

QUESTIONS IN DOUBT

14th DECEMBER 2025

3rd Sunday of Advent

READINGS¹

Isaiah 35:3-7

*Strengthen the weak hands
and make firm the feeble knees.
Say to those who are of a fearful heart,
“Be strong, do not fear!
Here is your God.
He will come with vengeance,
with terrible recompense.
He will come and save you.”*

*Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf shall be opened;
then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness
and streams in the desert;
the burning sand shall become a pool
and the thirsty ground springs of water;
the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp;
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.*

¹ New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition of the Bible.

Job 42:1-8

*“I know that you can do all things
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.
‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’
Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me that I did not know.*

*‘Hear, and I will speak;
I will question you, and you declare to me.’
I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees you;
therefore I despise myself
and repent in dust and ashes.”*

After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: “My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering, and my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has done.”

Matthew 11:2-11

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with a skin disease are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What, then, did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces.

What, then, did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, ‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’ “Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist, yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

James 5:7-11

Be patient, therefore, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.

Brothers and sisters, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! As an example of suffering and patience, brothers and sisters, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Indeed, we call blessed those who showed endurance. You have heard of the endurance of Job, and you have seen the outcome that the Lord brought about, for the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

REFLECTION

(Rev. Toby Keva)

One of the most challenging things in raising children is trying to answer their questions; and I tell you what: the questions are getting hard and harder to answer every year!

Take for example, my five-year-old son, Arka, who once asked me, “Dad, when we go to heaven, what is it like?” If it had been an adult who had asked the question, I would have answered it by saying something like, “Oh, heaven is whenever and wherever we are in the presence of God. So, we can actually experience heaven now whenever and wherever God is present with us!” But, how do I explain that to a five-year-old?

Or, what about when my eight-year-old son, Abinaya, asked me the question, “Dad, why do we have to go to church every Sunday?”

That’s a trickier question to answer. If I answered it by saying, “Well, we go to church every Sunday because Dad works as a Minister,” he would think that going to church is a duty.

So, I answered him by saying, “We go to church because we want to spend time with God and with our friends.” It may not be the best answer, but it’s still better than the other option!

Friends, we may laugh when children ask us some innocent questions, but asking questions is actually a critical part of their development, including of their spiritual and faith development. Asking questions can bring all of us closer to the truth.

In our reading today from the Gospel of Matthew, even John the Baptist asks a question about the true identity of Jesus. Via his own disciples, John asks Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another? (Matthew 11:3 NRSV)?”

Now, John is not a spiritual novice. Many scholars believe that not only John was the person who baptized Jesus; he actually acted as the mentor of Jesus when Jesus spent his time in the desert.²

² “Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.” (Matthew 4:1 NRSV)

Even Jesus himself calls John as the greatest person alive.

“Truly I tell you,” Jesus says, “among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist....”

(Matthew 11:11 NRSV)

Indeed, arguably at the time—besides Jesus’ own family—no one knew Jesus more than John the Baptist did. But even someone like John the Baptist has doubt about who Jesus actually is and has to ask him questions about his true identity.

Now, we actually should not be surprised that even someone like John the Baptist has questions about Jesus’ identity. Jesus doesn’t entirely fit into the Jewish expectations of the Messiah. Unlike the vision in Isaiah, Jesus does not come “with vengeance” and “with terrible recompense” (Isaiah 35:4 NRSV).

Unlike what the Jews expected of their Messiah, Jesus doesn’t act like a military leader who is going to restore Israel’s Kingdom by driving the Romans away. He is nothing like Judas Maccabaeus, the Jewish military leader who drove the Greek Seleucid Empire away from the Jewish land more than one hundred years before the time of Jesus.

But, Jesus fulfills the other elements of the Messiah in Isaiah’s prophecy:

“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf shall be opened;
then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.”

(Isaiah 35:5-6 NRSV)

Now, we hear nothing about John's reaction to Jesus' answer. Is he convinced? Or does he have more questions to ask?

