



Community of St. Bridget
an inclusive catholic experience
Third Sunday of Advent - December 15, 2024
Liturgist: Donna M. Mazzola



Mary: Love Forever Being Born, Kelly Latimore Icons

Suggestion: *Please have on hand bread and wine/juice, and a copy of this liturgy so you can fully participate.*

Into this day will break moments of awareness, tiny shards of light in the midst of darkness that illumine the whole reality of existence. May the words we hear and share be such moments and may we be thankfully blessed by their gifts.

ALL: Together we open our hearts to the Holy Wonder of Life.

Opening Song: **Holy Darkness** by John Michael Talbot; Album: Table of Plenty; © 1997
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EAczCdb9NQ> (lyric/video)

Refrain: Holy darkness, blessed night
Heaven's answer hidden from our sight
As we await you, O God of silence
We embrace your holy night (2x)

I have tried you in the fires of affliction.
I have taught your soul to grieve.
In the barren soil of your loneliness,
There I will plant my seed. **R**

In the deepest hour of your darkness
I will give you wealth untold
When the silence stills your spirit
Will my riches fill your soul. **R**

The Third Sunday in Advent is known as Gaudete Sunday and infuses the season with an exuberant and infectious spirit of joy and celebration. Today's candle is pink. The Gospel tells of Mary's visitation with her cousin Elizabeth, and the song of her Magnificat. We ask the Divine Presence to empower us to move through this season with resilience, courage, and joy. We confidently pray in the name of our Creator, our brother Jesus and Holy Spirit, Sophia. Amen.

Lighting of the Advent Candle

1. May we, during this holy season, reflect on the many and different ways we can begin to make the Holy One's compassion and love available to our broken world.
2. May we learn together to reflect on the Divine call to generous response in the light of Christ's life, and *as we light this candle today*, may we look forward to the new birthing of Eternal Love in all creation, expressed anew in our love for all.
3. This is a personal call to become Christ's presence and action in our world. Together we can begin to image Christ whose compassion never fails.
4. We give you thanks, O Loving Mystery of Life, for this time of waiting when we search to find you present in our midst. May we be attentive, be reflective, and be responsive to your Advent Presence among us!

Transitioning Out of Darkness

O Fruitful Ground of our Being:

5. As you gather us into the darkness of winter, You call us inside to the great fires in our hearts, those fires we have never believed in. You ask us to warm the hands of hope in our secret soul places. You show us the heaven seeds that have been planted in our souls, and you remind us that heaven's answers rest in the dark ground of our beings.

ALL: *We praise you, O Holy Darkness!*

6. When the deep loneliness comes, you cradle us in your enriching dark arms. In the darkness you teach us to trust in what we cannot see, to hope for that which seems impossible, to have faith in the night of unknowing. You reveal to us the necessity of patience and the holiness of waiting in the dark as we enter into solitude.

ALL: *We praise you, O Holy Darkness!*

7. In the darkness you cover us with beauty: the poetry of the moon and stars, the loveliness of nocturnal creatures who make music in the forest's darkness, the mystery of silvery shadows. You soften the day's

light to show us the light of night. You give us the gift of rest and sleep. You send us your night angel to close our tired eyes and breathe dreams and visions into our longing hearts.

ALL: *We praise you, O Holy Darkness!*

1. Once upon a time in the holy darkness of our mother's womb, we waited for birth. Now we are being born again. We are growing wings in our sorrow's darkness and finding new eyes that can see in the dark. On your black earth pillow we rest our heads and hearts. We trust your unseen blessings.

ALL: *We praise you, O Holy Darkness!*

2. All of creation finds life in the watery womb of your darkness. Deep in the rich black soil of the earth many happy seeds are cradled in your nurturing womb. Soon the shell of the seed will crack open and blessings will rise up out of the darkness.

ALL: *We praise you, O Holy Darkness!*

Opening Prayer*

Cosmic Womb, Life of All Life, Dark Mystery, all creation rejoices with Mary. You choose to be born in her, in us, in this blessed realm of time and space. You come to us, and become through us. In this evolutionary adventure of life, divinity is enfleshed in a Bethlehem birth. We unite with all willing souls, who, along with Mary, consent to give birth to you and the sacred kindom. We join Mary in magnifying your Blessed Name. Amen.

LITURGY OF THE WORD**

We sense the movement of the Spirit of Life as we listen to the Scripture readings broken open and shared by all.

First Reading: Zephaniah 3:14, 16bc-17acde, 18a, 19bc

A reading from the Prophet Zephaniah:

Shout for Joy, People of God! Sing joyfully! Be glad!
Celebrate with your whole heart!
Do not be afraid, my people. Do not be discouraged.
God is present among you, with a healing hand outstretched.
God will take delight in you, calming and claiming you with love;
God will sing joyfully because of you.
Sorrow upon sorrow you have gathered,
but your sorrows will dissipate.
No longer will you know shame and sadness.

