

The Magnificat
Wednesday 1st December 2021
Rev. Susan Pickering

Gathering of the People of God

Welcome & Notices - do we want to meet in January or wait until February?

Centring Prayer

Let us prepare our hearts and minds for worship,
let us rest in the silence, breathing in the presence of God...

Call to Worship

Just when life seems cosy
And comfortably predictable:
Angels appear unexpectedly,
And point us in directions
We would not have chosen.

Just when we have reached the point
Of comforting assurance in our respectability:
Angels appear unexpectedly,
And pose uncomfortable questions
We would not have chosen to face.

And when we have followed the pointing's of angels
And answered their disquieting questions
And we feel that things can't get any worse:
Angels appear unexpectedly,
And remind us that "all shall be well"

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For the God of love works for good in all who fear God.

The God of love works for Good

In all who dare listen to angels.

Let us Worship God

Acknowledgment of Country

We recognise that God created heaven and earth, the sea and the sky,
and all that is in them.

This land is Holy Ground

As we gather we acknowledge the traditional custodians, elders, past,
present and emerging

***We honour them for their custodianship of the land, on which we
gather today.***

Lighting the Advent Candle

As we celebrate the beginning of the season of Advent,
we join with Christians around the world to light the candle of hope.

We wait with hope and anticipation for God's love to be revealed.

As we wait this summer night, we hear anew,
that the world will be pierced with a great light.

**We wait with hope and expectation for the Light of the World to be
revealed. The candle is lit as a symbol of our hope.**

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Hymn **Longing for light, we wait in darkness**

Longing for light, we wait in darkness.

Longing for truth, we turn to you.

Make us your own, your holy people,
light for the world to see.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in your Church gathered today.

Longing for peace, our world is troubled.

Longing for hope, many despair.

Your word alone has power to save us.

Make us your living voice.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in your Church gathered today.

Longing for food, many are hungry.

Longing for water, many still thirst.

Make us your bread, broken for others,
shared until all are fed.

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Christ, be our light!

Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in your Church gathered today.

Longing for shelter, many are homeless.

Longing for warmth, many are cold.

Make us your building, sheltering others,

walls made of living stone.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in your Church gathered today.

Many the gifts, many the people,

many the hearts that yearn to belong.

Let us be servants to one another,

making your kingdom come.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in your Church gathered today.

Prayer of Thanksgiving & Confession

God of Advent,
we give thanks for this night,
We have begun the journey through advent,
And we give thanks and praise for your love,
your willingness to come into the messiness and struggles of
humanity in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

As the darkness of night covers the earth,
We must confess the darkness that covers our hearts.

We confess that we live in a world that is divided.
A world of obscene wealth and a world of scandalous poverty.
A world of greed and conspicuous consumption,
And a world of hunger and famine.
A world where some live in the lap of luxury,
And a world for many that feels like hell.
We confess that in our human frailty we have accepted these
divisions.

We confess that we live in a world obsessed with the lifestyles
of a 'chosen few',
A world of people who are completely left on the margins.

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We live in a world witnessing great medical and technological breakthroughs, and a world that's being pushed back into the stone age.

A world where people expect to live for ever,
And a world where millions won't live to see their fortieth birthday.

A world seemingly of infinite choice.
And a world where people have no choice.

God forgive us for creating and accepting divisions in your world.

For erecting barriers that shut out the poor and the hungry
And that safeguard us and the many things we own;
Barriers that keep us insulated and in a state of unreality;
Barriers that separate us from those we see as different,
strange, alien –

From those we view as dangerous and unclean and who want
to keep from entering our lives, neighbourhoods, our world.

Barriers that stop us from reaching out to our siblings
And building your kingdom of justice and peace.

Send your Spirit upon us,
May She help us to open the gates,

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Break down walls,
Roll away stones,
Heal divisions,
To share bread with our siblings,
In the name of the Coming One we pray, Amen

Words of Assurance

We move closer to the moment when we will celebrate the incarnation, God coming among humanity in the vulnerable Christ child,
so friends as we consider the risk that God took, let us take the risk to be free people of God and give thanks.

Thanks be to God.

Service of the Word

Readings

1st reading	1 Samuel 2:1-10 Hannah's Prayer
2nd reading	Luke 1:46 - 55 Mary's Song of Praise

This is the Living Word

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Sermon

We've begun the journey into Advent and the reality is this is our final Wednesday evening service before Christmas and the new year. Our readings bring us the prayers, the praises of two amazing young girls/women.

Tonight I'm going to focus on the Magnificat, Mary's song of praise, but before we get there I'd like to put some context around it and consider the magnificat in light of the foretelling of Jesus' birth.

