

HOW Mission Community & KSAT Worship Service for 20th December 2020 THEME: 'Let it be to me according to Your Word'.

Welcome to this week's service for 4th Sunday in Advent

Call to Worship: *'Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign: the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel' (Isaiah 7 v 14)*

Prayer

'My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.' As we gather, apart and yet together, may we, too, open our hearts, echoing the words of Mary. **Amen**

HYMN MP 631 – Tell out my soul<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eqwoqRo9N6E>

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 to 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!

Prayer

God who strengthens, sustains, raises up, redeems, births, brings, gathers and celebrates,
God whose love is bigger than the skies, firmer than the earth, wider than the seas;
God, You approached this world in the words of an angel to a young girl, asking consent, and
bringing life unexpected.

Now we approach You, in the joy of welcome, knowing that You will never turn us away.
To You be glory and praise and all thanksgiving.

Lord, we confess that sometimes when we read Your Word, we think 'that was then', or 'that
was for them'; it's not really anything to do with us. **Open our eyes, Lord.**

We don't always want to hear Your call to us. **Open our ears, Lord.**

We don't always want You to break into our lives. **Open our minds, Lord.**

We don't believe You could choose us. **Open our hearts, Lord.**

Forgive us, Lord, when we close our eyes, ears, minds and hearts to You and to each other.
We pray that we might be more like Mary, not hesitating, but hearing Your voice and ready to
obediently respond to Your call. In Jesus' Name. **Amen**

Jesus says, 'Your sins are forgiven; go and sin no more'. And Lord, we are thankful. **Amen.**

Bible Readings:

Isaiah 12 v 2-6

*"Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD Himself, is my
strength and my song; He has become my salvation."*

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

*In that day you will say: "Give praise to the LORD, proclaim His name; make known among the
nations what He has done, and proclaim that His name is exalted.*

Sing to the LORD, for He has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world.

Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you."

Luke 1 v 26-38

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

HYMN – The angel Gabriel<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fzC9dxwRddc>

The angel Gabriel from heaven came, his wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame;
'All hail,' said he, 'O lowly maiden Mary,' most highly favoured lady: Gloria!

'For know a blessed mother you shall be, all generations praise continually,
Your son shall be Emmanuel, by seers foretold,' most highly favoured lady: Gloria!

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

Of her, Emmanuel, 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!

Reflection

The countryside was fragrant with the scent of orange and lemon blossom and other aromatic plants. The fields were bright with wild flowers – scarlet anemones, golden crown daisies and bright-eyed marguerites. The landscape was studded with gnarled fig trees, dark green cypress trees and graceful palm trees, swaying in the gentle breeze.

Nestling within this landscape, lay a little town, which was, and still is, considered the back of beyond, drab and seedy – the town of Nazareth on the slopes of the hills of lower Galilee. Its houses were small with flat roofs and its busy narrow streets rose above the market place in terraces. The town bustled with activity and noise – traders selling their wares, children energetically running here and there – laughing & shouting to one another as they played.

But all was not well in this little town – or indeed in the nation – for the land was occupied by enemy forces. Roman soldiers were everywhere – bringing with them a religion which denied the one true God – introducing a host of different idols and ideas, putting up taxes and, in general, making life very difficult indeed for the inhabitants of Nazareth in Galilee.

Here, in this little town, lived a young woman, an ordinary young woman. Not much is known about her – she was probably still in her early teens and, almost certainly, a simple peasant maid. An ordinary young woman – engaged and looking forward to her marriage to the respected local carpenter. An ordinary young woman – yes – but an ordinary young woman, chosen for a very special and unique task by Almighty God. An ordinary young woman – yes – but one who responded by simply and humbly saying 'Yes!' to God.

Mystified and uncomprehending, she does not demur or protest, like some others before her. Moses asked God to send someone else; Gideon, cowardly hiding in a winepress said, 'I'm too weak'; Isaiah proclaimed 'I'm not worthy'; Jeremiah thought he was too young; Abraham and Zechariah believed that they and their wives are too old! But Mary? Mary simply says, 'Yes' – putting no limits on God or His ability to do what He says.

And because Mary said 'Yes', God was able to give to us the best Christmas gift we could ever receive – that of a Saviour – someone who could transform our lives, our families, our communities – transform even the mess of the world.

