

When I was younger, I absolutely loved visitors! I don't care who they were—friends of the family; aunts, uncles, and cousins; my grandma; it could've been anybody and everybody—I loved it when people came to visit. It was so exciting! *Whiff-whiff!* All kinds of delicious smells would come wafting out of the kitchen, like fresh-baked pies right from the oven. *Ha, ha, ha!* There'd be smiles on every face, and the room would be filled with laughter. And *mmm-mmm!* There was a lotta love in that house. It's no wonder I always looked forward to when guests would come stay with us.

Then, I grew up! And those smells, and those smiles, and that love would get overshadowed by all the responsibilities of having to play host myself. See, when it came time for *me* to open up *my* home, well everything changed. Now, it was up to *me* to clean the whole house, not just my Mom and Dad anymore. Now, *I* had to clear *my calendar*, it was no longer up to my parents to clear theirs. And now, it's not as easy for *me* to have such a good time since I'm so worried about whether or not *everyone else* is having a good time. Of course, don't mention any of this to my in-laws who're coming to stay with us this week . . . But don't get me wrong—I'm not saying that I don't like to host. I actually *do, really*. But having people come to visit will never be the same. All I'm saying is, now that I know how the hot dogs are made, having house guests just isn't what it once was.

There are many people who would agree with me. In fact, they'll take it a step further. While I've never had a horrible house guest yet—cross my fingers—I recently came across some real horror stories from folks who have. Some of them mentioned fires, floods, and all sorts of fiascos due to the carelessness of their guests. Then, others described strange interactions their visitors had with the cat, the many negative outcomes of drinking too much, and all of the rude, offensive comments made about the host's cleanliness and décor. But one of my favorites was this letter that I'd like to share with you:

*Dear Houseguest,*

*Thank you for your recent visit. Just a couple of things I would like to mention before you ~~impose~~... er, visit us again.*

*I realize that due to the short notice of you coming to stay we didn't get to chat much before your visit. And perhaps you didn't really understand what I meant when I asked what you like to eat or if there is something you don't like to eat. A reply of "anything" tends to give me the impression you will actually eat "anything". So the gluten free and soy product ~~demands~~ requests did come as a bit of a shock when you mentioned them on the morning you arrived after I had gone shopping and menu planned.*

*I don't expect you to help cook or clean on a 3 day visit, but the occasional offer to clear dishes or the like would have been nice – rather than you plopping on the couch after dinner and asking for dessert while playing with the TV channels.*

*It's nice you missed your friends when you were in town. Perhaps next time though you could get them to call before 1am and then you won't be interrupted when we bang on the door after half an hour of giggling.*

*I have perfectly functioning laundry and bathroom towel racks. It is appreciated if wet towels could go to one of these two places rather than hung over my canvas lamp for 2 days.*

*I do appreciate that you smoked outside. However, could you please shut the front door if you are going to lean on the screen door to smoke, especially when those were definitely NOT, umm, store bought cigarettes.*

*Oh, and in regards to your comment about staying with us for longer while you look for a place to stay when you come up here for work later this year...we have turned the spare room into a recreation room and as such we regret that we just don't seem to have a place for you to crash. I can recommend a number of hotels and real estate services though.*

*Regards,  
Redhead*

Hopefully not, but perhaps you have some of your own stories to share.

So, today's The Visitation of Our Lord, the day when Mary—just finishing her first trimester with baby Jesus—comes to visit her cousin, Elizabeth, who's also six months pregnant with John the Baptist. It's a happy occasion—as soon as Elizabeth sees Mary in the doorway, she gets up and wobbles over as fast as she can. Tears of joy, warm embraces, lots of laughter and chit chat. Who knows, maybe they were excitedly talking the way pregnant mothers do—discussing swollen feet, food cravings, and getting the nurseries ready for the new babies. Even little John is giving his momma some good kicks, jumping for joy and doing back flips when the guests arrive. Everything seems picture-perfect—if there was a Norman Rockwell edition of the Bible, I can just imagine him painting this scene.

But what a house guest! Did you catch some of those details? These were the days before telephones—no invitation from Elizabeth to stay with her, no phone call from Mary to say “I'm coming over,” just “In those days Mary arose and went with haste to the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.” Mary here, I would say, is queen of the “pop-in”! Just think, here's Elizabeth, probably just getting back from her OB appointment, house is a mess, nothing in the refrigerator, and here's Mary unannounced! But wait, the real clincher comes at the end of the reading when Luke tells us, “And Mary remained with her about three months [before returning] to her home.” Three months! Wow! It's hard to believe that Elizabeth and John could be so excited about their house guests, when they were so unexpected. And it's even harder to believe that they could *stay* excited for three-whole-months. But we have every reason to believe that they did. In fact, during those three months, the excitement only builds as John is about to be born, and as Jesus gets closer to his due date.

