

Thursday in the Fourth Week of Advent: December 24, 2020

A special son was born to a devote family with parents who were well beyond the age when their neighbours had children. His father Zechariah was a priest, taking his turn serving in the sanctuary of the Temple burning incense so worshippers through their sense of smell would acknowledge the presence of Creator and Great Spirit. His mother Elizabeth was the daughter of a priest, believing in the mysterious presence and power of the Most High God Almighty. On the eighth day after his birth, at the time of his circumcision, Elizabeth named their son John, receiving her husband's approval for this departure from the usual naming practices of their families. Members of their extended families and neighbours wondered what would become of this unique child.

Read Luke 1:67-80. What catches my attention in this gospel reading?

Zechariah had been surprised on an ordinary day in the sanctuary of the Temple by a visit from Angel Gabriel. Zechariah did not believe that his prayer had been heard and that he would father a child in his old age so Zechariah lost the ability to speak. After their son received his name in a ceremony, Zechariah was filled with words and could not stop until every word which Great Spirit had given him was spoken and heard. Zechariah identifies the unique role which his son John will play in the drama of salvation, not only for the Hebrew People but for all of the Peoples of Mother Earth, saying **"And you child, will be called the prophet of the Most High for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins."** Luke 1:76,77. Zechariah also speaks about this Lord pointing out what this Human One will accomplish, saying **"By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."** Luke 1:78,79. Zechariah speaks about a day in which all of the promises made by the Most High God Almighty for generations will be fulfilled and a new era in creation will begin.

Zechariah was filled with Great Spirit and had a lot to say about what his son would be and do as well as what will happen when the Human One was sent by Creator and Great Spirit into this world.

Reread Luke 1:67-80. What is God saying to us?

As this time of preparation comes to an end, we wait with calm anticipation for a miracle to happen.

The Minister of Indigenous Services Marc Miller spoke publicly at the beginning of December 2020 about the need for the federal government to work more collaboratively with Indigenous communities facing either long-term or short-term water advisories so that clean, safe water can be provided for their homes. The People of Neskantaga First Nation had been evacuated from their homes on October 19, 2020 after an oily film was discovered over the waters in the reservoir for their water treatment plant and flown to Thunder Bay to stay at the Victoria Inn. Space in this hotel was made for children and youth to attend school in classrooms. 9 year old Jayla Troutlake was asked by a journalist from the CBC if she was having fun in her temporary home in the hotel but she answered emphatically by saying, "No." Jayla Troutlake explained that she missed her dog Gizmo who remained at her home. Her 9 year old friend (Bedahbun) Bee Moonais said, "Sometimes, I feel that I don't exist, like nobody knows that we

don't have no clean water. Like, we're just ghosts, and we're just put in a drawer, in a box." Bee Moonais also spoke about how she was scared of the water that came out of the tap in the hotel because all of her life water that came from a tap had to be boiled first before being used. Members of Neskantaga FN have been using bottled water for drinking. Elder Laura Sakane sat in her wheelchair at the door to the hotel and watched as people came and went. Elder Laura Sakane said, "We miss home badly. We just left everything in there, even our moose meat. And I filled up our freezer before I left." Those with medical conditions accessed supports in Thunder Bay. Members of Neskantaga FN advocated on the streets for the right to have safe, clean water in their homes before they left Thunder Bay. After repairs, 14 days without any issues with the water samples taken from the water treatment plant were needed. On the weekend of December 19 and 20, 2020, the People of Neskantaga FN were tested for Covid-19 in Thunder Bay and flew home to their traditional territories. Further issues with the distribution system had not been resolved and their wastewater system still needed some improvements. However, Chief Chris Moonais and Council listened to the People of Neskantaga and returned expecting the water advisory to be lifted in the coming weeks. Upon arrival, Chief Chris Moonais noted that their water no longer looked like ginger ale but was clear at the water treatment plant. Minister Marc Miller made a commitment for the federal government to provide training over the next five years so that a team from Neskantaga would gain the knowledge and skills to manage the water treatment plant, water distribution system, and the wastewater system, building capacity for self-determination. Indigenous Services Canada are committed also to obtaining a third party review of the contractors and engineers who have not been successful in resolving the water advisory while spending more than twice the original estimate to complete the water project. The darkest days of the year came to an end and each new day will bring more light into their lives on their traditional territories. Hopefully, the Covid-19 tests will come back negative so families can celebrate together. Those who share a Christian heritage will be able celebrate the birth of the Human One promised by Creator and Great Spirit in their own homes too.

After more than 25 years on a boil water advisory, it will take some time before the People of Neskantaga will trust the water that comes from their taps.

Reread Luke 1:67-80. What is God asking us to be and do?

Give thanks for what has been accomplished in preparing the way forward towards having safe, clean water available in the homes of the People of Neskantaga FN. Continue to pray for the other Indigenous communities who still do not have safe, clean water in their homes and those who will build knowledge and skills among Water Protectors in those communities. Look for the ways in which Creator, Eternal Word, and Great Spirit are bringing new life into being. Listen to what the Source of All Life and Love is saying to us at this time.

Dianne Ternan and I wish each and all of you many blessings in your celebrations of the birth of the Christ Child and the generosity of Creator and Great Spirit. May your days be full of the peace which God offers to all humankind.

David Franks