

Filled With Expectation

Isaiah 12: 2-6

Luke 3: 7-18

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Advent 3 Candle lighting liturgy by Rev. Amy C. Wake

<https://youngclergywomen.org/an-advent-candlelighting-liturgy/>

Reader: "And Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name'" (Luke 1:46-49).

Reader: Today we remember Mary, innocent and powerful, sacred and scared, worried and waiting as the Savior of all grows in her womb. She sings boldly when she might be meek; she bears her role in history with the confidence of a warrior; she is the beginning of a mighty revolution as the proud are brought down and the lowly lifted up.

People: Today we give thanks for the Marys among us, who step out of the roles society has planned; unintended pioneers determined to do as God asks; fearless and fearfully stepping out in faith and beckoning us to do the same.

Reader: On this third Sunday of Advent, we light this candle as a symbol of Mary, mother of God, bearer of the Way.

Isaiah 12: 2-6

You will say in that day: I will give thanks to you, O Lord, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, and you comforted me. Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the Lord God is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation. With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

And you will say in that day: Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known his deeds among the nations; proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously; let this be known in all the earth. Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

Luke 3: 7-18

John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?" In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what

should we do?" He said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation and be satisfied with your wages."

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

Luke's gospel tells us that the people were filled with expectation. For generations they had been waiting for the promised Messiah as across all those generations there had been many false claims and shattered hopes, yet the faithful remained filled with expectation, actively waiting for rescue, redemption and forgiveness from the One to be descended from the family line of King David who would unify the scattered tribes of Israel, who would rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, and who would usher in a Messianic Age of global universal peace. A time described by the prophet Isaiah as when God's anger would turn to comfort, when with joy the people would draw water from the wells of salvation, and God's glorious deeds would be known in all the earth and celebrated with shouts of song and praise as great in our midst would be the Holy One of Israel.

In this season of Advent we remember our faith ancestors waiting in the darkness filled with expectations for the coming of the Messiah, and we acknowledge the ways in which our own world is in darkness as we await the coming of the Christ child.

Mary was one filled with expectation. She knew the history of her people, she waited for the Messiah just as those before her. Perhaps she even said or sang the now ancient words, "Even though the Messiah tarries, I will wait for him/her every day with great anticipation."

In a holy, sacred, unexpected time, the expectation that she shared with her family, her community, and all those before her, became her literal, imminent, expectation of a child, the infant Savior, in her womb. Suddenly called away from all that she knew and into God's plan for her, she boldly embraced this with the confidence of a warrior. Through the child her mind and body are nurturing, she is to be the beginning of a mighty revolution as the proud will be brought down and the lowly lifted up.

On this day we give thanks for the Marys among us, those who step out of the roles and restrictive boundaries society has planned; those who emerge as unintended pioneers determined to do as God asks for the good of all God's people; those who are fearless as they fearfully step out in faith and beckon us to do the same. We give thanks for the Marys among us who confidently take risks trusting fully in God's plan, who tenderly and lovingly parent new life that is fragile and vulnerable. We give thanks for the Marys among us who know that they are enough, and who can eagerly say 'yes' to blessings from God.

John the Baptist was one filled with expectation. The one who had once leapt for joy in the womb when he had heard Mary and his mother Elizabeth's voices celebrating God's holy plan, promise and blessing, now felt unworthy to even stoop down and untie the sandal of his cousin Jesus, a truly humbling task of respect and honor. Unlike those before him, John knew that the Messiah was almost immediately in their midst, that the long and difficult wait was soon to be finally over. John's expectations were not about an unknown future time but were in

preparation of the Savior's revelation among them. The people in the wilderness—a physical place of desolation—a spiritual place of seeking God's graciousness—wanted John to be the Messiah, but his humbly proud role was to prepare the way, to open the hearts, hands and minds of the people whose expectations were about to be fulfilled. It would not be enough to passively wait without honest repentance, without a lifestyle and behaviors that faithfully reflected a true love of God, and it was absolutely wrong to assume that just by tracing one's heritage back to Abraham that that would be sufficient.

John was bold and brash- he was a man on a mission with a compelling urgency. “Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” His message was at times metaphorical, comparing the people to a wheat harvest of grain and chaff, and at other times it was practical and direct. Food and clothing should be shared so that none are left cold and hungry while others have more than they need. Tax collectors should not pad the bill to line their own pockets, nor should soldiers coerce the people beyond the authority given to them. Live lives worthy of repentance, live lives worthy of redemption.

On this day we give thanks for the John the Baptists among us, those who boldly seek and proclaim the good news of what it truly means to live a life of faith, who call us to humility and repentance, who challenge us to take a deep and honest look at our life journey, our faith journey, as truthfully reflecting the words and promises of our baptism. We give thanks for the John the Baptists among us who pursue social and economic justice, who dare to live out God's call for their life no matter how unique and different it may be, who know that the time to act is now and not to be put off to the future.

We are ones filled with expectation. The darkness of our world is the cloud of Covid, bringing sickness and death, despair and isolation, exhaustion and frustration, as we eagerly wait for the politics to subside and a global response to unite us against this common enemy. The pain of our world throbs in poverty when there is more than enough if one of two coats would be shared. It aches in the injustices of racial and cultural rejection, as though skin color and heritage marked wheat and chaff. It hurts as the brood of vipers greedily abuse our environment. As we wait with eager expectation for the Light of the World, the Prince of Peace, we give thanks for those among us who bear good fruit, who actively improve the world, who creatively, faithfully, boldly bring it closer to the harmonious state for which it was created, who act for the good of all God's people with the lessons that Jesus taught for all who would follow him as we do the work to which we were baptized. We give thanks for those among us who proclaim the good news through their words and their deeds so that with joy water may be drawn from the water of salvation. Amen.