

CIRCUIT SERVICE FOR 19th DECEMBER 2021-Rev. David Jenkins

Call to Worship-The fourth Sunday of Advent-the Sunday before Christmas.

We light candles for each week of Advent in celebration of Jesus the Light of the World

(Each Church may wish to follow its own Advent Candle lighting liturgy at this point or simply follow on with this service as printed)

[Hymn 350 Singing the Faith \(238 Hymns and Psalms\) "I cannot tell"](#)

I cannot tell why he, whom angels worship,
should set his love upon us, now or then,
or why, as Shepherd, he should seek the wanderers,
to bring them back, they know not how or when.
But this I know, that he was born of Mary
when Bethlem's manger was his only home,
and that he lived at Nazareth and laboured,
and so the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is come.

I cannot tell how silently he suffered,
as with his peace he graced this place of tears,
or how his heart was broken,
the crown of pain to three-and-thirty years.
But this I know, he heals the broken-hearted,
and stays our sin, and calms our lurking fear,
and lifts the burden from the heavy-laden,
for yet the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is here.

I cannot tell how he will win the nations,
how he will claim his earthly heritage,
how satisfy the needs and aspirations
of east and west, of sinner and of sage.
But this I know, all flesh shall see his glory
and he shall reap the harvest he has sown,
and some glad day his sun shall shine in splendour
when he the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is known.

I cannot tell how all the lands shall worship,
when at his bidding every storm is stilled,
or who can say how great the jubilation
when every human heart with love is filled,
But this I know, the skies will thrill with rapture,
and myriad, myriad human voices sing,
and earth to heaven, and heaven to earth, will answer:
"At last the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is King!"

(William Fullerton)

Prayer

In deep anticipation we approach you, Living God.

In the worship of this day we long for you to encounter us in such a way that our lives are deepened with insight and ignited with wonder.

We worship you, God beyond all time and space and thought.

We thank you for the gift of life and all the gifts of every single day of life.

We thank you that, before we were ever aware of it, our lives have been surrounded by your all-embracing love.

We are grateful that we can glimpse something of that love in our relationships and thank you for the profound gift of human love.

We recognise, with sorrow, how we have sometimes taken such love for granted, or spurned it or abused it, failing to love in return.

In your healing forgiveness enable us to love much more deeply, with greater reserves of understanding, with real respect, heightened affection and a compassion that continually expands beyond our own concerns to the needs of others.

May this act of worship contribute to your transforming re-moulding of our lives-in Jesus our Lord. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.**

[Hymn 191 Singing the Faith \(94 Hymns and Psalms\) "Away in a manger"](#)

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed, the little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head;
the stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay, the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes, but little Lord Jesus no crying he makes.
I love you, Lord Jesus! Look down from the sky, and stay by my side until morning is nigh.

Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask you to stay close by me for ever, and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in your tender care, and fit us for heaven, to live with you there.
(Anon)

All-Age Talk-"Hanna learns about Christmas" (A Story by Pat McIntosh in "Stories for Christmas")

Hanna sat on the ground, leaning against the wall of the hut. She was cold, yet she chose to be outside the hut. Inside it was dark, uncomfortable and not much warmer. Hanna was also hungry. She couldn't remember a time when she hadn't been hungry. Long ago, her mother had said, they all used to have enough to eat. Hanna thought it must have been wonderful. Sometimes her mother told her about the farm-house they used to live in and all the animals they had. Hanna was born there, but when she was still a baby there had been soldiers fighting in the fields. For fear of coming to harm, they had to leave the farm. Much the same happened to many others and now Hanna's family lived with other homeless people in a village of huts. "Quickly, Hanna", her mother called, "Come and get your food bowl. the other children are starting to line up." So Hanna ran and joined her friends as they waited for the food which was given to them every day. Sometimes they would see the lorries come to the village, unload the food and drive off again. Where they came from Hanna did not know. She was only glad that they did come. "It's the smiling lady today", said one of the children. "Good", said Hanna, "I like her". She did not like all those who came to give out the food. Some seemed too busy to take much notice of the children. Others got impatient and tried to make them hurry up. No doubt, thought Hanna, they were all good people, or they would not come at all. But she liked the lady with the ready smile best. Soon the children passed the news down the line, "The lady is giving us extra today." Everybody got very excited. "And a toy, too", said someone else. A toy! Hanna could hardly remember when she had last had a toy, it was so long ago. All the children wondered what was so special about that day. Then one of the girls said, "The lady says it's Christmas." Christmas. What was that? Hanna wondered. Just then she saw one of the other girls carrying a doll. Hanna had never seen such a thing in her life. How she hoped there would be a doll for her! And there was! More exciting even than the extra food was the doll which the smiling lady put in her arms. It was the most beautiful thing Hanna had ever seen. "Happy Christmas", said the smiling lady. Hanna smiled back and then plucked up her courage and asked, "Please, what is Christmas?" "When I have finished serving the meal, I will tell you," said the lady.

