

<Elizabeth portrayal>

picture screencapture from
<https://www.jesusfilm.org/watch/Lumo-the-gospel-of-luke.html/Lumo-Luke-1-1-56/english.html>; credit: LUMO

Well, hello. I am Elizabeth, descendent of Aaron, wife of Zechariah – he is a priest in the order of Abī’jah, and do not ask him about temple business or he will talk your ear off!

It feels good to have a few moments while our baby John is napping. I love him to pieces, but I have to say: Be careful what you pray for, you may end up with more than you bargained for!

It is funny; two years ago if you told me I would be a mother, I would have laughed at you. It had been too long, and I was past the time of childbearing, or so I thought. Yet God answered my prayers after all!

When we first married, I had such hopes for having a big family, bearing sons to make Zechariah proud. After all, we are both descendants of Aaron and have status because of our families. We had a duty to make the family larger with a new generation to carry on.

It seemed like I was getting everything! But as time passed and God did not bless us with any children, my dreams crumbled. I was an embarrassment to the family, a disappointment who had to work harder for

the community to make up for my failings.

The other women in town were not very nice about it, especially at first. They would show me their babies, deliberately ask about my children, and when I said I had none, they proclaimed "Such a shame!" about me.

At first, I thought they sympathized, but then they kept doing it, over and over, even when they knew I had no children. I guess they were jealous about everything else they assumed I had.

But nice clothing, spotless house, better food than most - those do not compare to the treasure of children. Many were the hours I spent in tears, wishing, hoping, and finally giving up on the idea of having children. I begged, I prayed, I ranted at God, asking what I had done to be so cursed!

I was secretly a little glad every time someone's son got into trouble, because then they felt some heartache too. I thought I could have done better at raising the child had he been mine. Why did they tolerate so much misbehavior? It was rude to others!

Or so I thought. Then, Zechariah went off for his turn serving at the temple. When he got home, I asked how things went - and he said not a word! He was mute! As if we were not embarrassment to the family enough already, now he was not talking to anyone!

You would think I would enjoy the peace and quiet around the house with him unable to talk, but it was very awkward. Our routines were not quite as routine as I had assumed. We wound up getting a slate for him to write on, so that he could ask and answer questions. That helped a lot.

On top of that, I was sick almost every morning for months after he got back. Zechariah wrote on his board about a vision in the temple, that we would have a son and call him John. Well, if God was giving us a son, He could certainly name him!

Word spread through the town about Zechariah's experience, and people were making up excuses to see us, to see if it was true. Tired of the gawking, I stayed in seclusion until I was obviously pregnant.

Then when I was six months along, my young relative Mary from Nazareth came to visit. My boy leapt inside me as she approached! I felt the Lord with me as I greeted her; somehow, I knew she was expecting too, with an even greater blessing of the Lord upon her.

Mary stayed with me for the last three months of my pregnancy, as I got larger and had more difficulty doing things. Such a lovely girl, so thoughtful and caring - her Joseph is very lucky to have her!

Then it finally happened. I went into labor - oh, such pain! But so worth it! - and gave birth to a fine, healthy boy. Everyone congratulated us - and then started telling us what to do, as if I had never helped with children nor seen what needed to be done.

They even tried to tell us what to call our own son! At his circumcision they started to call him Zechariah, after his father, and I had to speak up and tell them NO, he would be called John.

They would not listen to me (his own mother!) and turned to Zechariah. Apparently they thought his being mute meant he was deaf too, because they started motioning at him to find out what name he wanted to give our son. He got his tablet and wrote, "His name is John," - and he was able to talk again!

Things have finally settled down for us, as much as they can with a baby in the house. I have learned how wrong I was to judge others about the way they raised their children, and I have more in common to talk about with other women in the village now.

After all those years of frustration, ridicule, and sorrow, I finally have peace in our community. Not quiet - heaven knows, with a baby, it is anything but quiet! - but a rightness of fit, of being. Things are just how they should be, and in the glory of God, my heart is full of just peace at last. *Shalom!*

Gospel lesson

Having heard last time Jesus' admonition to "Stay awake!", this second Sunday of Advent we hop back to the beginning of the Gospel of Mark:



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/john-baptist/>

Mark 1:1-8 (NRSV)

¹The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

²As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way;

³the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'"

⁴John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

⁵And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

⁶Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a

leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.

