to the extreme of including pink or blue fire, which can have disastrous results, such as the pyrotechnical disaster that destroyed 10,000 acres in southern California this past September.

None of these birth announcements compare, however, to the amazing revelation that Mary experienced when she learned that she was expecting a baby boy. No colored balloons or blue cake, but an angel appeared to her and said, “Greetings, favored one. God is with you.”

The Gospel writer Luke tells us that Mary was understandably confused by this experience and wondered what it all meant. The angel must have sensed Mary’s hesitation, for the messenger told her, “Don’t be afraid, for God is pleased with you.” And then comes the gender reveal announcement: “You will have a son and name him Jesus,” followed by the explanation how this baby would be in the lineage of the great King David and how his rule would last forever.

Just imagine the shock of hearing this news—not due to the gender of the baby—but in hearing the news of having a baby at all! Mary blurted out, “How is this possible, for I haven’t had any intimate relationships with a man!”

The angel replied that with God, anything is possible. “Look, even in her old age, your relative Elizabeth has conceived a son. This woman who was labeled ‘unable to conceive’ is now six months pregnant. Nothing is impossible for God” (Luke 1:36-37, CEB).

Have you noticed this theme in the Bible? Those unable to bear children amazingly have babies! Sarah had Isaac. Rebekah had Jacob and Esau. Hannah had

Samuel. Throughout history God always finds a way to bring new life, even when it seems impossible. These births are more than gender-reveal parties, for they are God-reveal parties. God reveals new possibilities when all hope seems lost.

Recently, we have heard of new possibilities, for with a vaccine for COVID being approved and arriving in local hospitals, healthcare workers are finding the possibility of relief. In the midst of their exhaustion of caring for the overflowing number of patients, a light of hope has appeared, a sense of peace that life might return to health again.

Although our world seems to have been painted in drab colors, a recent news story noted that “during our most troubling hours, what many people turned to for solace was art. Whether in the form of visual imagery or music, dance or poetry, the vivid power of art to take us out of the moment and uplift us from despair is a reminder that hope endures.”¹ Unfortunately, with the tightening of budgets, many people could not purchase art or even attend artistic events.

One successful New York artist decided he could help other artists by purchasing their art. Guy Stanley Philoche invited fellow artists to send images of their work, and when something grabbed his attention, he bought it, spending \$65,000 for over 150 pieces of artwork.

As a 3-year-old immigrant, he learned to speak English by watching TV and was inspired to draw Disney characters. Now that he’s a successful artist, he wants to help others. “Art saved my life,” he said. “I owe it a debt I could never repay, but the only way to really repay it is by buying other art from someone who hasn’t gotten a big break yet. And that’s what I’m going to keep doing.”²

Have you ever found a sense of peace while looking at artwork? When listening to music? When reading a novel? While watching someone dance? The artists among us offer us peace, a chance to see beyond the difficulties of life to a better day. They stir our imaginations to embrace a creative world that soothes our troubled souls.

Back in April, soon after the pandemic had shut down most gatherings at church, a small group of

3

people began meeting with me on Zoom, looking at a different piece of artwork each week. As we gaze at the artwork from various artists from around the world, we begin to catch a glimpse of a bigger picture, of how God has been inspiring people throughout history and in various cultures. The creative images inspire us, offering us a moment of peace amid our hectic days. They invite us to pause for a few moments to soak up a visual reminder of God's presence among us.

In those times when we find it difficult to understand how God could come among us through Mary's giving birth to a child, artists help us imagine...help us trust...help us see beyond our limited vision. Artists and storytellers invite us to envision possibilities of peace, as was the case with an

elephant [who] was thoroughly enjoying himself as he splashed about in the river. A mouse was

perched on the sandy shore. It was obvious that he was disturbed about something. The mouse yelled at the elephant, "Come out of the water at once." The elephant laughed and said, "Why should I come out?" ... [The mouse] kept yelling and yelling.

The elephant realized that if he wanted any peace and quiet he had better come out of the water. Slowly the elephant lumbered out of the water and stood towering over the mouse. "Now, why did you want me to come out of the water?" The mouse looked up and said, "I wanted to see if you were wearing my bathing suit."

It is easier for us to understand how an elephant could wear a mouse's bathing suit than it is for us to understand the awesome mystery of the incarnation—God's Word became flesh. [God] wore our suit of flesh.³

...through the birth of Jesus...through you and me... as we strive to bring a piece of peace into the world, not only during this holy season, but throughout the year in how we live our lives, for I do believe in peace.

Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers. Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #135.

¹ Judy Cole, Dec. 15, 2020, www.goodnewsnetwork.org/guy-stanley-philoche-buys-65k-art-in-pandemic/

² Ibid.

³ Hodgkin, Michael. *1001 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations for*