Matthew, the writer of the Gospel of Matthew, does not give us any conclusion. He lets this episode finish with an open-ended note.

But, I think, that's the whole point of this episode in Matthews's Gospel. By having John asking the questions and Jesus answering them, Matthew achieves two things: first, he affirms Jesus' identity as the Messiah; second, he affirms that even someone like John the Baptist—who is a league of his own—has doubt and questions about Jesus!

See, friends, having doubt and questions is not the same with having no faith. As we can see it in many Biblical characters, including John the Baptist himself, having doubt and questions is fundamental to their spirituality. We can even argue that John's openness to express his doubt in Jesus and to ask questions about him are what enable him to endure the uncertainty and suffering in the prison until his eventual violent death at the hand of King Herod.³

To endure period of uncertainty and suffering is also at the heart of our reading today from the letter of James. The author of this letter offers two biblical characters as examples in endurance in the midst of suffering: the first one are the prophets and the second one is Job.

Now, just like John the Baptist, Job is known in the Bible as the one who not only has found favor in God's eyes; in God's own words, "there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil."⁴

³ See Mark 6:14-29.

⁴ Job 1:8.

But even Job, who is, in God's own words, the finest man on earth, has doubt in God! The book of Job is practically about questions after questions that Job raises to God in the midst of his suffering.

In the end of the book, however, instead of God rebuking Job for his somewhat 'irreverent' questions, God justifies him! God instead rebukes Job's friends who try very hard to make Job 'comes into his senses' and stop him from asking more silly questions!

One Catholic theologian, Father Richard Rohr, once likens our relationship with God to two people who are dancing, holding hands with each other. To make a dancing movement, one often needs to step back so that the other person can step forward.

Father Richard imagines that the same thing is true in our relationship with God. Often, God 'steps back' to create a space so that we can 'step forward' towards God.

When that happens, however, we may feel that God is retreating from us or, in the words of the psalmist, that God is "hiding God's face" from us.⁵ The Christian mystics often call this as God's "withdrawing of love" or, in the words of Father Richard, "God moves from dynamic presence to loving absence."⁶

So, in a moment like this, we may feel that God is leaving us in the dark; but what actually happens is that

⁵ "By your favor, O Lord,
you had established me as a strong mountain;
you hid your face;
I was dismayed."
(Psalm 30:7)

⁶ THE HIDDEN WORK OF GRACE, A Dance of Intimacy on Monday, December 8, 2025 (The Center for Action and Contemplation).

“God creates a vacuum that God alone can fill. Then God waits to see if we will trust our God partner to eventually fill that space within us, which now has grown even more spacious and receptive. What feels like suffering, depression, uselessness—moments when God has withdrawn—are often deep acts of trust and invitations to intimacy on God’s part.”⁷

Indeed, it is through this ‘darkness’, this ‘unknowing’, this ‘uncertainty’, this ‘anguish’ that Job arrives at a deeper level of understanding of his God.

“I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,”
Job says, “but now my eye sees you....”
(Job 42:5 NRSV)

I don’t think Job means that he is now able to see God with his own eyes, literally! Seeing, in the Hebrew mindset, means to have an understanding of something. So, Job is saying that he now understands who God is with more clarity or, in our Christian language, he now loves God even deeper than ever.

Friends, the theme for this Sunday of Advent is love. Today, we are exploring our love for God and, surprise of all surprises, today we learn that we can love God deeper not by ignoring our doubt or by suppressing our questions, but by openly and honestly expressing and reflecting on them. Or, in the words of Father Richard Rohr, “Yes, love is the final goal but ever deeper trust inside of darkness is the path for getting there.”⁸

Amen.

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QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Have you ever doubted God?
2. What are the questions that arise within you in those moments when you have doubt in God?
3. Can you bring those questions in a prayer to God?
4. Can you share those questions with other Christians and reflect on them together?