

## Pressezentrum

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Sperrfrist:	25. Mai 2017 09.30 Uhr
Projekt:	Bibelarbeiten am Donnerstag
Veranstaltung:	<b>Bibelarbeit</b>
Zeit, Ort:	Do. 09.30 – 10.30, CityCube, Ebene 1, Halle A5, Messe Berlin, Charlottenburg (594   E1)
Referent/in:	<b>Lensa Gudina, Menschenrechtsaktivistin, Addis Abeba/Äthiopien</b>

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### Mary Visits Elizabeth

The topic of this devotion is, “Mary Visits Elizabeth”, similar to the overarching theme of the Kirchentag “You See Me” which is taken from the Book of Genesis chapter 16 verse 13, it is about the dynamics of seeing each other. When Mary and Elizabeth saw each other the supernatural occurred – heaven and earth met, the unthinkable became possible. When God saw Hagar (to use the Prophet Isaiah’s language) ‘the desert burst into blooms, the sand became pool of water while the thirsty ground turned into bubbling springs’<sup>1</sup>.

The once voiceless, lonesome slave woman utters words of joy and celebration – *El-Roi – the God who sees me!*<sup>2</sup> She exclaimed, “*I have now seen the one who see me!*” It’s all about the dynamics involved in seeing each other.

Why was Hagar ecstatic about being seen by God? After all the Bible tells us that His eyes are ever looking upon the earth. As the Prophet Hanani uttered a word of prophecy to Asa, the Israelite king saying:

“... for the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth ...”<sup>3</sup>

King Asa’s reaction was nothing like that of Hagar’s, as a matter of fact he disliked being seen by God and went to the extreme of throwing the prophet into prison. Asa was a king - he lived among his people, he relied on his vast army and great wealth, so he didn’t want to be bothered. But Hagar’s condition was entirely different – pregnant, slave, fugitive, forlorn & bewildered! Stranded in the middle of the desert where no mankind is to be found. The feeling of despair smothering her, with no trace of hope that a search team might be dispatched to rescue her. How dreadful it might have felt to be all alone, with no one to care, alone in the wilderness, the sun descending, darkness and death laying ahead ... Does she proceed or go back? Where would she go back to? Not to the home of Abram and Sarai, the couple who conspired against her and threw her into the dark pit. Merciless Sara, the grand architect of the whole scheme, she neither inquired of God nor consulted the victims. No matter what it might cost all she wanted was to build a family for herself<sup>4</sup>. Unjust Abraham, who could never make up his mind when it came to Sara’s adulterous schemes, took ruthless steps following his wife’s instructions of expelling the slave woman only because Sarai changed her mind and designed yet another evil scheme to get rid of the chaos her endless schemes had caused.

All these painful thoughts rushing through Hagar’s mind as she roamed around in the desert, a voice from heaven interrupts her thoughts, calling her by her name – Hagar! This might have made her feel a great sense of self-worth as her owners never called her by her name. Genesis 16 shows us that in Abram and Sara’s conversation she was addressed as “the slave woman”. But now the King of heaven and earth speaks to her tenderly, he treats her like she had never been treated before. Through the spoken words she feels his love and submits. A divine encounter transforms her life. Everything around her changes. A deserted woman on the verge of death is told. ‘... your descendants will be too numerous to count’<sup>5</sup>. A lonely woman without any genealogical records was now endowed with the title of ‘the mother of Ishmael – heard by God.’<sup>6</sup> No more aimless wandering in the wilderness, no more loneliness, no more tears and agony. Ecstatic that she was seen by God, she walks with her head held up high, her eyes looking forward, her steps firmer, full of hope and vigor she strides toward the fulfillment of God’s promise, singing *El-Roi ... El-Roi*<sup>7</sup> ... the God who sees me.

Travelling through the Old and New Testaments we hear stories of a number of women whose lives were transformed as a result of being seen by God’s divine eyes. Such was a story of a young Moabite woman who cherished being seen by Boaz and exclaimed:

“... why have I found such a favor in your eyes that you notice me – a foreigner ?”<sup>8</sup>

Uncontested that was a divine favor that this poor, foreign woman became the ancestor of Jesus Christ.

Mary Magdalene, the woman whose love for Jesus seems to have surpassed that of all other disciples, who moved Jesus' heart by her kind deeds and about whom Jesus spoke saying:

*"Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."*<sup>9</sup>

She passionately sought after him, whether dead or alive, became the first person to be seen by the eyes of Jesus after the resurrection. She became the first evangelist.<sup>10</sup>

Though separated far apart by generations, cultural identities and religious beliefs Hagar, Mary and Elizabeth share a common experience – all three experienced the transforming power of being viewed by divine eyes. The Creator of heaven and earth, the maker of the galaxies containing millions and trillions of stars, revealing himself to lowly women.

Elizabeth, who bore the scars of bareness, stigmatized by society as cursed, and who described herself as "disgraced among the people"<sup>11</sup>, had a long marital life which remained a life of paradox. Paradoxical, because scripture testifies that her and her husband Zachariah's life was adorned by righteousness, obedience and prayer but yet no fruit of the womb. As an obedient servant who strictly observed the Law of Moses the couple are the rightful recipients of all the blessings promised for obedience. Her life seemed a reflection of justice denied – receiving curse, when she rightfully deserved blessings. A life full of riddles and unfulfilled promises. Oh how heart rending it must have felt counting the cycle of the month, ever hoping for conception, months pass by, years come and go but she never conceives. Marital tensions soar so high that meaningful communication becomes hampered. So who is to blame for their childlessness? Certainly not Zechariah! Men are never considered barren in such societies, it is the woman who should bear the blame. Long nights of agony for Elizabeth, days full of hurtful words by neighbors and relatives. The monotony of living in a childless home, deprived of the joy of watching the wonders of child birth, and child rearing.