So Hanna and her friends sat on the ground and listened to the story of the very first Christmas, when Joseph and Mary came to Bethlehem and a baby boy was born. "And when the baby Jesus grew up, he went about helping people", finished the lady. "Just like you help us," said Hanna. And, once again, the lady smiled.

Reader One- Micah 5: 2-5a

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you will come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labour has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace.

Reader Two- Luke 1; 39-56

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

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant. Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants for ever." And Mary remained with her for about three months and then returned to her home.

[Hymn 187 Singing the Faith \(87 Hymns and Psalms\) "The Angel Gabriel"](#)

The Angel Gabriel from heaven came,
his wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame;
"All hail", said he, "thou lowly maiden Mary,
most highly favoured lady."
Gloria!

"For known a blessed Mother thou shalt be,
all generations laud and honour thee,
thy son shall be Immanuel, by seers foretold'
most highly favoured lady."
Gloria!

Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head,
"To me be as it pleaseth God", she said,
"My soul shall laud and magnify his holy name:"
most highly favoured lady.
Gloria!

Of her, Immanuel, the Christ was born
in Bethlehem, all on a Christmas morn,
and Christian folk throughout the world will ever say,
"Most highly favoured lady."

Gloria!

(Sabine Baring-Gould)

Sermon "Dynamite-handle with care-if you dare!"

What did you think when you heard today's readings being read?

They are both, especially the second one, turning the expected social order upside down.

The first one speaks of a ruler who will stand and shepherd his people, who comes from one of the little clans of Judah.

If the reading begins to be linked with the promise of the Messiah he won't be from a large thriving city of undoubted importance-not from an obvious place like Jerusalem, but from the "little town of Bethlehem".

The second reading is particularly unusual in the Bible as there are very few descriptions of two women meeting, and of an extensive account of their conversation.

Even today it is unusual for women to be centre-stage-in present day Afghanistan, for example, it would be unheard of; but, even in a country like Sweden, it is news when they have their first female prime minister. In the Bible, sometimes subtly, sometimes blatantly men are exalted over women; women are envisaged as man's inferior, often even as man's property. Yet here, in this deeply respectful, affectionate, reverential meeting of two female relatives some of the deepest truths about human possibility and of the nature of God emerge.

Mary's song, called the Magnificat, has been described as "the most revolutionary document in history".

This is dynamite-handle with care-if you dare!

Rulers cast down from their thrones, the rich sent empty away, the proud scattered in the imaginations of their hearts.

The hungry filled with good things, the lowly lifted up-that reversal of the world order, of the established status quo will be echoed in one of the phrases frequently used by Mary's grown up son-"The first shall be last and the last first."

If we take it seriously, if we follow it through thoroughly, Mary's dangerously subversive song is world-transforming. Within the beauty of its poetry it offers a vision of economic, moral, social and spiritual upheaval.

It also enables us to discover afresh the values that make human life worthwhile. These values are found most fully when we co-operate with God and with one another towards the emerging of an infinitely better and more profoundly humane world.

The implications of Mary's song for our present world include everyone finding a place to call home. In a world of an increasing number of refugees so many nations are concentrating on closing their borders and making life even more difficult for those who have already been through many terrible experiences to survive. Refugees, treated as political pawns, cynically welcomed by Belarus, in order to cause problems for their European neighbours and with callous disregard that these people are left in freezing conditions in a no man's land where soldiers from Belarus and from Poland will attack them if they try to enter either country.

The first United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees said this in 1952-"When my good old father died, I inherited from him a piece of cardboard on which someone had written a poem of 4 lines, I have seen that piece of cardboard on the wall of my father's library for 30 years and now it is on the wall my private office in Geneva. I have it there, because it expresses extremely well what is the essence of our work with refugees to provide them with a place of which they can say what the poem on cardboard says -"A person needs a little place. Small as it may be. On which he can say, "This is mine, here I live, Here I love, here I find my rest. This is my land, this is my home."

