

## Advent Devotional December 8, 2019

### Scripture

Luke 1:57-68

*57 Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. 58 Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. 59 On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. 60 But his mother said, "No; he is to be called John." 61 They said to her, "None of your relatives has this name." 62 Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. 63 He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And all of them were amazed. 64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. 65 Fear came over all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. 66 All who heard them pondered them and said, "What then will this child become?" For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him. 67 Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy: 68 "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them."*

### Devotional

#### The Rev. Dr. Nancy E. Lowmaster '11

The Gospel writer reports that when Elizabeth gave birth, the villagers—family and neighbors alike—rejoiced. A delivery safe for both mother and child was not guaranteed, so a celebration was indeed warranted. And Elizabeth and Zechariah were each well beyond the time in life when babies are usually conceived. This miraculous child was special cause for joy.

The people assumed that this baby boy would be named "Zechariah," like his father. Take a moment to be a little surprised at that assumption: of course—"Zechariah" was the name of the infant's father. It is a name with deep Hebrew roots—it means "the LORD has remembered."

But "Zechariah" is a name that casts its eyes backward—toward what *has been*. God, however, was looking forward. Listen again to Gabriel's announcement to this baby's father inside the incense-filled Holy of Holies: "You *will* have a son," "he *will* be great," "he *will* be filled with the Holy Spirit," "he *will* turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God," "he will . . .," "he will . . ." Would these villagers who gathered to celebrate fully recognize and eagerly embrace the new thing that God was doing (see Isa. 43:18-19)? Do we?

"John" is the name that God has pre-selected for this child. "John" is a name that lives in the present and looks forward into the future—it means, "the LORD is gracious." And it is this John—himself a product of a miracle—who would proclaim the wonder of God's new, loving act of salvation as he points to Christ Jesus, God-with-us.

### Prayer

God of all-powerful love, grant us the grace both to remember your blessings of the past with thanks and to anticipate eagerly the new ways you are working in us and in creation this day. Grow our trust in you, so that we can confidently, peacefully, and joyfully rest in your care. Through Christ Jesus, Emmanuel, we pray. Amen.