

Sermon for 14 December 2025 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Third Sunday in Advent

Scriptures: Isaiah 35:1-10; Psalter: Page 199: "Canticle of Mary" (*Magnificat*) Luke 1:47-55; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11

Sermon:

How good are you at waiting?

That's the question we're being asked by the scriptures today.

Mary's song of praise in this passage from Matthew is not clearly about her being pregnant, but about her trust in God to do something great for the down-trodden people of Israel. That's in Luke.

I'd never looked at it that way until I sat down to write this sermon.

And as for John the Baptist, he's not the confident proclaimer of Jesus that he was when he baptized Jesus hesitantly, modestly, and saw and heard the signs of Jesus' uniqueness. He's now in prison, and as we know, the signs of his doom are pretty clear with Herod.

I put these to us as believers in Holy Writ. It's long past the time when we can take the Bible literally. Scripture is a mixture of witnesses and scholarship that, like everything else in science and history-reading. We learn and then more and then learn still more, just as we do in living our own lives.

Advent: The time of waiting, of not knowing what's next, of learning and then learning again, of forgiving and being forgiven over and over ... of seeing things differently after prayer and the passage of time and the observations of others and ourselves ... Advent is a season of practice in faithfulness that the church has produced over many generations for our benefit in being God's creatures.

Jesus' answer to John's question, "Art thou the one, or shall we wait for another?" is just what it looks like. You see the facts. Make your conclusions. Then learn to watch some more.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, as we drink deeply of this short semester of Advent, give us both patience and courage. Help us learn bravery even as we face surprises, as we get let down as well as lifted up, and as things in our society get both clearer and harder to handle. You are coming into the world, and you are closer than we are to ourselves. Guide us. Forgive us. Help us forgive, ourselves and others, over and over and over, as the growing creatures of faith you have constructed us to be. Thank you for Scripture. Thanks for differences of opinion. Let us grow wiser, even as you allow us chance after chance to develop well past what we expected to.

All this we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.