

WELCOME AND NOTICES

19th at 16:00 - Carols in the community garden

24th from 16:00 walk through Christingle

24th at 23:00 late night communion

25th at 10:30 a short family friendly service

26th Boxing Day – No service

CALL TO WORSHIP:

In the hustle and bustle of the Advent season, it is easy to get swept up with the business of preparing our homes for guests, visiting friends and families, and finding the perfect gift for our loved ones. Let us take a moment to slow down and remember what Advent is meant to be: a time of waiting for the coming of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ.

LIGHTING OF ADVENT CANDLE

We light our first Advent candle to remember that Christ is coming again. Christ brings hope to a troubled world. The second recalls the Old Testament prophets and the peace Christ came to bring to a troubled world.

The third recalls John the Baptist and the love Christ came to bring to a troubled world.

The fourth recalls Mary the mother of Jesus and the Joy Christ brought to a troubled world.

OPENING PRAYER

God of hope, who brought love into this world, be the love that dwells between us. God of hope, who brought peace into this world, be the peace that dwells between us.

God of hope, who brought joy into this world, be the joy that dwells between us.

God of hope, the rock we stand upon, be the centre, the focus of our lives always, and particularly at this Advent time. **Amen**

SONG/HYMNNS

Praise is rising

Praise is rising, eyes are turning to You

We turn to You

Hope is stirring, hearts are yearning for You

We long for You

When we see you we find strength to face the day

In your presence all our fears are washed away, washed away

Hosanna, hosanna

You are the God who saves us

Worthy of all our praises

Hosanna, hosanna

Come have your way among us

We welcome you here Lord Jesus

Hear the sound of hearts returning to you

We turn to you

In your kingdom broken lives are made new

You make all things new

When we see you we find strength to face the day

In your presence all our fears are washed away, washed away

Hosanna, hosanna

You are the God who saves us

Worthy of all our praises

Hosanna, hosanna

Come have your way among us

We welcome you here Lord Jesus

What's the time (4)
It's time to glorify God Luke 1: 39 - 55
19th December 2021



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Blessed be your name

Blessed be Your Name
In the land that is plentiful
Where Your streams of abundance flow,
Blessed be Your Name.

And blessed be Your Name
When I'm found in the desert place,
Though I walk through the wilderness,
Blessed be Your Name.

Every blessing You pour out I'll turn back
to praise.
When the darkness closes in, Lord, still I
will say:

Blessed be the Name of the Lord,
Blessed be Your Name.
Blessed be the Name of the Lord,
Blessed be Your glorious Name.

And blessed be Your Name
On the road marked with suffering,
Though there's pain in the offering,
Blessed be Your Name.

Every blessing You pour out I'll turn back
to praise.
When the darkness closes in, Lord, still I
will say:

Blessed be the Name of the Lord,
Blessed be Your Name.
Blessed be the Name of the Lord,
Blessed be Your glorious Name.
(Repeat)

You give and take away,
You give and take away.
My heart will choose to say:
Lord, blessed be Your Name. (x2)

Blessed be the Name of the Lord,
Blessed be Your Name.
Blessed be the Name of the Lord,
Blessed be Your glorious Name.

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CONFESSIO

**Lord our God, in our sin we have avoided
your call. Our love for you is like a
morning cloud, like the dew that goes
away early. Have mercy on us; deliver us
from judgement; bind up our wounds
and revive us; in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen**

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

God is slow to anger and full of
compassion. He forgives all who humbly
repent and trust in his Son as Saviour and
Lord. There is therefore now no
condemnation for those who are in Christ
Jesus. **Amen.**

OFFERTORY

God of all goodness and grace, receive the
gifts we offer, and grant that our whole
life
may give you glory and praise, through
Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

PRAYER FOR SUNDAY CLUB

Loving Lord, you were once a child, and
you understand all that is needed to grow
up into mature adults. Bless now our
children and those who will teach them, in
Jesus' name. **Amen.**

READING: Luke 1: 39 – 55 (read by Mark Elvin)

Mary Visits Elizabeth

³⁹ At that time Mary got ready and hurried
to a town in the hill country of

Judea, ⁴⁰ where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you will bear! ⁴³ But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfil his promises to her!"

Mary's Song

⁴⁶ And Mary said:

"My soul glorifies the Lord

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,

⁴⁸ for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,

⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me—

holy is his name.

⁵⁰ His mercy extends to those who fear him,

from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;

he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones

but has lifted up the humble.

⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things

but has sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful

⁵⁵ to Abraham and his

descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors."

This is the Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

SONG/HYMN

Come thou long expected Jesus

Come, Thou long-expected Jesus,
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us;
Let us find our rest in Thee.

Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.

Born Thy people to deliver;
Born a child, and yet a King;
Born to reign in us for ever;
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.

By Thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone:
By Thine all-sufficient merit
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.

Charles Wesley (1707-88)
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REFLECTION: WHAT'S THE TIME (4) IT'S TIME TO GLORIFY GOD

Do you sometimes get a bit fed up with all those Christmas songs? There are literally millions of possible places to visit online and all the old favourites are there – Christmas carols old and new; Christmas songs (Frosty the Snowman, Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer, All I want for Christmas is my two front teeth – once voted the worst popular song of all time). There's even a song entitled 'Grandma got run over by a reindeer.' It was American

needless to say, with lyrics best not repeated in polite company.

Some Christmas songs are downright silly, others are funny -- but some have the capacity to transform hearts and minds. One song that comes from a transformed heart is the one that we heard during our Bible reading – Mary's song, the Magnificat, the Latin word for 'My soul magnifies the Lord.'

The song is a tremendous outpouring of joy from Mary's heart knowing that she had been chosen to play a part in God's plan for the world. But it is also more than that. Dietrich Bonhoeffer called this song "the most passionate, the wildest, one might say the most revolutionary Advent hymn ever sung." He added: "This is not the gentle, tender, dreamy Mary ... This song has none of the sweet, nostalgic, or even playful tones of ... Christmas carols. It is instead a hard, strong, inexorable song about collapsing thrones and humbled lords of this world ... "

Sung by Jesus's mother — a teenager, alone and pregnant — it is surely the darkest, unruliest, most radical Christmas song of them all.

To appreciate the true significance of this song, we need to understand a little about Mary's background. She would have been familiar with poverty; with the insecurity of living in a land that had been fought over for generations. She is betrothed, we would say engaged, to a humble tekton or carpenter named Joseph and there would have been a time of waiting, at least a year, before the marriage took place.

Mary would have been in this time when we meet her, a young Jewish girl, aged somewhere between 13 and 16, thinking about the future, and dreaming of married life with Joseph.

Then, all of a sudden, to this unassuming, ordinary peasant girl, comes the angel Gabriel with a message that was to turn her life upside down. The angel tells Mary that God loves her and he has found favour with her. When she reacts with fear she's told not to be afraid but simply to listen to what she's being told. God is going to do something wonderful through her. She is going to have a son; he will be the promised king, the saviour, the Messiah. The promise of God, made years ago, and repeated often, was going to be fulfilled through her.

The promise of everlasting peace, hope, joy, love; the promise of a King who would rule with justice and truth; the promise of someone who would be on the side of the poor – all of this, all the hopes and the dreams of a nation's history were now to rest on this young girl. No pressure there then!

Mary was totally free to say 'No.' She was quite at liberty to turn down the offer. But, eventually, after careful thought Mary agreed and said 'I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said.' No compulsion, no coercion. Mary obeyed and thereby glorified God. But Mary's obedience came at tremendous cost – she was a single woman who was to become pregnant; she would be subject to gossip by those who stood around on street corners; she would have to suffer the indignity of people talking about her behind her back but just

loud enough so that she knew what they were saying; she would face public shame and even possible stoning for presumed adultery.

But, despite those difficulties, deep down in her heart she glorified God: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my Spirit rejoices in God my Saviour for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant." The Magnificat – the Promise fulfilled -- and Mary's immediate response was one of joy. One of the reasons for her joy was that she realised, in a way that she never had before, that God was real; that his promises in the past, to Israel, to Abraham and his children, would come true. Mary's soul magnified the Lord, and God gave her joy, peace, hope, love that our gifts, carols, gatherings and celebrations can only hint at.

And the same is true for us because, when like Mary we come to the point of saying 'Yes' to God, submitting ourselves to him, then we too can be released into great joy, be freed to praise. God will grow in us and move us on and give us the joy, peace, hope and love we need for ourselves and to be a light to the world. Magnificat – humble people used by God, When Mary was chosen by God her first reaction was – How? Why? Why me? Little me, insignificant me, inadequate me, unimportant me. God can't use me! God wouldn't want to use me. God couldn't use me. I'm just a poor girl, from a poor family (to misquote a line from Queen's Bohemian Rhapsody).

I think that we've done a great disservice to Mary in some parts of the church, which have embellished her, made her out to be something she never was

intended to be. Some have made Mary god-like, someone to worship and venerate; that I firmly believe wasn't meant and certainly isn't the intention of the Bible. She eventually came to be seen as sinless, taken into heaven where she prays for us and through whom we offer our prayers.

