

Season of Advent—Week 3
12–18 December

Deepening the theme...



I sat on the bench, waiting for something.
An angel, perhaps.
Or dancers with legs of goats.

No, I didn't see either. But only, I think, because
I didn't stay long enough.

from "Such Silence" by Mary Oliver

In her poem "Such Silence," Mary Oliver tells of finding an old stone bench in a forest clearing. She sits on the bench and experiences a great silence even though she is near a town. And yet, as delightful as the experience was, Oliver comes to the insightful conclusion that she did not wait long enough for something "magical" to happen which, in her words, "has deeper roots than reason."

The Season of Advent invites us to discover the gifts that come with intentional waiting that extends longer than we might feel is reasonable. It's like the yoga instructor who encourages us to take a stretch deeper when our muscles are already straining. But with a breath and exhale, we relax into it and are amazed.

May we not grow weary of holding anticipation and hope. Let us go deeper still and see what happens in and for us as we wait.

Reflection 1

Luke 1:39, 40

In those days Mary set out and went with haste
to a Judean town in the hill country, where she

entered the house of Zechariah and greeted
Elizabeth.



Mary lived in Nazareth, an historic city in northern Israel. At the time, it was a medium-sized metropolis in the Roman Empire. Mary travels—sparing no time, we're told—to visit her cousin Elizabeth who lived in a small Judean town in the hill country.

The photo on the left is an image of Elizabeth's hometown. Not only would Mary find hospitality in the home of Elizabeth but the landscape itself may have offered a welcome retreat from the city scape of Nazareth.

(Cont.)

- How are you finding these Advent days so far? What has been renewing for you?
- As we reach the mid-point in our journey through this season, do you sense an invitation to make space for re-creation? to retreat from the busyness or distractions of life? What might this look like for you?

You who make yourself known
in the quiet heart,
call to me in these days.
Lead me to hospitable spaces
and settle my mind and heart
that our love might be renewed
in our encounter of one another.
Amen

Reflection 2

Luke 1:41

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

In an interview about her book *The Wisdom of the Body*, Christine Valters Paintner says, "For me, the body offers an intuitive, somatic and emotional knowing which when I allow it to guide me, brings me to richer places than my thoughts. ...It calls us to a much wilder and freer sense of ourselves and what is possible."

The child leaping in Elizabeth's womb confirmed for her the presence of the promised messiah. The stirring deep within brought wisdom that was beyond thinking, inviting a wild and free response from Elizabeth.

Take a few moments to sit quietly and comfortably. Become aware of your body at rest. Recall, too, times when your body was in motion recently and when various sensations occurred in you.

- What might God be trying to say to you through your body just now?
- How do you feel led to respond?

Spirit of Life:
My ears are open to your voice
in tingles and stirrings
and even my aches and pains.
Help me to understand
the wisdom of my body.
Lead me to respond
in life-giving,
loving ways.
Amen

Reflection 3

Luke 1:41b–45

Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?"

For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

In his anthology of poems around the theme of joy, editor Christian Wiman says that many throughout history have drawn a distinction between happiness and joy. While Wiman would soften the distinction somewhat, he does write:

Happiness is a disposition or evaluation: we are happy when we experience pleasure, when things go our way, and so on. Joy, by contrast, is an emotion: there is always an element of being *seized*. Happiness involves enlarging or securing the self: you're happy when you pay off your mortgage or get a raise. Joy, by contrast, always involves some loss of self, from the parent revelling in the autonomous existence of her child to the contemplative lost in religious ecstasy. (*Joy: 100 Poems*, edited by Christian Wiman)

- When have you experienced joy as being seized? that is, when has it come upon you perhaps even existing within challenging circumstances?
- In what ways did your joy involve a loss of self? What did this look like?

Come, Lord Jesus, Come.
Fill my emptiness with your Holy Spirit
that I might awaken
to lasting joy
and sing praise to you
forever.
Amen

Reflection 4

Luke 1:46–56

And Mary said,
My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has looked with favour
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.
His mercy is for those
who fear him from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud
in the thoughts of their hearts.

He has brought down the powerful
from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made
to our ancestors, to Abraham
and to his descendants forever."

Mary remained with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned to her home.

The Magnificat of Mary reveals that the joy that has come to her is not for her alone. In her song she proclaims a view that the child stirring in her represents the first stirrings of God's promises being fulfilled anew through her.

- What words or lines from the Magnificat are especially meaningful for you at this time?
- How do you see these words being fulfilled in your experience? And how are you a participant in making real the promises of God?

In times of doubt I forget
that You are not a God
of thoughts, to be found
in concepts or theories
but are the source of
my life and the radiance
that shines forth in all
that is, and then I remember:
mine is the work of learning
to see You as the radiance
that shines forth in all that is,
even in the dark. Even in me.

(from *Meister Eckhart's Book of the Heart*
by Jon M. Sweeney and Mark Burrows)