The inspired words of our ancient prophetic tradition. Amen.

Cantor: 8 Alleluias

Second Reading - Gospel: Luke 1:26-28, 31, 38, 39-55
A reading from the Gospel attributed to Luke:

In those days, Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country. There, she entered the house of Elizabeth and Zechariah. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, her child leapt in her womb. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit! She exclaimed with jubilation, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! Why has this happened to me, that the mother of God's Anointed One comes to me? As soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Blessed are you who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to you by a messenger of God."

Annunciation (Magnificat) by Marty Haugen from Anthology III 1990-1996 album
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=woNE7LY1otA> (no video)

An angel went from God to a town called Nazareth
to a woman whose name was Mary.
The angel said to her, "Rejoice, O highly favored,
for God is with you.
You shall bear a child, and his name shall be Jesus,
the Chosen One of God Most High."
And Mary said, "I am the servant of my God,
I live to do Your will."

The Magnificat (all welcome to sing along)

My soul proclaims Your greatness, O God, and my spirit rejoices in You.
You have looked with love on Your servant here,
and blessed me all my life through.
Great and mighty are You, O Holy One,
strong is Your kindness evermore.
How You favor the weak and lowly one, humbling the proud of heart!
You have cast the mighty down from their thrones,
and uplifted the humble of heart.
You have filled the hungry with wondrous things,
and left the wealthy no part.
Great and mighty are You, O Faithful One,
strong is Your justice, strong Your love,
as You promised to Sarah and Abraham, kindness forevermore.
My soul proclaims Your greatness, O God, and my spirit rejoices in You.
You have looked with love on your servant here,
and blessed me all my life through.

The inspired words of the writers of Luke's Gospel. Amen.

Third Reading: A reading from *Holy Dark* by Cole Arthur Riley taken from her Advent Meditations with *Black Liturgies*:

...The darkness of Advent is never far from the darkness of the womb. A beautiful dark. Advent's origins in the Christian tradition honor the story of a God who dwelled in the holy darkness of Mary's womb. It is a site of the unknown, but it is also a site of formation—growth, rest, waiting. Whatever our religious landscape may be, we can learn from this image. That the dark can be a harbor.

I don't mean to romanticize the dark with this metaphor; I mean to complicate it. I mean to remind you that creation has long found ways to endure the dark and the unknown, and even, found shelter in it. That sometimes darkness means we reimagine our seeing. That we train ourselves in a different kind of vision. This is our Advent ritual.

The inspired words of writer and poet, Cole Arthur Riley. Amen.

Shared Homily: Donna Mazzola

There is absolutely nothing *efficient* about the timing of the Divine. Our spiritual journeys don't unfold "like clockwork." Clocks give us a measure of time as duration. But we, who follow Christ, are invited to live in the time of *Kairos*—"deep time," when the past and present merge into a moment of clarity. Richard Rohr explains that *Kairos* is when you realize that life is already full, no matter what the clock reads.

Mary's visit to Elizabeth is a sacred moment of synchronicity, their bodies syncing up, an inner knowing of God with them, confirmed in their embrace and greeting. A fullness. A moment of clarity. *Blessed are you, Mary, my kin...among all women, and blessed is the One you carry in your womb.* In this out-of-time scene, Elizabeth feels John leaping for joy in her womb. What holy stirrings these are.

Elizabeth and Mary—a matured woman and a young, tender one. The author of Luke tells us that Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months before returning home. Imagine the bond that grew between the two. Mary, learning new recipes from Elizabeth. Both thinking through how to care for a newborn. Simple ways of finding support through the days of unknowing that lie ahead. Surely, something we need now.

Mary's sung Magnificat today is a flashback to the angel's announcement. *Rejoice, favored one, God is with you. You will carry the Divine's Chosen One.* Mary answers: *I live to do Your Will.* Her prayer illuminates who this chosen woman is. We must not confuse what she says. This is a woman, neither diminishing nor disappearing herself.

She stands in humility. Humility—the realization that we are so small as to seem insignificant, and yet so urgently needed in the scheme of unfolding creation. Mary knows how God-with-us works. Lifting up the *anawim*, those on the margins. These ones have long found ways to endure the dark and the unknown, and even, found shelter in it. Like Mary and Elizabeth, they know that darkness can be the portal to a new way of seeing. We need that in our time, too.

Mary's YES, becomes the pattern for her life. Mary's womb becomes a place of growth, rest, and waiting for Jesus. He dwells and is formed within her body. Later, we imagine Jesus observing his dear mother, seeing her faith lived out daily, watching her move through hard moments. Mary's YES-song then becomes the pattern that Jesus follows.

