



**BENEDICTUS**  
contemplative church

14 December 2024

Advent 3 (Luke 1. 39-48, 56)

**twice blessed**

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This is liminal space. Two pregnant women meet, a young woman and an older woman. The encounter is extraordinary. Elizabeth was well respected. She came from a priestly lineage as did her husband, but her barrenness was held against her and no doubt there was whispering and gossip and now that she has conceived, miraculously, something is shifting for her. Mary's visit, as a young unmarried pregnant teenager puts Elizabeth's status at risk. Elizabeth risks everything to open her arms her heart her home to Mary. Something in her recognises Mary's blessing. She blesses Mary, gathers her, enfolds her and enables her to speak out the wonderful words, the seditious words we now know as the Magnificat resonant of similar words from her forbear in the faith, Hanna when she found herself pregnant with Samuel. There are layers here.

I have always been taken with this meeting between Elizabeth and Mary. In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary. What an amazing epiphany, and Mary said yes to conceiving and birthing God. Unimaginable, and now it's sunk in she needs support. 'She flees: toward her kinswoman, toward refuge, toward sanctuary. In the home of Elizabeth, Mary finds what she most needs'.<sup>1</sup>

For five months prior to this visit Elizabeth remained in seclusion, we read. (Luke 1:24-26). "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favour and taken away my disgrace among the people."

Now Mary has arrived at Elizabeth's place.

I imagine them pounding corn together, cleaning the house, resting, yarning, for three whole months as the babies in their wombs grow as they make sense of their

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<sup>1</sup> <http://adventdoor.com/2015/12/14/advent-4-a-blessing-called-sanctuary/>

stories and prepare for the changes that are happening in their lives, until Elizabeth delivers her child, controversially named John, not Zachariah after his father.

Luke is a consummate storyteller. Our minds go back to Sarah, the wife of Abraham, who also conceived in her old age, laughing. How would it be if Mary didn't have Elizabeth, a wise woman, and Anam Cara to spend time with. What would it be if Elizabeth didn't have Mary a younger woman blossoming with life and faith and hope and fear. This companionship is transforming.

I wonder what is being conceived in you, what is growing in you? Maybe it's an idea or a project for work or home maybe it's a growing knowledge of yourself and the divine.

I wonder who or what blesses you, supports you and encourages you and brings out the best in you?

For me it is Nikolai, and one or two special friends, my spiritual director and my supervisor. They all hold me, ask difficult questions, sometimes encourage, sit alongside and invite me forward.

Meditation also helps in this process, the sinking down into the ground of my being, stilling myself, quietly resting, opening.

Walking the Labyrinth does it too, a walking meditation. We had a wonderful Labyrinth walk on 1st December, the first day of summer and of Advent. 10 of us walked together all one, alone and together and we held each other in our walk so that amazing things unfolded. Lives were changed.

And then there's InterPlay<sup>2</sup> - improvised dance, movement, storytelling, song, alone and in community once again. In the movement, in the song, in the stories, things shift and there is a deepening of connection and a growing awareness of what is important and what needs nourishing.

So I wonder who or what nurtures and tends you and I also wonder, who we bless and nurture?

Jan Richardson shares an amazing story of blessing, she says:

Janet Wolf, tells the story of a woman called Fayette. Janet used to serve as the pastor of Hobson United Methodist Church in Nashville, Tennessee. Hobson UMC is a wildly diverse congregation that includes, as Janet has described it, "...people with power and PhDs and folks who have never gone past the third grade; folks with two houses and folks living on the streets; and, as one person who struggles with mental health declared, 'those of us who are crazy and those who think they're not.'"

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<sup>2</sup> [interplayaus.com.au](http://interplayaus.com.au)

Years ago, a woman named Fayette found her way to Hobson. Fayette lived with mental illness and lupus and without a home. She joined the new member class. The conversation about baptism—“this holy moment when we are named by God’s grace with such power it won’t come undone,” as Janet puts it—especially grabbed Fayette’s imagination. Janet tells of how, during the class, Fayette would ask again and again, “And when I’m baptized, I am...?” “The class,” Janet writes, “learned to respond, ‘Beloved, precious child of God, and beautiful to behold.’ ‘Oh, yes!’ she’d say, and then we could go back to our discussion.” [What a community.]

