

## Readings for December 4, 2022

### United Church of Strafford Hybrid In-person and Zoom Service

**Responsive Reading** *adapted from Luke 1, the Benedictus of Zechariah, at the birth of his son, John the Baptist*

Leader: “Blessed is the Spirit of the Universe,  
which looked favorably on the earth and its people  
and redeemed them.

**People: The Spirit evolved a powerful source of salvation for us  
in the house of its servant David,  
as was foretold through the mouth  
of holy prophets from of old,**

Leader: that we would be saved from evil ways  
and from violence at the hand of all who hate.

**People: The Spirit has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors,  
and has remembered our holy covenant,  
the oath our ancestor Abraham heard God make,**

Leader: to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of evil,  
might serve God without fear,  
in holiness and righteousness all our days.

**People: And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go before the living source of our hope  
to prepare the way, to give knowledge of salvation to all people  
by the forgiveness of their wrongs.**

Leader: By the tender mercy of our God,  
the dawn from on high will break upon us,

**People: to give light to those who sit in darkness  
and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”**

*from Luke 1:5-24, 57-66 The story of the birth of John the Baptist.*

In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah.... His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations.... But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years. Once when he was serving as priest before God...there appeared to him an angel... When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. 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. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of God. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will turn many of the people of Israel to God. 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 Spirit of God.”

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.” The angel replied, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. But 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.” Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah, and wondered at his delay in the sanctuary. When he did come out, he could not speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary.... After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived....

Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son.... On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. But his mother said, “No; he is to be called John.” They said to her, “None of your relatives has this name.” Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And all of them were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. Fear came over all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. All who heard them pondered them and said, “What then will this child become?” For, indeed, the Holy Spirit was with him.