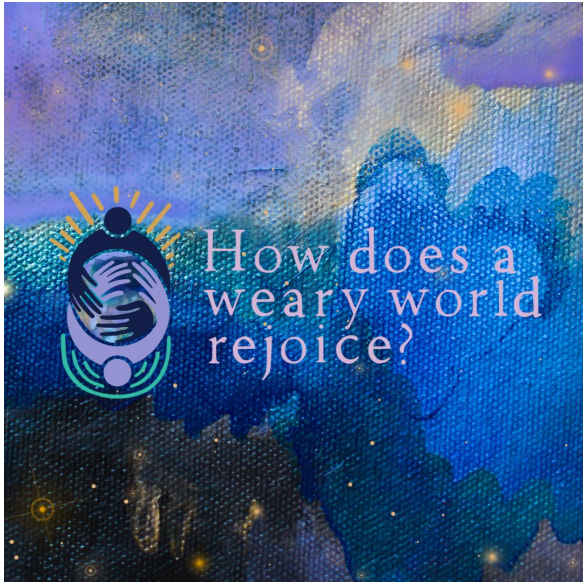


HOW DOES A WEARY WORLD REJOICE?

We Acknowledge Our Weariness

December 3, 2023

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Luke 1:1-23

Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us,² just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word,³ I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus,⁴ so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

⁵ In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.⁶ Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the

Lord.⁷ But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.

⁸ Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty,⁹ he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense.¹⁰ Now at the time of the incense-offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside.¹¹ Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense.¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him.¹³ But the angel said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John.¹⁴ You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth,¹⁵ for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit.¹⁶ He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God.¹⁷ With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.'

¹⁸ Zechariah said to the angel, 'How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years.'¹⁹ The angel replied, 'I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to

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speak to you and to bring you this good news. ²⁰But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur.'

²¹Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah, and wondered at his delay in the sanctuary. ²²When he did come out, he could not speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak. ²³When his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

REFLECT & DISCUSS

1. Read the passage slowly. Then take a deep breath and read it again. What word, phrase or image stands out to you?
2. As Advent begins, what weariness do you carry—in your body, mind, or soul?
3. What does it look like for you to rejoice when you are weary? When have you welcomed joy while simultaneously feeling anxious, afraid, alone, sad, or overwhelmed?
4. Elizabeth and Zechariah experienced infertility. They are not alone. Perhaps as many as 1 in 7 couples are affected by infertility. Even so, this wearying journey often gets overlooked in scripture and in society. Reflect on how this time of year (and the stories of miracle childbirth) can be hard for couples impacted by infertility, miscarriages, barriers to adoption or frustrated

dreams of family. If you have experienced or struggled with any of these (or know family or friends who have), reflect on what you discovered was helpful or supportive.

5. Zechariah was rendered mute, unable to speak, and struggled to communicate what he experienced. Do you have an experience of actively struggling to communicate? If so, what happened? What did you learn?
6. Have you ever had a religious or spiritual experience that was difficult to describe, at least at first? What happened? How do you talk about it now?
7. What do you make of Zechariah's time of silence? Consider how this silence might have impacted his daily life? What blessing or learning might have been embedded in this experience?
8. Have you ever taken a "time of silence" for an hour, day, or extended season? Why? What did you experience or learn?
9. Advent means "arrival" and is the season in which the church waits, with great anticipation, for what God brings about in Christ. How do you practice "Advent"?

Find resources for practicing Advent:
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