After the crucifixion and Easter event the annunciation and birth of Jesus are probably the most frequently heard and known. At the time of the annunciation Mary would've been around 13, she's a lowly, peasant, unmarried girl who lives in a culture where she is basically the sexual property of her father or the man to which she's betrothed, in this time and place she has absolutely no individual status.¹ Mary is described as a virgin, in our context we immediately understand this in terms of a young woman who hasn't engaged in intercourse, in the Hebrew scriptures the term is used more often in relation to youth. The doctrine of the immaculate conception began to

¹ Goss

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grow from the 12th century onwards.² It's suggested that this post-apostolic idealisation of Virgin robbed Mary of her humanity and sexuality.³ Ultimately this is a doctrine that has caused, like many other doctrines much harm, that's because it ignores the reality of poor women around the world, and the fact that virginity is almost never compatible with a life of poverty.⁴ We need to recover the original theological significance of the term, because its intent is suggested to be an opportunity to demonstrate the divine nature of Jesus as opposed to being a sign of Mary's sexual purity.⁵

Despite the risks involved when visited by Gabriel Mary accepts God's plan to inhabit her womb at which point Mary sets out in 'haste' σπουδῆς⁶ (spooday) to seek another woman, her cousin Elizabeth. Rather than joy the term haste carries with it a sense of alarm and anxiety and in the context in which she lives we can understand why. This was a young pregnant girl who lived in an occupied territory,⁷ a world that was rife with patriarchal violence and her being pregnant

² Urwin

³ Goss

⁴ Althaus

⁵ Cheng

⁶ Greek New Testament Luke 1:39

⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Search the Scriptures*, 1994

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carried the real risk of being stoned to death, she would've been afraid.⁸ At the moment she enters into the comfort of her cousins presence that conception is confirmed and Mary is reminded of Gabriel's earlier message, God is with her.⁹

Mary then begins her song of praise, a poem which offers us a window into the world. It opens up by establishing a mood of celebration.¹⁰ The song begins with a focus on Mary and then we notice a change in form,¹¹ reflecting a shift in perspective from the particular to the all-encompassing.¹² She sings of the eschatological reversal and offers the vision of a new community¹³ in which the powerful will be brought down and the lowly lifted up, the hungry will be filled and rich sent away empty.¹⁴ This new community will be one of justice and love, it will be one where the excluded will be included.

This song of praise can certainly be used to narrow women's roles or idealisation of women's subordination.¹⁵ However, if we

⁸ Goss

⁹ NRSV Luke 1:28b

¹⁰ Tannehill

¹¹ NRSV Luke 1:49-50

¹² Tannehil

¹³ Johnson

¹⁴ NRSV Luke 1:52-53

¹⁵ Goss

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truly read and reflect and consider the context this is a powerful ancient poem that becomes an opportunity to shock people out of their complacency, inviting people to see God in a new, more authentic light. Mary's song is an expression of how God will disrupt the social world and turn it upside down.

This unmarried, lowly peasant girl becomes an exemplary disciple, actively responding to the word of God.¹⁶ In the calling of Mary, God transgresses the bounds of sexual traditions and creatively pursues the conception of Jesus outside the bounds of vanilla religiosity.¹⁷ Mary and her sexuality is restored, she is free to answer, she has ownership of her body and breaks free from the patriarchal culture and male heterosexual economy of reproduction.¹⁸

Mary and her song of praise is a for all people, for all who are oppressed and in particular tonight, I believe that Mary and her song is for the LGBTIQ+ community. Rather than a symbol of oppressive celibacy and erotophobia, that's been used through the ages to persecute the community, she becomes, as Goss describes her, "a queer prophetess,"¹⁹ she becomes a bearer

¹⁶ Goss

¹⁷ Fiorenza Searching the Scriptures, 1994

¹⁸ Goss

¹⁹ Goss

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of radical love expressed in her yes. Mary challenges not only the social norms of her time and place, she dissolves and deconstructs traditional boundaries about gender and family life, she erases boundaries between traditional family categories of parent spouse and child.²⁰

For too long the Christian faith has been hijacked, generally by heterosexual men, this not being anything other than the reality of the context. Yet as we read this narrative the centrality of women in God's liberating action is revealed. Artificial barriers based on sexuality and gender, that have for too long disenfranchised and harmed people, are shattered. Poor theology, fear and hate has failed to recognise that in God's choice to inhabit the womb of a lowly, unmarried, peasant girl by the means of the Spirit, who is the eternal feminine, God shatters the established heterosexual patriarchy.²¹

In her decisive response to say yes and her willingness to welcome the Spirit and receive the child in her womb, Mary receives a great gift. Thomas Bohach writes "for Mary, that great thing is conceiving the Christ in her body. For [the LGBTIQA+ community] that great thing can consist of allowing

²⁰ Cheng

²¹ Goss

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Christ to take Christ's place within [the community].²² Oppression and hate, has for many within the LGBTIQ+ community prevented people from engaging in worship, participating in the body of the community of Christ and ultimately prevented people from experiencing the fullness of the love offered to all by God through Jesus.

At the beginning I suggested that this poem offers widow into the world and so as we continue to journey through advent towards Christmas Day let us all engage with the invite to look into that window and view God through the more authentic lens which brings life and hope to all people, let us see God who loves, who refuses to accept the barriers that society has constructed, let us hear the calls for justice that disrupts the social world. Let us begin to hear this song with fresh ears, to hear the words of the prophetic woman of liberation and inclusion. As a community of faith let us empower the silenced and the excluded to participate in this creative conception and enable people to participate in the birth of the good news. As a people of faith let us work together to provide safe spaces that reverses the culture of poor theology, fear and hate. This Christmas may we reconnect with the God who demands that we respect the dignity of the whole of humanity in its rainbow of

²² Bohach

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diversity and prepare the way for a new upside down way in the world.

