



# The **Methodist** Church

Nottingham North East Circuit - Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> December 2020



This short act of worship, based on the service which would have been held at Church today, has been prepared for you by Rev John Wiseman, to use at home. If you are well enough, why not spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

I have included some links to allow you to access versions of the hymns / songs / music via YouTube

## Opening prayer

**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Advent...I encourage you to light a candle at the start of this act of worship as we sing / read / pray the first 4 verses of our advent hymn to the tune, 'Oh worship the King, all glorious above'**

In word, thought and deed, we gather together, separated and yet connected, to offer you our worship and our praise. We come knowing that whatever we say or sing, our words will be inadequate to express our thanks to you, creating, redeeming, empowering God.

The candle of hope we light in this hour  
Proclaims that the Lord is coming in power.  
We wait for a future, now hidden from view,  
When Christ in his glory will make all things new.

We came perhaps with our lives in turmoil, our plans thrown into disarray. We come perhaps wondering what the future will hold and how we will manage. We come perhaps in search of someone to share our trouble, ease our burdens, listen to our plight

The candle of peace shines bright with God's plan;  
The wolf will lie down and dwell with the lamb.  
Our guns and our weapons, our hatred and war,  
Will give way to gardens that heal and restore.

We come just as we are, with all our faults and failing. We come just as we are with all our doubts and dilemmas. We come as we are because that is the only way we can come.

The candle of joy reminds us to sing,  
For God is at work to do a new thing.  
The proud will be humbled; the lowly will rise.  
God's kingdom is one of delight and surprise.

And we come glad of your assurance that if we turn back to you in faith and repentance, if we are indeed truly sorry, then you will once again speak words of grace, telling us that our sins have been forgiven.

The candle of love tells what we are worth:  
God loves us so much, God came to the earth!  
An angel brought news of a child who would be  
The one who would save us and set us all free.

God of love, life and light, be with us in the act of worship and accept this our prayer in the power of your Holy Spirit and in Jesus name.  
Amen

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[www.youtube.com/watch?v=D6HNI5TRdHk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D6HNI5TRdHk)

**This morning's reading pt 1: Luke 1:26-38**

**Pause for a few moments to reflect as you set out on your advent journey....**

<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin engaged to a man

whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.<sup>28</sup> And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you."<sup>[b]</sup><sup>29</sup> But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.<sup>30</sup> The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God."<sup>31</sup> And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.<sup>32</sup> He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David.<sup>33</sup> He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."<sup>34</sup> Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"<sup>[c]</sup><sup>35</sup> The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born<sup>[d]</sup> will be holy; he will be called Son of God."<sup>36</sup> And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren.<sup>37</sup> For nothing will be impossible with God."<sup>38</sup> Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

**Let's sing again, a new song but to the familiar tune of "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling"**

Mary heard the angel's message:

"Greetings, Mary, favoured one!  
Do not fear, for God is with you;  
You will one day bear God's Son."

Filled with questions, filled with wonder,

She proclaimed her faith in God:

"May it be as you have spoken;  
I'm the servant of the Lord!"

When she heard her cousin's greeting,

Mary's heart was filled with joy,

So she sang of God's great blessing

Promised in her baby boy:

"God has looked on me with favour,  
So I sing this song of praise.

God has worked, the proud to scatter...

Humble, hungry ones to raise."

Mary heard the shepherds' story,

Words she treasured with delight.

Then an angel gave the warning:

"Flee with Jesus in the night!"

Mary wondered in her anguish,

What would be the pain he'd know?  
Fleeing then, she held him closely...  
One day she would let him go.

Mary heard, "Who is my mother?

Who is in my family?

All who do my Father's bidding —

All these ones belong to me."

Later, on the hill she heard him,

"Woman, see your new son there!

You, my friend, behold your mother!"

So Christ formed new bonds of care.