Not all refugees travel to distant lands. Some are displaced in their own country and may return home. Fatima with her two children returned to her village in Iraq after 4 years of civil conflict to find her home reduced to rubble and her belongings stolen. Deeply saddened she burst into tears. "But after I cried", she said, " I gave thanks to God that my children and I are still alive. They are much more precious than buildings and belongings". Her thankfulness turned to determination, and, despite the laughter of her neighbours, she started to rebuild her home. With the help of Tearfund's partners she rebuilt the house and opened a small shop within it.

Small but significant steps are transformative, like the Messiah who emerged from the little town of Bethlehem, like the phrases in Mary's song about lifting up the lowly and filling the hungry with good things.

The contributions we may make to life may seem to be relatively insignificant, but who knows where they may lead?

A woman who had survived Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen and had spoken at a number of places, including the opening of the Holocaust galleries at the Imperial War Museum and the first Holocaust memorial Day at Westminster Central Hall lay in her bed at Barnet Hospital, her life very nearly over. A young Junior Doctor was trying to insert a cannula into her concealed veins. The woman winced and cried with pain as the needle repeatedly failed to hit its target, but eventually the doctor managed it. The woman said, "Not bad for an 88 year old survivor of Auschwitz and Belsen!" The doctor was dumbfounded and asked the lady's daughter if this was indeed true. She confirmed it and the doctor looked again deeply into the woman's face and asked her if she had ever spoken at a certain school in Dorset. She thought about it-she had spoken to so many students and children in so many schools about her experiences-and she then said "Yes, I can remember." The doctor told the lady and her daughter that he went to that school and was in the Sixth Form when he had heard her speak. He said you could hear a pin drop, she had spoken so engagingly and expressively. He told the lady and her daughter that her presence and her words had made such a deep impact on him that it influenced him in his decision to study medicine. And there he was, years later, helping her in her last few days on the earth. The doctor, the lady and her 2 daughters who were present found this discovery of each other in that place utterly extraordinary.

Who knows what influence for good even small actions or words may have years afterwards?

Who knows what part we might play in that on-going story of revolutionary transformation of Mary's song?

But Mary's song not only has a radically global dimension, it is hugely personal-from beginning to end. "My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour". It is the language of one who walks with God, who knows God, who loves God. Any impact for good we may have upon the world has to start from within.

There is another song which starts with the words "Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me".

Mary's song, too, with all its vast repercussions for changing the world begins with her, with you, with me.

If the contribution we are to make will involve us in all which lifts the lowly and fills the hungry; in all that undermines tyrannical and anti-human structures, then all of that needs to start with us-each of us-in our own personal faith and relationship with God.

Where do we stand in responding to Mary's song, in living out the ways of justice and compassion, in meeting with and rejoicing in God our Saviour?

Prayer-In the silence let us make our own response to what we have heard.....

Hymn 204 Singing the Faith (107 Hymns and Psalms) "In the bleak midwinter"

In the bleak midwinter frosty wind made moan, earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow, in the bleak midwinter, long ago.

Heaven cannot hold him, nor the earth contain; heaven and earth shall flee away when he comes to reign.
In the bleak midwinter a stable- place sufficed God, the Lord Almighty, Jesus Christ.

Angels and archangels may have gathered there, cherubim and seraphim thronged the air,
but his mother only, in her maiden bliss, worshipped the beloved with a kiss.

What can I give him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd I would bring a lamb;
if I were a wise man I would do my part; yet what I can I give him, give my heart.

(Christina Georgina Rossetti)

Prayers

Forgive us all for the times when we exhibit all the worst features of religiosity.

Excite us with the vision of Mary's song being expressed in the world's life.

Transform our behaviour so that women receive a central and celebrated place in the life of every nation and every home.

Overturn the power of the arrogant and may we begin to discover the leadership of gentle and humble people, mirroring your image.

May the horror of hunger be banished into the past.

May people receive adequate clothing and fresh water and safe shelter and a home to call their own-all people-everywhere.

May the peoples of each nation, and all the nations of the world co-operate together against all the threats to our existence.

May all of us, in generation after generation, discover the glory, the wonder and the joy of the Mighty God who does great things for us all. Amen.

[Hymn 186 Singing the Faith \(86 Hymns and Psalms\) "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!

(Timothy Dudley-Smith)

Benediction - Revolutionary God, making the first last and the last first, turning life upside down; give us the conviction, the courage and the compassion we need to work alongside you. May this be our life's work, our enduring contribution. Bless us, Father, Son and Spirit, so that we become bringers of true and life-changing blessing in the world that is your and ours. Amen.