Prayer

Inclusive God, whose power does not reside in fleshless lonely purity, whose word is enwombed at the heart of creation: We give thanks for Mary, whose yes made a way for love; whose song of transformation makes rulers and thrones tremble; whose prayer is heard because she is one of us. In the name of the Word made flesh. Amen

Hymn When out of Poverty (CH 291)

When out of poverty is born
A dream that will not die,
and landless, weary folk find strength
To stand with heads held high,
It's then we learn from those who wait
To greet the promised day,
'The Lord is coming; don't lose heart.
Be blest; prepare the way!'

When people wander far from God,
Forget to share their bread,

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They find their wealth an empty thing,
Their spirits are not fed.
For only just and tender love
The hungry soul will stay.
And so God's prophets echo still
'Be blest; prepare the way!'

When God took flesh and came to earth,
The world turned upside down,
And in the strength of woman's faith
The Word of Life was born.
She knew that God would raise the low,
it please her to obey.
Rejoice with Mary in the call,
'Be blest; prepare the way!'

Prayers for the People

Sacrament of the Lords Supper

Peace

Communion

- Invitation

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Come to this table

For here we will be fed

Here we will be reminded of the love that entered the world for
all

- **Great Prayer of Thanksgiving**

God be with you

And also with you

Lift up your hearts

We lift them to God

Let us give thanks to the God of love

It is right to give our thanks and praise

Talon: Why do we give thanks and praise at this table?

Leader: It is right to give thanks and praise because God is
always with us

And so we gather in the presence of God and one another,
Trusting that where the Spirit of God moves among us , we are
beckoned to present ourselves in the holy work of creation.

Gathered together we remember your commitment to your

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people, commandments to love one another, you liberation from injustice and oppression, your promise that you will not forget us.

We give thanks that you entered into the chaos and struggles of humanity in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, you know our pain, our grief, our love and our joy

Therefore, with our hearts lifted high,
we praise you with the faithful of every time and place,
Joining with the whole creation in the eternal hymn:

- **Sanctus**

Holy, Holy Holy Lord
God of Love and Light
heaven and earth are full
Are full of your glory.
Blessed is the one who comes,
in the name of the Lord
Hosanna in the highest
Hosanna in the highest
Hosanna in the highest

- **Institution**

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Susan: Tonight we gather around this table to share the bread and the cup.

Talon: Why do we eat bread at this table?

Leader: We share the bread on this table remembering that...
...Do this in remembrance of me

Talon: Why do we drink from the cup at this table?

Leader: we drink from the cup on this table...

...Do this in remembrance of me

What do we remember at this table?

All: We remember Jesus' death and celebrate his resurrection; we await with hope his coming again to bring peace and justice to the earth;

- Invocation & Lord's Prayer

Holy Spirit, come rest upon this bread and this cup,
Fill them with the vibrant life of Christ.

Come and rest upon your people and open our hearts to receiving the love of Jesus the Christ.

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...And as a sign of sacred unity, we join together in the 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. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

- **Breaking the Bread**

Prayer after Communion

As an inclusive community we have been fed with the bread of life and the cup of the new covenant
Our hope is restored and renewed,
We affirm our diversity our uniqueness
We affirm our loving acceptance of one another
And we reclaim our place in the body of Christ,
In the name of the One who is Love, Amen

Sending Forth the People of God

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Hymn Guide us to Openness (Tune TiS 154)

Guide us to openness, Spirit of Mercy,
Aid us in seeking God's justice and grace.
Move us to show Christ's compassion through witness,
Love first to offer and hate to erase.
Guide us to openness! Guide us to openness,
Let no one ever be shunned or denied.
Make of the Church a bold place of compassion,
That all who seek you may come and abide.

Spirit of mercy, impart Your presence,
Fill both our hands and our hearts with Your care.
Let no one suffer or grieve unattended,
Grant us your kindness and warmth here to share.
Guide us to openness! Guide us to openness,
Let no one ever be shunned or denied.
Make of the Church a bold place of compassion,
That all who seek you may come and abide.

Though there are those who would limit Christ's graces,
Still we refuse to believe in such lies,
For in this time we have made a commitment
Never to limit love's power or size.
Guide us to openness! Guide us to openness,

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Let no one ever be shunned or denied.
Make of the Church a bold place of compassion,
That all who seek you may come and abide.

Words of Mission & Blessing

Let us leave this place and continue the journey of Advent,
with songs of praise and liberation in our hearts and on our lips.
Let us never lose hope that love will win,
that the broken-hearted will be comforted,
that the light of justice will dawn on the whole earth.

May the blessing of God, the outrageous one, continue to
comfort and disturb us,
May the blessing of Christ, powerful in his vulnerability, be born
in us afresh.

And may the blessing of the Holy Spirit, ungraspable yet
longed for, birth within us the desire to see justice and peace
upon all the earth Amen.

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