



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

A Devotion During This Time of the Coronavirus Pandemic Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 20, 2020

The Anatomy of Advent Praise

by Garland F. Pierce

Luke 1:46b-55

1:46b "My soul magnifies the Lord,

1:47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

1:48 for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

1:49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

1:50 His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

1:51 He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

1:52 He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;

1:53 he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

1:54 He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,

1:55 according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

During this pandemic, we have been bombarded with scientific terms and medical information: vaccination, vector, aerosols, droplets, asymptomatic; and, the list goes on and on. Advent also gives us an anatomy lesson, not human anatomy but the structure of praise, particularly praise in uncertain and even difficult times.

Our Christmas cards, carols, and pageants sanitize the situation; but, things could not have been easy for young Mary, even before the angel Gabriel's visit and announcement. It may even be

fair to say that things were not made any easier by his announcement. Yet, he called her “Favored One” and she said, “Yes!” From that yes came praise.

Mary’s praise is personal, “My souls magnifies the Lord.” Mary’s praise is political, “He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly.” Mary’s praise is filled with the possibilities that come from faithfully answering the call of God, even remembering the promise made to Abraham in response to his yes long before. Mary was young and poor and in a territory that was a part of the oppressive Roman empire. Now, she was pregnant and not quite married. Some would and even now do question why she responds in praise. Hers is not an ignorant praise or one rooted in deep denial. She knows her situation and sees very clearly the oppressive and death-dealing forces that are around. Yet she offers this praise because while she knows her situation, she also knows her God. She knows that God is the God of Impossibilities. She knows that God is the God who calls and answers. She knows that God is the God who changes things in ways that are hard to fathom. Mary’s God and our God is the God who is faithful and keeps promises.

This year has been horrendous! Horrible things have happened and are still happening. People have said and done horrible things. Oppressive forces sometime seem to rule the day; and, often innocent people are crushed in the process. This Advent, a praise that tried to pretend like none of these things exist would failed to be praise worthy of God; it would be more like blasphemy. Can our praise be one that names the wrongs and injustices and then proclaims faith in a God who so loves us and the world that this same God would come down in the midst of all of this to turn things around and to make things right, to save the world? This Fourth Sunday of Advent, as we think about love, Mary teaches us that one of our faithful and loving responses to God is praise.

Advent teaches us the anatomy of that praise!

TALK: Take a moment to be silent, reflect, and share (write down)—Reflecting on the scripture and on the questions: This Advent, what does favor look like for you? What is the anatomy of your Advent?

PRAY:

Dear God, our souls magnify you. Our spirits rejoice in you. We say “Yes!” Not fully knowing; but, striving to fully trust you. May our love be evident and our actions lead to justice and peace. AMEN

ACT:

1. Based on your reflections from the TALK section, make an Advent action plan as to how you will move forward in your work of justice this Advent? This Advent, how will you share the love of the Lord? Make that action plan as well. This Advent, do what you can; help others and yourself by practicing social distancing as much as possible, washing your hands often, and wearing face covering to help prevent the spread of COVID-19—See: <http://www.amechealth.org>.

2. See also the activity that accompanies this devotion.

3. Check out some other Advent Resources for worship and study:

AMEC Publishing House (Sunday School Union). <http://www.iamame.org/worship-resources-2/>

Advent Daily Devotional from the AME, AMEZ, and CME Departments of Christian Education
(Kindle version):

https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B08M6FGLHC?pf_rd_r=VVMNB09AMKMDNH1EDGJS&pf_rd_p=40eb7df6-3345-4945-93b1-96c5bd9a116d

Song:

Bless the Lord, O My Soul
(Bless His Holy Name)
AMEC Hymnal, #594

1. Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is with-in me
bless His ho-ly name.

He has done great things,
He has done great things,
He has done great things,
Bless His ho-ly name.

Physical space—You may wish to create a dedicated space for your time of devotion. You may choose to place an Advent wreath, bible, and special symbols or material/fabric (purple or royal blue) to help you focus and center during this time of reflection and prayer.

If you use this meditation and exercise in a time of family or group devotion, share in the leadership; allow different persons to read or lead different parts of this meditation.



The Christian Education Department will continue to develop resources that can be used as times of personal and collective devotion and study during this pandemic to help us all sustain and strengthen our faith and resolve.