Because of one human life freely and simply surrendered to God, the door was opened for salvation to come to the whole world.

The scene changes – to countryside perhaps not quite so fragrant – but nevertheless distinctive with the smells of autumn and winter – damp leaves, spicy fruit, pine trees; and another small town comes into view – just to the west of the hills of the northern Pennines. Perhaps not quite the back of beyond – but still unknown to many! In these streets, people are scurrying about their business, trying to catch up with life after lockdown or sauntering in the winter sunshine, when there is any! Some are busy making an honest living; others are hurrying to someone's aid; still others are charging around doing last minute shopping, cooking and cleaning before the celebrations.

But all is not well in this town, or indeed the country, either – enemy forces are in occupation – denying the one true God and introducing other idols – possessions, money, selfishness and pride; some may even be scheming & planning violence of one sort or another. Some people are content and fulfilled and thankful. Some are more selfish, proud and critical of others. Many are lonely and frightened. Some are dying of disease, other are dying of heart-ache. Many are crying out 'Which way should I go? What is life all about'.

Here, in this town, live ordinary men, women and children – going about their everyday lives – working, resting and playing. And God is still searching, among these ordinary men, women and children, for those who will cooperate with and follow Him. And this time, God's eye lights – not on Mary – but on you and me. You and me – very ordinary men, women and children – but each one of us chosen & hand-picked by Almighty God for a special and unique purpose – and He calls us to follow His way – to be part of the eternal and universal jigsaw of His plan of salvation; to accept His gift to us as Lord and Saviour and, like Mary, to share that gift of love with those we meet.

God's gift of His Son to Mary grew inside her, as she pondered in her heart what it all meant and then she gave Him to the world.

God's gift of His Son to you and me, first of all has to be accepted in our hearts and then we are called to share that love, forgiveness and grace within the church, the community and the world around.

God gives us this gift of His love, not just at Christmas, but every day. What gifts will we give Him – and each other – not just this Christmas but every day?

Mary, humbly answered 'I am the Lord's servant. Let it be to me according to Your word'. How will we answer His call this Christmas and into 2021? **Amen**

Sit quietly for a few minutes and think about Mary's response and our own response. You may like to listen to the following (from Graham Kendrick's 'Make Way for Christmas' – or use the words as a prayer:

Let it be to me <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VFSW9VRmHTc>

Let it be to me according to Your Word. Let it be to me according to Your Word
I am Your servant, no rights shall I demand; let it be to me; let it be to me
Let it be to me according to Your Word

Prayers of Intercession: (based on the Magnificat – Luke 1 v 46-55)

*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.*

Take a moment to reflect on this past week - what were the good moments, the moments that made your spirit rejoice, the moments you can thank and praise God for.

*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.*

Remember the 'great things' that God has done – for you, those you love and for all people.
Praise and thank Him for His greatness and His Holiness

His mercy is for those who fear Him from generation to generation.

Pray for those who love and serve God around the world; especially remembering those who are suffering for their faith. Pray that they will know God's strength and experience mercy.

*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;*

Pray for countries and people who are in positions of power – that they may use their power and influence for the good of all. Pray for Governments at this time of world crisis, for a humility and a willingness to work together that all may benefit.

He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

Pray for all in any kind of need – the sick, the bereaved, the lonely, the anxious; the hungry, the homeless, the abused. Pray that God will meet them at their point of need and raise up those are able and willing to help.

*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
forever.*

Lord, help us to remember and hang on to Your promises in this coming week, and help us to keep in mind Your presence with each one of us in every situation we will face – thank You.

Amen

Lord's Prayer

Hymn MP 503 – O little town of Bethlehem

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=71ppzuPARXg>

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by
Yet in thy dark streets shineth, the everlasting Light
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight

For Christ is born of Mary and gathered all above
While mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love
O morning stars together proclaim the holy birth
And praises sing to God the King and peace to men on earth

How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heaven
No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin
Where meek souls will receive Him still the dear Christ enters in

O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray
Cast out our sin and enter in, be born to us today
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel

The Blessing

May the light of the Christmas message shine in the dark places of our hearts; may the urgency of the Christmas message transform the complacent places of our hearts; and the challenge of the Christmas message lead us to change the priorities in our hearts; this Advent and always.

Amen.