Just one divine glimpse removed a lifelong despair and sorrow. Wailing turned into singing, disgrace into pride. The once speechless woman babbles words of praise and prophecy; the one who considered herself disgraced now call herself "so favored"<sup>12</sup>. When God sees, monotony is broken into pieces, new things spring up – neighbors flocking into the once dull house to witness the miracle, the cruel bondage of curse sneaking out the backdoor while blessings flood in through the gates and fill in the house. Praise and prophesying replace tearful prayers and the never ending moaning nights.

Out of the three women whose life we are reflecting up on, for the two women (Hagar & Elizabeth), being seen by God's divine eyes marked the culmination of disgrace, bitterness, loneliness and curse; it meant the beginning of a new life, a new name & reputation, a new status.

Unlike Hagar and Elizabeth, being seen by divine eyes did not come as culmination of sorrow and disgrace for Mary, rather it took the inexperienced and unprepared young woman into unknown territories. Hagar was singing "El-Roi", a song of the moment – he sees me & I see Him, it's mutual, reciprocal! He arrived right there in times of dire need, the Almighty reached at the most urgent moment.

Mary's song, the *Magnificat*, was nothing like El-Roi, rather it was the song of the future, the song of salvation for the perishing, redemption for the captives, prosperity for the poor; it was a celebrative melody of divine intervention and how God-ordained judgement was going to reverse the course of historical injustice. Mary's joy and ecstasy ended with her song right there at the home of her cousin Elizabeth. The rest of her story can be summarized in the words that Simeon prophesied to her at the temple, "... a sword will pierce your own soul too."<sup>13</sup> The piercing sword was set in action when she conceived Jesus – "the Son of the Most High". Is she to keep it silent or announce it to family and friends? Even if she were to keep it a secret her ever expanding waistline would betray her. The unbearable hormonal changes of pregnancy causing morning nausea are hard to conceal. What would her mother say when she finds out? How is she going to bear the wrath coming from her father? She will be ostracized by her teenage girlfriends, her fiancé will abandon her which will make her a victim of stoning and brutal death. Dreadful times laying ahead of a lonely young woman. She hated the nights since she was taunted with nightmares, spending endless sleepless nights. She would stare into the dark while the whole family rested peacefully. Is that what it means to be seen by God?

Divine Guidance takes Mary into the Hill Country of Judea, where her elderly cousin lives. The meeting of the two women becomes historical, unprecedented by any meeting before or even after. Two simple women, whom no records of history had known, no royal blood line, no hint of gallant ancestry or even heroic achievements; nevertheless, their meeting sets a spark up in heaven and down here on earth. At that very moment of their meeting they become world renowned celebrities of heaven and heroines of the Faith. Their visitation not only transforms them but the history of humanity. They become the channels for the pioneers namely John the Baptist and Jesus – the road pavers and the preachers of the eternal gospel.

There at their meeting place, in that small dull and monotonous home of Elizabeth, the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit sets a new beginning, 'the glory of the Lord revealed, every valley raised up, every mountain and hill made low'<sup>14</sup>. There at their meeting place, as Mary and Elizabeth were singing songs of praise and exaltation, they found the grace and the spiritual stamina to be the bearers of the two heroes – John & Jesus, without whom repentance & reconciliation; salvation & resurrection would not have been possible. There at their visitation, at the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit, they were endowed with the wisdom required to raise divine children; they were given the insight required to raise children who liked to question the status quo, children who did not hesitate to question those in power, who did not hesitate for a moment to confront the temple officials and to criticize the ever hypocritical Pharisees; two children whose destiny was brutal murder & crucifixion.

What does the visitation of Mary and Elizabeth mean to this generation? The meeting & fellowshiping of the two women went beyond simple personal comfort and bonding. The blessings flowing from their meeting extended to generations fulfilling the eternal will of God for humanity.

Living in a technologically advanced time, where alternatives to physical meetings and fellowshiping are multiplying, where the media rules and the virtual is more valued than the real. Endless information over flooding our minds, electronic barriers blocking our spiritual eyes, preventing us from seeing and being seen. How can this generation experience the marvelous feelings that come from the divine glance of the Creator of the universe?

As Christ says in Matthew 18:19–20 "I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them." Visitation among sisters and brothers, fellowshiping among the followers of Christ is what brings heaven to earth. Harmonious relationships usher Christ's presence into our meetings. As David beautifully put it in his Psalm, it is indeed precious and pleasant when brothers & sisters get together, it moves God to pour down His anointing generously, life and blessings abundantly.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Isaiah 35:6b–7

<sup>2</sup>Genesis 16:13

<sup>3</sup>2 Chronicle 16:9

<sup>4</sup>Genesis 16:2

<sup>5</sup>Genesis 16:10

<sup>6</sup>Genesis 16:11

<sup>7</sup>Genesis 16:

<sup>8</sup>Ruth 2:10

<sup>9</sup>Matthew 26:13

<sup>10</sup>John 20:11

<sup>11</sup>Luke 1:25

<sup>12</sup>Luke 1:43

<sup>13</sup>Luke 2:25–35

<sup>14</sup>Isaiah 40:4

<sup>15</sup>Psalms 133

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