

“Celebrate the Love of Advent: An Interactive Meditation”

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Friends, lets pray:

May the words from our mouths and the meditations from our hearts bring forth our praises to you, the Great I Am, and may this praise be acceptable in your sight, Oh our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Advent means this: when God announces the divine intention to act decisively in the incarnation of the Word: everything gets turned on its head. – Andrew Purves

Mary’s Magnificat, so called because this is her first word in Latin, My Soul Magnifies the Lord, is a canticle. Mary, a young woman perhaps pregnant far too soon, visits her older cousin who had long hoped to expect a child in her later years. This could have been a moment of tension between the two, a moment whose celebration was snubbed by bitterness or resentment or jealousy; but the moment was not lost. The two women break out into gleeful shouting and songs of joy to God who alone is worthy of our praises.

So, what did these two women have in common such that this moment was experienced in tandem?

Well, they were both Jewish, exposed to the Old Testament and taught to live in expectation of God’s promises made to Israel. These two women were faithful to scripture. Again and again, the Word filled their daily lives with stories of their people in relationship with God who never abandoned their them. God who is

peculiarly bent on remaining faithful to Israel and the poor and afflicted. God, who protects his chosen even in the face of aggression. God who overcomes evil. The Lord, who was in a field at night surrounded by nomadic tents and drew Abraham's gaze upward and promised a future filled with descendants that would be as numerous as the stars. For Elizabeth and Mary and the Jewish people, God meant mercy, revolution, reversal, rescue, and hope.

Within this framework of faith, the Spirit carved out a common space in these women. I'm not just talk about the physical space of a mother's womb, I am talking about the safe space created by a solid trust and living relationship with God's divinely inspired Word. This holy pace united these women, freeing them to recognize and celebrate God's love born anew.

Their faith gave them room to dream new dreams and hear ancient callings and draw close into a kindred life-giving spiritual moment.

Mary and Elizabeth show us on this third Sunday of Advent the courageous faith we need - for love to be born anew.

Generation upon generation hands down the gift of faith. Generation upon generation gather each Advent and light diminutive candles in sacred spaces and places across this earth. Generation upon generation of faithful people in many religions, believers as numerous as the stars, hold in them inspiration of God's Word incarnate and celebrate the Love of the Christ child.

For our generation, and those to come, the significance of Mary's celebration cannot be understated. One theologian says-

It's the gospel before the gospel, a fierce bright shout of triumph thirty weeks before Bethlehem, thirty years before Calvary and Easter. It goes with a swing and a clap and a stamp. It's all about God, and it's all about revolution. And it's all because of Jesus — Jesus who's only just been conceived, not yet born, but who has made Elisabeth's baby leap for joy in her womb and has made Mary giddy with excitement and hope and triumph. — N.T. Wright

'My heart declares that the Lord is great,
⁴⁷My spirit exults in my savior, my God.
 The Powerful One, whose name is Holy,
 Has done great things for me, for me.

Each week we gather as a church and are called into worship by lighting one of the Advent candles. Each week in Advent we are presented an opportunity for communal discernment and personal examination, as we prepare to celebrate the Nativity and be filled with hope until Christ's return.

In this sense, each time we light a candle- we testify. We testify that God in Christ has already come but is coming again. We give testimony to living in an in-between time. We testify that God is in our world working for peace and ending violence and we look to a future where swords shall be beaten into plowshares. We testify that God has lifted up righteous peoples who rule with loving-justice and we long for the day when God's world is thoroughly transformed through a Holy universal Justice. We testify, like Mary and Elizabeth, about the daily wonders where we see, and we feel, and we celebrate the signs of God's enduring presence in our lives and those around us.

Make no mistake, these little wax candles and their faint lumens expended from their wicks- they point towards a great power. A great and miraculous power.

Their revolutionary light is cause for our truest celebration. Their radical light testifies to the dawning of the one that is to come.

Like the dawning light breaking fourth in morning, our souls call out for an in-breaking of spiritual richness and relationship with our Creator. Consider the words of this morning prayer called Cry of Advent-

O Morning Star, Splendor of Light Eternal,
O Radiant Dawn, O Dayspring from on high,
Shining with the glory of the rainbow,
Come and awaken us from the greyness of our apathy,
And renew in us your gift of hope,
O Bright Sun of justice, judge of all the world,
Seeking to straighten what is crooked
And put right what is wrong,
Come with dread power and stark mercy to our reluctant hearts.
- Jim Cotter

Perhaps what makes the Magnificat so worthy of great composers and lectionary reading, is its personal nature. Mary is genuine in her celebration and praise wailing to God. Her faith opens her to the discovery of the divine in her immediate setting and welcomed the dread power and stark mercy of God's awesomeness.