That's not Mary. Mary was a real, down to earth, humble young woman with no sense of any importance other than she was chosen by God. How else can we ever try to make sense of the incarnation, of God become flesh and blood, real life, human? Mary had to be real so that Jesus became real man, flesh and bone like us. And if Mary is real and down to earth, and gritty, and vulnerable, and poor and struggling, then we can relate to her.

It makes much more sense to me that Mary was ordinary and vulnerable like us. It makes sense to me that she grew old and had to be cared for. We don't need, and it's not helpful, to have an other-worldly image of Mary. Mary suffered like us. After all, she stood and watched as her own son was cruelly nailed to a cross and died there in front of her. Christianity has always had a message in times of disaster, in difficult times, because we believe, that, in taking on human flesh, Jesus went through what we go through. When we read of disasters, earthquakes, floods, oppression, poverty, murder – it's because of the earthly Mary and Jesus that our faith has something real to say.

I want to see Mary not as a goddess but as a human being, a woman, a young girl. I don't for one minute believe that she was sinless. And it says something to us about

our faith, if God can use this poor young girl. He chose her and brought her great joy.

If God can use Mary He can use us – weak, vulnerable, at times sinful people. People who say one thing and do the opposite; people who do and say wrong things; people who open our mouths before putting our brain in gear; who mess things up, get things wrong, who constantly have to keep coming back to Him for forgiveness.

God can and does use you and me, people like us. We are not insignificant and unimportant. God loves us, cares for us and thinks we are just who He needs and wants to work for Him. Magnificat – Changing the World.

And thirdly, Mary sang with a heart of joy because, if God was for her, in her situation, she realised that he was on the side of the poor, those who suffer across the world. She sang “He has scattered those who are proud, brought down the rulers, lifted the humble, filled the hungry, sent the rich empty away.” Mary realised that what was going on with her and in her and through her was none other than God’s revolution.

God was going to confront the powers of evil in society and bring about a tremendous transformation of the world order. And that made Mary’s heart glad. She had suffered but now there was hope for her and for all people in her situation. What she saw in the coming of the Messiah, her son, was a revolution. God was going to challenge the ways of the world.

There was to be a moral revolution where standards in society were to be challenged, sleaze countered, injustice in courts stopped. There was to be a social revolution where the humble would be raised; those who bowed down under terror of force or oppression, those who thought of themselves as nothing, would be important in God’s eyes. There was to be an end to prestige and labels, an end to the pull of the old boy network, of belonging to the right family, the right school, the right regiment, the right club. And there was to be an economic revolution where no-one dared to have too much while others had too little. That was a promise of upturned values, promise of a real revolution. And that made Mary sing for joy from the very depths of her heart. Mary saw this radical agenda for social change.

Talking about the Bible, Mahatma Gandhi once said, ““You Christians look after a document containing enough dynamite to blow all civilisation to pieces, turn the world upside down and bring peace to a battle-torn planet. But you treat it as though it is nothing more than a piece of literature.”

The magnificat is a lovely song. But behind it is real dynamite. And it’s all the more powerful because it’s sung by an ordinary young woman, Mary. And how much we need that message in society today, how much we need that same truth to be proclaimed today. And when it’s sung, the weak, the poor and the humble can and will sing for joy.

Mary sings her song of cosmic inversion — a turning of the tables. The lowest become the highest and the highest

become the lowest. The Magnificat is perhaps best understood not as a declaration of class warfare but rather as a call on the affluent everywhere to seek a new relationship with the poor and marginalised, one that begins with listening to them.

That's a fitting, if not particularly soothing, message during this professed season of goodwill towards all our neighbours. And may Mary encourage us in our faith, not by being raised on a pedestal but being the real, down to earth, human Mary.

In the name of Jesus, **Amen**

PRAYERS led by Christine McGrath

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father in heaven
Hallowed be your name
Your kingdom come
Your will be done on earth as in heaven
Give us today our daily bread
Forgive us our sins
As we forgive those who sin against us
Lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil
For the kingdom, the power
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

SONG/HYMN

Tell out my soul

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord;
Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;
Tender to me the promise of His word;
In God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of His name!
Make known His might, the deeds His arm has done;
His mercy sure, from age to age the same;
His Holy name - the Lord, the Mighty One.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of His might!
Powers and dominions lay their glory by;
Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,
The hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

Tell out, my soul, the glories of His word!
Firm is His promise, and His mercy sure:
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
To children's children and for evermore!

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CLOSING PRAYER AND BLESSING

May the strength of God sustain us; may the power of God preserve us; may the hands of God protect us; may the way of God direct us; may the love of God go with us this day and forever. **Amen.**

Go from this place glorifying and praising God: May the Lord guide you, protect you, and surround you.

And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord
In the name of Christ. Amen.