It takes courage to trust our inner experience of God and not lean on the reassurance of a religious system. It takes courage and vulnerability to find our people, our kin. It takes courage to say, "yes" to our small, yet needed, part in creating a kingdom of justice and love.

When Zechariah is struck mute in Luke's gospel, an opening is left for the women's un-muted voices. You are invited to un-mute and share the wisdom stirring in your heart today.

Holding these thoughts in the sacred space among us and strengthened by the support of one another, we now proclaim our affirmation of faith:

Affirmation of Faith***

3. We believe Advent is an opportune time to transition out of the darkness of our doubts and pain and look with joyous expectation that the God of all love will provide whatever we need to see the light.
4. We believe that Mary had many questions regarding her role as the Mother of Jesus. We believe she had many trying moments like any other mother and wondered if she had made the right decision in accepting her pregnancy that was blessed by Our Creator.
5. We believe that Mary's faith and love for God enabled her to fulfill her role and responsibilities as the mother, mentor and apostle of Jesus.
6. We believe that our loving God will provide everything we need to be faithful to our calling in life if we but ask for the assistance in the name of Jesus.
7. We believe our loving Creator will bring peace, joy and justice for all according to God's timetable, not ours.

1. We believe Holy Spirit, Sophia, will guide us to fully embrace the gifts given to each of us so we too will be faithful followers of Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Prayer of the Faithful

For a deeper coming of Christ in our world that we experience through the birthing of God anew in our lives, let us offer our prayers: Our response today is: ***We awaken to your call.***

For whom and for what shall we pray?

Eternal Source of Life, help us to discover how we can be most useful in bringing your message of love and inclusion to reality. May we work unceasingly to bring the joy of our new birth in Jesus to everyone especially to those who have lost any hope that justice will exist for all of us. Amen.

LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

Sign of Peace

As we prepare this sacred meal, we reaffirm that just as Jesus was anointed, so is each of us. And so, we celebrate our Creator's fruitful love as we extend our blessing to one another with joy. May the peace that our brother, Jesus, offers, be always with us!

Offertory (All raise bread and cup)

We place on our plate the harvest to be won by labor's love. And into the cup we pour all the sap which is to be pressed out this day from the Earth's fruits.

Prayer Over the Gifts

ALL: O Gracious One, giver of the gifts we bring, receive them from your church gathered here today, affirming the sacrament of your Presence among us. Amen

The Holy One is with us, abounding in Love!

2. We open our hearts in Christ, who lives and loves, heals and empowers through us, and we give thanks to the Source of all Life.
3. Birther God, you brought forth all creation from your Life-Giving Womb. O Love of the Ages, who was born from Mary's womb, we praise you and leap for joy in your presence.
4. O Holy One of ancient Israel, you revealed yourself in a shining star, in humble shepherds, in a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes. You embrace us with infinite love in every situation and relationship. You dwell in the depths of our hearts.

5. We invite you this day to set us free, heal us, transform us and empower us as we gather around the table of your love. As we celebrate this sacred mystery in the embrace of the Holy One of Birthing, we proclaim your praise:

Holy is This One, Richard Bruxvoort Colligan, *Our Roots Are in You*. 2013
Worldmaking.net.

<https://youtu.be/wc13T8GMuao?si=bUlcoXZ7ajP7khBB> (no video)

Holy, holy, holy is this one
Holy, holy, holy is this one

In the wilderness, on the mountain
were you always?

Here among us, come to love us
were you always?

6. Praise to you, all-giving Mystery, born of Mary. You are the body and blood of woman. We glorify you, nurturing God for the dawning of the sacred promise of God's Anointed, fulfilled in Jesus, the Christ.

ALL: May Sophia Spirit be recognized in the gifts of this Eucharistic table, as we celebrate the +transformative power within this bread and fruit of the vine given to nurture afresh in us, the discerning gifts of wisdom, light and truth.

7. We celebrate the birth of Jesus, our newborn Emmanuel who came to give us fullness of life. During this holy season we share the bread of freedom and lift the cup of blessing. We invite all, especially those on the fringe of church and society, to join us around this banquet of love.

As Jesus gave birth to the New Covenant, he took bread, gave thanks, broke the bread, and shares it with us now saying:

ALL: *Take this all of you and eat it. This is my very Self given to you.*
(All raise bread)

At the end of the meal Jesus took the cup, blessed you, Birther of Life, and shares the cup with us now saying:

ALL: *Take and drink this cup of the new and everlasting covenant. It is poured out for you and for all, so that you might be free. Whenever you remember me like this, I am among you.*
(All raise cup)

Let us proclaim the sacred presence of our nurturing God:

ALL: Christ, by your life, ministry and death, by your rising to new life within us, you have given birth to your new creation.