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[www.youtube.com/watch?v=dYUj7iyVqPE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dYUj7iyVqPE)

**This morning's reading pt 1: Luke 1:39-56**

<sup>39</sup> In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country,  
<sup>40</sup> where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.<sup>41</sup> When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit<sup>42</sup> and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb."<sup>43</sup> And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?<sup>44</sup> For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy.<sup>45</sup> And blessed is she who believed that there would be<sup>[e]</sup> a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

**Mary's Song of Praise**

<sup>46</sup> And Mary<sup>[f]</sup> said, "My soul magnifies the Lord,<sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,<sup>48</sup> for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;<sup>49</sup> for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

<sup>50</sup> His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.<sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.<sup>52</sup> He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;

<sup>53</sup> he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.<sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,<sup>55</sup> according to the promise he made

to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

<sup>56</sup> And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

**Let's sing again a new song that picks up on the reading we have just heard. We sing it to the tune for "Once in Royal David's City"**

Mary gladly told her cousin,  
"Praise the Lord! My spirit sings!"  
Young and humble, she'd been chosen!  
God was surely changing things!  
God of love, her words ring true  
As we sing her prayer to you:

"Now my soul is gladly singing  
At the greatness of the Lord.  
I rejoice, for God is bringing  
His salvation to the world.  
All who live will say I'm blest  
Even in my lowliness.

"God is mighty, just and holy,  
And he's done great things for me.  
Those who fear him know the mercy  
That God gives us endlessly.  
Mighty ones are brought down low;  
Lowly ones find blessings flow.

"God has filled the poor and hungry,  
And he's sent the rich away.  
God is active here in history,  
In a real and wondrous way.  
God has promised, and I'm blessed,  
For I know God's faithfulness."

© 2009 by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=D3iw03OePLs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D3iw03OePLs)

**Today's message.**

When was the last time you sung out for joy at the top of your voice? Perhaps it was at a concert, a football match or even in the shower this morning. For anyone who loves live music there is perhaps no better thrill than hearing the opening notes of your favourite song being struck up, knowing that you know every single word to what is about to be played and that given the chance you would be up there on

that stage belting out the song just as good (and possibly even better) than the lead singer of the band. Caught up in the joy of the moment you don't care who hears you or if you are honest what you sound like.

Who knows you might even have experienced such a moment during an act of worship, in your local church or perhaps at a larger, maybe even national gathering of Christians. And I am sure that singing out loud is one of the things we are all looking forward to being able to do, back in our respective church buildings, once this pandemic is over. Singing with passion, singing with enthusiasm, even singing with relief!

Today's two readings are taken from the opening chapters of Luke's gospel, ones that have often been described as being ripe for a musical, because the characters Luke introduces simply cannot stop singing. Zechariah sings when his son John is born and his tongue is finally loosened. The angels sing of peace and goodwill when they share their "good news of great joy" with the shepherds. Simeon sings his song of farewell once he has seen God's promises to Israel kept in the Christ child. And as we will discover a little later, Mary bursts into song when she is greeted by her cousin Elizabeth.

Today's readings allow us to eavesdrop on two women. Two women separated by distance but soon to be as close as close can be. Two women who are going to be related through more than blood. Two women of different generations, at opposite ends of the chronological spectrum. Two women who did not expect to have a child; one because she was too old, the other because she had not yet 'known' a man. Two women linked by a sense of shame; one because she had never been pregnant, the other because she has discovered she was suddenly expecting. Two women sharing circumstances beyond their control. Two women sharing their anxieties, their worries, their fears. But also sharing their joys. Two women who had unexpectedly been blessed by God. Two women through whom God is about to transform the world.

For Elizabeth, well she had probably long given up hoping this day would come. Old in age, her days would be filled by the sound of silence, rather than noise of children and grandchildren getting under her feet. For Mary, well she might not even have thought of this

moment. Not yet married the thought of children although there, would be something on the back burner. 'Let's get the marriage out of the way and start to settle down with Joseph' she would probably have been thinking. Now the futures of both women had been thrown upside down.

Travelling up country to stay with her cousin had probably been a welcome break for Mary offering as it did an escape from all the gossip and innuendo of the villagers, an escape from the withering looks of her family and future in laws, an escape from seeing the hurt and disappointment in Joseph's eyes. A trouble shared is a trouble halved and I am sure Mary was looking forward to the blessing of being able to spend some time with Elizabeth, herself pregnant with a very unexpected child. Herself the recipient of God's grace and favour.