Ding! Dong! God's here. He's come today not just to visit, but to stay with *you*. And He's going to stay not just a week, not even three months like today's Gospel, but *forever!* You're going to have God as a house guest 25/8 not just in this life but for all *eternity*. How does that sound?

We know this because the Bible says that He lives in each of us. The Bible tells us that our bodies are a temple of the Lord, His dwelling place. After all, when we hear God's Word, as we take it all in, Jesus (who is that Word) enters us. When we eat His body and drink His blood, Jesus comes under our roof. Receiving our Lord, He takes up space inside of us and fills our hearts. And while sometimes that sounds nice, maybe other times *not so much*.

I mean think about it, we have to always play host to Him. Our normal routine—whatever it is we'd typically do—gets thrown out the window and we're on His timetable. We have to make sure our house is in order, being careful not to make ourselves messy with sin. And it's tough to get any privacy, what with Him always hanging around, watching. Our whole lives, thanks to Him, are flipped upside down, turned inside out, will never be the same again. A friendly visit? More like an interruption, an imposition, an invasion. Like Elizabeth, how could we possibly be excited about that? Why would we ever be overjoyed about God popping in and staying so long?

Remember though, God Himself, is no stranger to bad house guests. I mean, back in the Garden, if I'm not mistaken, it was *us*, humanity, that completely trashed *His* place. We not only left it in shambles, but didn't respect the rules of the house, and we couldn't have been more rude and impolite! By bringing sin and death onto God's turf we've made the

history books for worst house guests ever! So, God also knows all about intrusion, interruption, imposition. Isn't it interesting then that God's let *us* stay so long?

I just saw a story about a different kind of unwanted houseguest. A woman who goes by the name of Jane Noe, purposely anonymous, wrote about her experience. She tells us that on Sunday May 21, 1989, one of the worst kinds of intrusions occurred. I'll spare you the details, but a man she had dated only a few times refused to take no for an answer. Four weeks later, she started to feel a bit queasy and her chest began to get sore. After taking a home pregnancy test it came back positive. Of course, due to the circumstances, everyone she knew—her friends, her family, society—was telling her to throw this little intruder out of her house, kick this tiny trespasser to the curb. But, nine months later, Friday February 9, 1990, she gave birth to a son. There was just something that made her want to be a good host, to make her new visitor feel right at home.

*"Do you see that dot blinking on the screen?"* the ultrasound tech asked.

*"Yes."*

*"That is your baby's heart beating."*

With those words, she writes, my life changed forever. That little dot became **my** baby. My heart overflows with the most incredible love for him, she continues, a love that until him I never even knew existed. Do I ever regret my decision? NO. Do I ever wish he hadn't been born? NO. Do I ever wish [it hadn't come about in such a way]? Of course. But I chose not to let [that] ruin my relationship with my son. I chose to recreate new dreams for my life. She closes by saying, "With love all things are possible."

*"With love all things are possible."* When God saw that dot blinking on His screen, when He saw *your* little heart beat, He just knew His life would be changed forever.

As Psalm 139 puts it—

He created your inmost being;  
He knit you together in your mother's womb.  
You are fearfully and wonderfully made;  
His works are wonderful.  
Your frame was not hidden from Him  
when you were made in the secret place.  
His eyes saw your unformed body;  
all the days ordained for you were written in His book  
before one of them came to be.

God's own heart overflowed with the most incredible love for *you*—a love that until you and me, until His beloved humanity, He never even knew existed. Sure, anyone else would've sent you packing, but He'd rather *die* than toss you out.

See, "With love all things are possible." And that's what made the joy of Mary and Elizabeth's visit so possible. In Mary's pregnant belly, both women watched God's love for them grow bigger and bigger, week after week. Their Savior, the Messiah promised long ago, was about to arrive. And one day He would save them, along with the rest of us, from our sins.

Maybe that's why you and I are back here today, still rolling out the welcome mat for God. In some ways, it might seem like He's imposing, interrupting, intruding, but after seeing the love shown to Mary and Elizabeth---His never-stopping, never-giving-up, always-and-forever love---it's hard to have it any other way. We eagerly wait and watch with Mary, knowing that there's a little dot blinking in there---and that little dot blinks inside each of us. That dot is the heart of Jesus beating. And with that dot, not only Mary's life, but also yours and mine are changed forever. That little dot is **our** Savior. May our hearts overflow with the most incredible love for Him---a love that until Him we never even knew existed. "With love all things are possible."