We can make this discovery as well, even the most reluctant and recalcitrant hearts among us are invited to unearth that which is Holy. We can celebrate love being born anew: Neighbors reaching out in times of need. Milestones in the lives of our loved ones achieved. Strangers becoming precious friends. Words spoken at just the right moment. Unexpected gifts. Being rescued when we thought all

was lost. Finding the Spirit in the least expected places. We can, and we have, celebrated God's love born anew.

And so, for the next few minutes, IAs you feel comfortable, share some of your stories with one another. Listen for God's love. invite those who wish to engage in dialogue to share about the questions printed in your bulletins under the "sermon notes" section which are:

How have you seen love born anew in this world?

How do you take time to celebrate this love?

If you prefer self-reflection, there is also space to journal in that same location. For our online folks feel free to share your thoughts in the chat and I may share them as an example. Kids, and adults, don't forget we have crayons, and you can color the pictures of Mary and Elizabeth and John the Baptist in your bulletin. So, find some partners and share. I'll call us back together in a couple minutes.

(Conversations take place)

Ok friends, I hope you have enjoyed this time of reflection or dialogue.

When we share stories of our lives with one another, when we reflect upon theological questions, and wonder together, and attempt to give words to the presence of God- we testify, we offer our testimonies. Our words become contextualized into God's evolving story of love, the love we celebrate today, and these words give shape and definition to the ways in which the Christ child continues to be born among us. Stories that celebrate God's love give voice to the presence of the Christ child, in this in-between time until he comes again.

Like the baby that Mary came to celebrate who would be become John the Baptist- we can witness and testify to the light, so that all might believe through our celebration, through our praise, through our audacity to faithfully live in gratitude. We know we are not the light, but we can testify to the light. Because the true light, which enlightens everyone, is coming into the world.

But here's the thing, sometimes we need a little help, a little reminder of God's presence so all our celebrations can faithfully contribute to the long history of faith we draw from. So, for this next part, I will need all the kids to come forward, so come on up to the chancel!

(Kids come up to chancel, uses headset from chair on chancel)

So, this is the third Sunday in Advent, and today we heard Mary sing a song in scripture to praise God for God's love being brought into the world. Remember Mary was Jesus' mother. She visited her cousin, Elizabeth and Elizabeth's was the mother of John the Baptist. When John and Jesus grew up, John the Baptist would baptize Jesus, just like we saw today! Think of John and Jesus and Mary and Elizabeth- as our extended faith family. Today we are getting together with them to celebrate Christmas.

Last week we learned about John the Baptist and the bible says:

John proclaimed that Jesus was coming, and John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.

Why do you think he would eat wild honey and locusts?

(kids answer)

You know in scripture the presence of honey is one way God reminds us that God's love is present, and God's love is being born anew.

In the Old Testament, God said to Moses:

I declare that I will bring you up out of the misery of Egypt, to a land flowing with milk and honey.

Then later on in the bible Moses sent spies to the promised land to Moses and when they came back, they said:

We came to the land to which you sent us; it flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.

Scripture also says:

How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!

-Psalm 119: 97 & 103.

So, honey, this beautiful creation from nature, is a gift from God that shows us that God's love is present. Honey is actually a reminder of God's promises of love being born anew. God's love is born anew in promised lands, for John the Baptist to keep him healthy, even in our hearts this very moment.

Sometimes, especially during the holidays with all their hustle and bustle, we people of faith need.... a little help. A gentle reminder. That our most important activity this Christmas is – celebrating God’s love born anew in Jesus Christ.

So, what we have are these little jars of honey. In a few minutes I will need you to help me pass them out to church members! You will take one basket or bucket or handful and go far out into the church and give them out. Just make one trip and return your bucket. We will enjoy some wonderful music during this time. If anyone is missed, please please come get a honey jar from the chancel before you leave because. I have no idea what we will do with all this honey.

(Kids deliver honey, nick delivers final blessing)

Friends, on this third Sunday of Advent

May your soul magnify the Lord and your heart be filled with joy

May the Spirit carve out the space needed for a truly divine celebration

May your words be a testimony to grace, mercy, revolution and reversals

May your days be filled with the sweetness of scripture

And May The Splendour of Light Eternal hold you close in this time of Advent
where everything gets turned on its head. Amen