The day of Fayette’s baptism came. This is how Janet describes it:

Fayette went under, came up spluttering, and cried, ‘And now I am...?’ And we all sang, ‘Beloved, precious child of God, and beautiful to behold.’ ‘Oh, yes!’ she shouted as she danced all around the fellowship hall.

Two months later, Janet received a phone call.

Fayette had been beaten and raped and was at the hospital. So Janet went. I could see her from a distance, pacing back and forth. When I got to the door, I heard, ‘I am beloved...’ She turned, saw me, and said, ‘I am beloved, precious child of God, and...’ Catching sight of herself in the mirror—hair sticking up, blood and tears streaking her face, dress torn, dirty, and rebuttoned askew, she started again, ‘I am beloved, precious child of God, and...’ She looked in the mirror again and declared, ‘...and God is still working on me. If you come back tomorrow, I’ll be so beautiful I’ll take your breath away!’

**Beloved**, Fayette. **Beloved**, Mary who visited Elizabeth. **Beloved**, Elizabeth, pregnant in old age, **Beloved**, the voice from heaven proclaimed as the baptismal waters of the Jordan rolled off Jesus’ body. **Beloved**, the voice named him as he prepared to begin his public ministry. **Beloved**, spoken with such power that it would permeate Jesus’ entire life and teaching. **Beloved**, he would name those he met who were desperate for healing, for inclusion, for hope. **Beloved**, echoing through the ages, continuing to name those drenched in the waters of baptism. **Beloved. Child of God.**

‘Fayette—beloved, precious child of God, and beautiful to behold—haunts me’, Jan says, ‘blesses me, goes with me into this season and challenges me to ask what it means that—like her, with her—I have been named by God’s grace with such power that it won’t come undone, I remember that, we, too, are named as beloved children of God in baptism. How will we live in such a way that others will know themselves as named by God, beloved by God—especially those who have been

given cause to think they are less than loved, less than children of the One who created them?

We remember Mary and Elizabeth and Fayette.

‘In response to Elizabeth’s blessing, Mary sings of a God who brings down the powerful, who lifts up the lowly, who fills the hungry with good things. Strangely, wonderfully, Mary sings of a God who not only *will* do these things, but who *has* done these things. She sings as if God has already accomplished the redemption and restoration of the world’, says Jan Richardson.<sup>3</sup>

Dear ones, ‘this is what a blessing has the power to do. The blessing that Elizabeth speaks and enacts through her words, her welcome, her gift of sanctuary: such a blessing has the power to help us, like Mary, speak the word we most need to offer. Such a blessing gives us a glimpse of the redemption that God, in God’s strange sense of time, has somehow already accomplished. Such a blessing stirs up in us the strength to participate with God in bringing about this redemption in *this* time, in *this* world’.<sup>4</sup>

Where will we go, like Mary, to find and receive such a blessing? Benedictus? Friends? spiritual companion?

How will we open our heart, like Elizabeth, to offer it?

In a ***A Blessing Called Sanctuary*** Jan Richardson sums it up.

You hardly knew  
how hungry you were  
to be gathered in,  
to receive the welcome  
that invited you to enter  
entirely—  
nothing of you  
found foreign or strange,  
nothing of your life  
that you were asked  
to leave behind  
or to carry in silence  
or in shame.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://adventdoor.com/2015/12/14/advent-4-a-blessing-called-sanctuary/>

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*,

Tentative steps  
became settling in,  
leaning into the blessing  
that enfolded you,  
taking your place  
in the circle  
that stunned you  
with its unimagined grace.

You began to breathe again,  
to move without fear,  
to speak with abandon  
the words you carried  
in your bones,  
that echoed in your being.

You learned to sing.

But the deal with this blessing  
is that it will not leave you alone,  
will not let you linger  
in safety,  
in stasis.

The time will come  
when this blessing  
will ask you to leave,  
not because it has tired of you  
but because it desires for you  
to become the sanctuary  
that you have found—  
to speak your word  
into the world,  
to tell what you have heard  
with your own ears,  
seen with your own eyes,  
known in your own heart:

that you are beloved,  
precious child of God,  
beautiful to behold,  
and you are welcome

and more than welcome  
here.

—Jan Richardson<sup>5</sup>  
from *Circle of Grace*

In the coming days, may ..we see who we are, and from our depths reflect to others  
their true name: 'beloved, precious child of God, and beautiful to behold'

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<sup>5</sup> <http://adventdoor.com/2015/12/14/advent-4-a-blessing-called-sanctuary/>