

Season of Advent—Week 4
19–24 December

Deepening the theme...

...and we are here
As we have never been before,
Sighted as not before, our place
Holy, although we knew it not.

—Wendell Berry

In his Sabbath poem on Christmas Day 1987, Wendell Berry describes the trek out to the barn to feed the animals. But on this day, the routine chore causes him to pause. He imagines what it might be like to open the door and find “the Child bedded in straw, / The mother kneeling over Him.”



God is always present, waiting to be noticed, yet we may miss the holiness before us at times. Therefore, may our ongoing preparations in the Season of Advent help us anticipate the truly amazing, yet entirely ordinary ways God is revealed to be at work in our world.

Reflection 1

Luke 1:57–63

Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. Her neighbours and relatives heard that the lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father.

But his mother said, “No; he is to be called John.” Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. He asked for a writing-tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And all of them were amazed.

The neighbours and relatives assume Elizabeth and Zechariah would follow the customs of the day and name their son Zechariah or after someone else in the family. Instead, both Elizabeth and Zechariah insist his name is John. This scene flags the ways God works in unconventional ways.

(Cont.)

- When have you encountered God's presence at work in unconventional ways or in surprising settings and people? What has been your response?
- Is there room for you to embrace this new thing more completely? If so, what might this include?

You who make all things new:
Give me imagination and vision
for what might be
and fill me with strength and courage
to be as bold for your new way
as Elizabeth and Zechariah.
Amen

Reflection 2

Luke 1:64, 67–69

Immediately Zechariah's mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. Filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:

Blessed by the Lord God of Israel,

for he has looked favourably on his people
and redeemed them.
He has raised up a mighty saviour for us
in the house of his servant David.

Recall the Season of Advent for you.

- What have been the gifts of this season?
- Focus on the grace that has come to you. Spend a few moments giving thanks to God.

Generous God:
Thank you for the outpouring of gifts
I have received in this season.
May I be generous, too,
in my love and praise.
Amen

Reflection 3

Luke 1:80

The child grew and became strong in spirit, and

he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.

The wilderness is a symbolic place in the spiritual life. It speaks of solitude, intention, revelation and growth. Anglican solitude Maggie Ross says in the stripped-back nature of wilderness we learn to behold, to give attention to the holy in our midst. She writes, "Behold is a word that alerts us to pause, however briefly, to be vigilant, because something new, something startling, is about to be revealed."

- What is the wilderness for you? What encourages you to behold as described by Maggie Ross?
- How can you make space for beholding during the upcoming Season of Christmas?

Creator of red dust and wide skies,
meet me in the wilderness of my heart.
Calm and quiet my mind
that I might behold you
in the sacrament
of each moment.
Amen

Reflection 4

Luke 3:3–6

John went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,
"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.
Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth;
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

(Cont.)

The Christian life grows by nurturing hospitality and openness in our hearts. Much like we might dust the furniture, clean the bathrooms and prepare a meal for someone's visit to our homes, so John urges us to prepare for God's abiding.

- What are some practical ways you make yourself receptive to God?
- When did intentional preparation lead to encounter and growth in the Christian life for you? What might this suggest for the future?

My heart is ready, O God,
my heart is ready.
Come and make your home in me.
Amen

