

## Unlikely Messenger, Unexpected Message of Hope

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December 5, 2021. God seems to delight in seeking out the most unlikely of messengers to carry the unexpected message of hope. This Advent season, we continue the journey of transformative hope together, listening to God's messengers and watching for signs of the Spirit.

Readings: [Malachi 3:1-4](#), [Luke 1:68-79](#), [Philippians 1:3-11](#), [Luke 3:1-6](#)

\*\*\* Transcript \*\*\*

I remember so well, when we had just bought a house and I was tending a yard of perennials, and that feeling that came when the snow first melted and revealed... death. Brown grass. Dry branches. Barren earth. The mucky, thick residue of the final onslaught of leaves that we didn't quite have time to pick up before the snow buried them in December. I was convinced that nothing had survived, that everything had died and would never come back. It seemed like a hopeless mess. But I was advised to wait, and watch to see what would happen, before digging everything up and starting over.

There are many things that we wait for. We wait in line at the grocery store. We wait for COVID to be over. We wait for our friends or family to arrive. We wait for test results. We wait for the rain to stop. So many feelings can go along with the waiting. Fear. Joy. Anxiety. Curiosity. Impatience. Hope.

This Advent season, as we await the coming of Christ, we reflect on those who waited, 2,000 years ago, for Jesus to come. Each of them longed for the mysterious Spirit of God that would reveal itself in the world in a whole new way in Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection. Mary, Zechariah, Elizabeth, and Simeon and Anna prophetically proclaimed the coming of the creator of the universe in this tiny, vulnerable, little baby. They knew, and sang for all of creation, the promise that Christ's presence on earth would transform this world.

In our gospel today, we are told of John the Baptist, one of the most well-known messengers of hope, who heralded Jesus' birth. Luke goes to a great deal of effort to set the scene for John the Baptist's arrival. Our evangelist names not just where John lives and who his father is, but no fewer than seven leaders who held significant power at the time, from the emperor to the high priests. The way Luke describes it, one can envision the Spirit moving among the people, traveling in and around palaces and temples, looking for the just right person to bear the great message of hope, and ultimately choosing not Tiberius, or Pontius Pilate, or Herod, or Phillip, or Lysanias, or Annas, or Caiaphas, in their seats of power, but John the Baptist, son of Zechariah, in the wilderness.

The Spirit of God, we are told clearly in Luke, and throughout all of scriptures, does not seek empire and power, as humans often to do, but blows where she will, often finding her home in the margins. As God so often does, God seems to delight in seeking out the most unlikely of messengers to carry that message of hope. God chose David — the youngest and smallest of Jesse's sons — to be king. Moses, a murderer living in exile from his people who described himself as unable to speak, was called to speak to Pharaoh and help the Israelites follow God's lead to freedom in a new land. The angel came to Mary, an unknown, unmarried, poor, teenage girl, to bring her news that she was to be the mother of Jesus, God's son. And when it was time for the word to be spread that God's promise was coming true right in the middle of all of this history, the Spirit chose John, son of Zechariah and Elizabeth, who was living in the wilderness, wearing skins, and eating locusts and honey, to be the messenger.

God seems to delight in seeking out the most unlikely of messengers to carry a message of hope that is, in its own right, quite unexpected. Hope does not promise the power of empire, government, wealth, and fame, but the power of the Spirit that continually calls us to justice, freedom, and transformative love that reaches to every corner of creation. Malachi describes God's coming as a refiner's fire that prepares us to offer all that we are to the God of creation. Paul writes to the Philippians of his prayer that God will lead them to overflow with love in Christ. God will, Paul declares, finish the work in them that has only begun. John cries out in the desert a message not of quick and easy prosperity, but of the faithfulness of the God who calls us to repent, to turn, to grow ever closer to them.

God seems to delight in seeking out the most unlikely of messengers to carry the unexpected message of hope. This Advent season, we continue the journey of transformative hope together, listening to God's messengers and watching for signs of the Spirit, as the Israelites and early followers of Christ and the generations of people of faith have done since the beginning of time.

We followers of Christ are called not because we are perfect, powerful, strong, brilliant in speech, popular or famous, but because we are beloved children of the God who formed us in the womb and knows us better than we know ourselves. We are invited, as Malachi says, to enter as a people of hope into the refiner's fire; as John the Baptist says, to turn again and again to the God of all mercy and love; as Paul says, to let God's love overflow in us as God faithfully completes the work in us that has only just begun.

Today, we claim this hope as we remember the promises of God revealed in our own baptisms, and celebrate today the love and promises of God who formed Hank Borden in the womb and gave him life. God is alive and at work among us, and today we baptize Hank to proclaim out loud in community that God's faithfulness endures and God's love is boundless.

Our scriptures tell us that, just as new, green growth finally and faithfully emerges from cold earth every spring, even in my dead yard, God's Spirit will not fail to carry the promise even to the wilderness places in our lives. Today and every day, we are called to turn to God, overflow with love, and join the prophets of our history as messengers of hope in our world today.

Thanks be to God.

\*\*\* Keywords \*\*\*

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