

**3 Advent
December 15, 2013
Holy Baptism**

**In the name of the God of all Creation,
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,
And the power of God known in the Spirit.
Amen.**

What a wonderful morning for a baptism ... and not just any baptism, but the baptism of a sixth generation child of this congregation. Lalita's great, great, great, grandmother was one of the original members of St. Cyprian's! What an honor to have this child and her family here today for this sacrament.

During this Advent season we have been singing ... or at least trying to sing ... the Magnificat as our Hymn of Praise as we begin our liturgy. The Magnificat ... The Latin name for the Song of Mary ... is one of several hymns in the first two chapters of Luke's gospel, and it is always one of the options for a responsorial reading on the Third Sunday of Advent.

Last week we heard John the Baptist describing this yearning for a messiah. John was baptizing with water, but the one to follow John, the one who would fulfill this messianic yearning, would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. He would cut down the tree that did not produce good fruit, and he would separate the wheat from the chaff.

Later, John the Baptist was arrested. While in prison he heard of the things Jesus was doing ... this Jesus that John had baptized. He sent word to Jesus and asked if, indeed, Jesus was the messiah for whom they were waiting. Jesus answered not with a report of judgment such as John had predicted, but with a report of bringing wholeness to those most in need.

The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.

The answer Jesus gave sounds a lot like the yearnings written by the prophet Isaiah. Jesus went on to say that some might be offended by this answer. One has to wonder why someone might be offended. However, this was certainly not the actions of the messiah John the Baptist had described. Instead of judgment was compassion and healing. Instead of separating the wheat from the chaff, Jesus was pointing to healing and wholeness. Instead of cutting down the tree that didn't provide fruit, Jesus was nurturing the poor, and the blind, and the lame, and the deaf back into life.

This is the Third Sunday of Advent ... the Sunday when we especially remember Mary's song about how God will turn the world upside down. It is a song of a mother's praise to the God who has blessed her with sacred life. Mary was also a woman of prophetic pronouncement.

Her "Magnificat" moves from the deeply personal to the explicitly political. God, Mary proclaims, "has been mindful of the humble state of His servant... the Mighty One has done great things for me." This peasant girl who a few months later would bear the Son of God then praises God the Mighty One because He has "brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty." I wonder what Herod or Tiberius thought when they heard her words. The incarnation of the Son of God, Mary announced, meant the inversion of conventional wisdom. Dethroning political power, plundering rich people, and redistributing food supplies signaled a new age and order.

Today is also the baptism of Lalita. It is our welcome of her into the family of God as we know it. It is our promise to her that we will bring her up to know the values of God ... just those values that Mary proclaimed. Lalita has two godparents, but in a way all of us who are committed to our faith are godparents to all children ... we have made a covenant to life and testify to the values of God's world ... what Jesus called the Kingdom of God.

Listen for a moment to the list of people that are named in our readings this morning: The passages from Isaiah, the Psalms, and Matthew's gospel all emphasize the people toward whom God is biased. These Scriptures describe at least eighteen sorts of people in pain who might be forgotten by the world but who are nevertheless remembered by God: the blind, the lame, the diseased, the deaf, the dead, the poor, the dumb, the oppressed, the hungry, the prisoners, the bowed down, foreigners and strangers, orphans, widows, the humble, and also, those with feeble hands, weak knees, and fearful hearts.

In the baptismal covenant we will be asked: "Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?" And you will respond, "I will, with God's help." It is to those on that list that we are being called to love as our neighbor.

And we will be asked, "Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?" Remember, everyone, including those on the list ... especially those on that list ... demands our respect.

The Third Sunday of Advent, just a week and a half from the Feast of the Incarnation at Christmas. It is also the baptism of Lalita into the family of God ... making a covenant with God to live our life, and to teach Lalita to live her life, in God's values, not the values of the world.

Amen.