(All raise bread and cup)

ALL: For it is through learning to live as Jesus lived,
And why he lived,
And for whom he lived,
That we awaken to your Spirit within,
Moving us to worship you truly,
Life-giving God,
At this time, and all time, and in all ways.

Cantor: Amen! (x2)

Communion Rite

In the power of this Eucharistic meal, O Divine Spirit, and in union with all peoples, we unite our thoughts and prayers, asking for wisdom and courage as we share these gifts among us:

1. Loving God, you call us to live the Gospel of peace and justice.
We will live justly.
2. Loving God, you call us to be your presence in the world.
We will love tenderly.
3. Loving God, you call us to speak truth to power.
We will walk with integrity in your presence.

This is the Bread of Life and Cup of Blessing, through which we are nourished and we nourish one another.

ALL: In the sharing of this holy meal, may it be for us a sacred reminder of all that has been offered in this unfolding story as we give thanks for everything that gives us life, shapes and animates our bodies, our minds and our spirits.

All are invited to receive at our Tables of Friendship!

Communion Meditation: ***The Divine Feminine*** by Gene Back: Cabrini ©2024
Soundtrack <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KU7YTKtV5t0> (no video)

Let us pray together in the Name of Jesus:

4. O Birther! Father- Mother of the Cosmos!
Focus your light within us - make it useful.
5. Create your reign of unity now-
through our fiery hearts and willing hands
Help us love beyond our ideals
and sprout acts of compassion for all creatures.

6. Animate the earth within us: we then
feel the Wisdom underneath supporting all.
Untangle the knots within
so that we can mend our hearts' simple ties to each other.

7. Don't let surface things delude us,
But free us from what holds us back from our true purpose.
Out of you, the astonishing fire,
Returning light and sound to the cosmos. Amen.

Closing Prayer****

God of the long wait, help us to be at rest with the unknowing. Help us trust the secret of Mary's womb, realizing we are not entitled to knowledge or clarity, but are still held in love. As we wait for healing and liberation—in ourselves, in the world—help us to practice justice, repair, and mercy. May we never rely on the divine to absolve us of our collective and individual responsibility. Let us feel that even here you are moving. You are growing our way to life and healing. Protect us from discouragement as we wait for the liberation of all. Amen.

Announcements:

Blessing: Let us extend our hands to bless one another.

Gathered together,
ALL: We wait for the light.

Standing together,
ALL: We trust in the light.

Praying together,
ALL: We hope for the light.

Seeking together,
ALL: We step out with the light.

Singing together,
ALL: We are blessed by the light.

ALL: We go into this week, held together by the love of our Generous Creator, clothed with the nature of Jesus our Companion and reinforced by the strength of +Holy Spirit Sophia. Amen.

We go in faith to ponder in our hearts the mystery and the wonder of this Holy Season!

Closing Song: **Christ is Coming** Richard Bruxvoort Colligan © 2004 Worldmaking.net.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9rYZnnU1oAs> (no video)

In the beginning was the Word, God and with God
Christ is coming, ever coming, coming again
From the beginning, it was life, the light for all people
Christ is coming, ever coming, coming again
Christ is coming, ever coming, coming again

And Jesus said to all his friends, “My peace be with you”
Christ is coming, ever coming, coming again
“Receive the Holy Spirit Breath. I am with you”
Christ is coming, ever coming, coming again
Christ is coming, ever coming, coming again

Unless a seed would fall and die, it stays but one seed
Christ is coming, ever coming, coming again
But if the seed is broken now, more will abound
Christ is coming, ever coming, coming again
Christ is coming, ever coming, coming again

Jesus was born, and Jesus died, and God raised Him up
Christ is coming, ever coming, coming again
We celebrate the story here with voices of hope
Christ is coming, ever coming, coming again
Christ is coming, ever coming, coming again

God of beginnings, God of ends, O make us your love
Christ is coming, ever coming, coming again
Oh, may your people be your life, the light for all people
Christ is coming, ever coming, coming again
Christ is coming, ever coming, coming again

Christ is coming, ever coming, coming again
Christ is coming, ever coming, coming again ...

***Thank you for your courage to worship in a spirit
of equality and justice!
You are welcome to join us again and invite a friend to support
This Community with your presence and prayer.***

* The opening prayer is adapted from *If Darwin Prayed* by Bruce Sanguin.

** The first reading and Gospel are from the *Comprehensive Catholic Lectionary* made available through the Women’s Ordination Conference.

*** Affirmation of Faith, by Donna M. Nagel

**** The closing prayer is adapted from *Black Liturgies: Prayers, Poems, and Meditations For Staying Human* by Cole Arthur Riley © 2024