⁷He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals.

⁸I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

The word of God for the people of God

<Hymn "Prepare the Way of the Lord"

UMH #207>

Message: Our Just Peace



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/our-spirit-waits/second-sunday-of-advent-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/second-sunday-of-advent-year-b-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Awesome Prince of Peace,

as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That in our waiting for Your return, we may be again filled with peace in Your assurances. Amen.

We continue our Advent series "Our Spirit Waits" this week with "Our Just Peace."

“We’re less than two weeks into December, and I don’t know about you, but I need a break. My sensory overload is at a maximum. My calendar is overbooked, but what am I supposed to let go of?”

Keven asked me months ago if I wanted to go to a concert with him at the Earlville Opera House to see Squirrel Nut Zippers, to which I happily said “Yes!” My calendar did not seem that busy to me at the time.

Then I got sick and fell behind on getting my term projects done for the classes I am taking. This week I also found out that I had finals to start working on earlier than expected, as well as the final week of classwork that could not be done ahead.

Christmas? Who has time to think about Christmas when questioning if I even have a couple of hours to go to a concert amidst all that I need to get done? But the sad thing is, I really do it to myself, not managing my time as efficiently as I should. So I wind up scrambling and praying to God to help me get through it all; shopping can wait, right?

The cries of ancient Israel remind me of that. God said, be faithful, and I will bless you – but then they sinned, and wound up being punished with exile instead of blessed the way they had been. They did not do as they should have, and would up scrambling & praying to God to help get them out of their mess.

They sound like they had about as much patience in waiting for help as I do, too. And what about the early Church to whom Peter wrote? They were waiting for Jesus' return in the face of ridicule from nonbelievers. Peter encouraged them to remember that God's timing is not our timing and to stay steadfast in their faith. There will be light - the Light of the world! - at the end of the tunnel!

Zechariah and Elizabeth had to wait a long time before they had their son John. They could have given up on their faith, but they stayed steadfast and were blessed to bear a prophet.

John the Baptizer was faithful too, proclaiming the message God had given him. He taught people how to properly purify themselves in preparation for an encounter with the Holy - a ritual stemming from the Jewish *Tevilah*, a full body immersion in living (flowing) water in order to be clean for worship.

John warned people that the Lord was coming, that they needed to prepare. We are here today in anticipation of the Lord coming, again with a need to prepare. Many of us are in a flurry in our daily lives, trying to keep up with holiday demands, getting stressed scrambling to deal with it all.

God offers us peace - shalom, that restorative peace,

that brings justice and wholeness to our lives. The theologian Augustine of Hippo said, “The City of God...has a peace of its own, namely peace with God in this world by faith and in the world to come by vision.”¹ But how do we let God’s gift of peace into our lives?

First, we need to repent of our sins, asking Jesus to cleanse us with the Holy Spirit and help us to change our sinful ways into holy ways, that we may be ready to encounter God. For in the midst of our sin and stressful lives, we need to encounter God.

God is just and merciful, patient with us and teaching us, letting us feel the effect of sin so that we understand and appreciate God’s forgiveness and gifts more fully, and lovingly restoring us when we finally turn to God in repentance.

We want to be perfect now, letting God do the work. God sent Jesus to teach us how to seek perfection, a perfect relationship with God – and it involves us making right choices, seeking our Savior with all that we are, in all places and times. So seek:

- † For the Word proclaimed in Scripture
- † For the presence of the Holy Spirit in prayer, both solitary and in fellowship

¹ Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, taken from Coakley, John W. and Sterk, Andrea, *Readings in World Christian History. Volume 1, Earliest Christianity to 1453* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), p.205.

† Even when frustrated

- consider when you may have frustrated others, especially in the way others are frustrating you
- and look for ways that God improves the situation especially if God is trying to work through you

Tell others how the Holy Spirit moves in your life. Share the love of Jesus so they can see God moving in their lives too. Work for the Holy Spirit to elevate the entire community to a better level with love - maybe only bit-by-bit - to a society with more justice and peace than we have now.

Step back from the sin-filled chaos of the mundane world and let God work. As we wait for the coming of Jesus this Advent season, the Holy Spirit waits to share just peace with and through us. Amen.