By opening up her home to Mary, and indeed greeting her as an honoured guest, Elizabeth overturns social expectations. An unmarried pregnant woman is not the kind of visitor every household would welcome with open arms whether they were related or not. Such a visitor might expect to be shunned and excluded. But Elizabeth demonstrates an inclusive love that goes beyond family ties recognising in Mary's situation that God is at work in a mysterious way.

Perhaps Elizabeth is drawing on her own experience of being shamed and made to feel an outsider. In that time and culture a women's role was to be a mother, to bear children, to ensure that the family line continued. As an elderly, apparently barren woman, she would possibly have endured a lifetime of being regarded as a failure. But now, her own miraculous pregnancy has reversed her own social standing as she declares, "This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favourably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people" (Luke 1:25). At long last, after many years of despair, in her twilight years, Elizabeth's honour has been restored. She is at last a married woman, pregnant with a son. Her joy is overflowing. Or at least it soon will be as the unborn child in her womb is about to leap for joy as they are both filled with the Holy Spirit.

As for Mary, well perhaps she has come expecting to receive a blessing simply by being allowed to spend time with Elizabeth. That

would have been enough. But now her elderly cousin confers on her an unexpected honour by revealing that she is in fact the one to have been blessed by Mary. Mary has been blessed by God in order to be a blessing to others.

And at that moment, it's time for the big number in Luke's nativity musical, as Mary bursts into a song of praise that is steeped in history and faith, one that Andrew Lloyd Webber would certainly liked to have had as one of his show stoppers. Commonly called the Magnificat, from the Latin for "magnify", close examination will show similarities with Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. Just like Mary, Hannah experienced a miraculous pregnancy. Just like Mary's son, Hannah's own offspring Samuel spoke God's word. And in the words of the Magnificat, Mary praises God for overturning the accepted structure of society by bringing down the powerful and lifting up the powerless by respecting, exalting, feeding, helping and remembering the poor.

But Mary doesn't just sing about God's plan of revolutionary and radical restoration, she sings at the top of her voice about being part of it. God has, is and will be going to do something rather wonderful in and for the world, and she, this unmarried pregnant women from an insignificant town in the middle of nowhere is going to be part of that plan. The question today is....are we?

Are we going to be part of God's continuing plan to restore, to refresh, to resurrect this world? Are we, just like Elizabeth, going to offer hospitality and sanctuary to those in need? Are we, just like Mary, having been blessed, going to be a blessing to others? Are we like Zechariah, like the angels, like Simeone and like Mary going to raise our voices in song to proclaim loud and clear our faith and our God? Because to leave you with the words and music of Gary Barlow and Andrew Lloyd Webber...

*Some words they can't be spoken only sung,  
So hear a thousand voices shouting love.  
There's a place, there's a time in this life  
When you sing what you are feeling,  
Find your feet, stand your ground,  
Don't you see right now the world is listening to  
what we say?*

*Sing it louder, sing it clearer, knowing*

*everyone will hear you,  
Make some noise, find your voice tonight.  
Sing it stronger, sing together, make this  
moment last forever,  
Old and young shouting love tonight.*

**Sing by Andrew Lloyd Webber & Gary Barlow. ©  
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[www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ah\\_Yf7ey1Q](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ah_Yf7ey1Q)

## **A blessing...**

Let us go from this act of worship with our  
voices raised in joy to proclaim the glory of  
God, the name of Jesus and the power of the  
Holy Spirit. Amen

## **Prayers of Intercessions**

We pray for the issues that have dominated  
our news headlines during this past week

We pray for all those hymn writers of old and  
those composing contemporary worship  
material for us to sing

We pray for all those preparing to lead our  
worship over the next week

We pray for areas of this world where the  
peace of the Christ child is in great need.

We join together to say the words of the Lord's  
prayer...Our Father.....

## **Let us conclude this act of worship by STF 186 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 forever more!

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=egwogRo9N6E](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=egwogRo9N6E)