

Call to Worship

We come today in joy for God calls us in love:

we are blessed and favoured.

We come today with hope for God calls us to a new way:

we are blessed and favoured.

We come today in faith for God calls us by name:

we are blessed and favoured.

Let us answer God's call to worship as we light the candles of hope, peace, love and joy.

Hymn The angel Gabriel from heaven came

Let us pray, Our souls reach out to you our God,

we rejoice in the knowledge of you.

This week we come before you in hope and in joy,
look with favour on your humble servants.

We, like Mary the mother of Jesus, give thanks:

for all the great things that you have done for us; for your unending mercy, poured out on all; for the strength to walk with you
through the trials of this life; for the knowledge that through your grace we are your beloved, blessed always.

We give thanks that in you the weak will find strength;

the hungry will be fed; the fearful will know peace;

the poor will have their needs met; the powerful will know their place; and all peoples will be united in your love:

in a world of pain and distraction we may not

always fulfil your wishes, but we ask today

for your help as we try to bring this new life ever closer.

Throughout the ages of our world, you have been there,

protecting your people, supporting and sustaining, keeping and shielding, in your mercy, you have shown us undying love and

in that love, you sent your only son to be with us forever.

In this Advent season, as we look forward to the celebration of his birth, we give thanks for all that you have given us, all that we are and all that we can do in your name, today and every day, as we pray together the words you taught us, saying, Lord's Prayer

Change

In the midst of fear, swamped by powerful emotions, Mary, who became mother of God, took courage in both hands and offered:
Here I am.

Mary acceded not out of meekness or naïveté, but in boldness and the fierceness of love.

As we approach the Incarnation in the midst of pandemic with fear all around and emotions overwhelming how can we offer our: Here I am.

Offering not by repressing our fear or denying our emotion but, in the midst of those, dredging up a vestige of faith.

Faith that acknowledges wherever we are, whoever we are,
God's invitation to us is generous and grace filled:
to be midwives of God for this day.

In the midst of the trauma in which we live
may we muster courage, boldness, grace
and fierce love, offering to God: Here I am.

Mary had a huge responsibility placed upon her shoulders, which she accepted with wisdom and grace. Think back over your life to times when you faced a big change and increased responsibility.

- How did you react at that time of change?
- What have you learnt from that experience? • What would you do differently now?

Think of someone you know who is facing a big challenge at this time and consider getting in touch with them to offer any support you are able to provide.

SONG Mary Did you know?

Luke 1:46b-55 (Magnificat)

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."

Tell Out My SOul

Sermon

Sorry to interrupt. I know it is Christmas and all that, and everyone is busy singing, oops I mean listening to carols and preparing for nativity services, though from a particularly novel and peculiar angle this year, but I have to interrupt.

My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favour on the lowness of his servant.

And as the festivities, and attempts at carol services and Christmas videos are put together for Christmas Eve, and technology is being used like it never has before in church, I have to interrupt.

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.

And as countries compete in new ways as we pull ourselves through the coronavirus pandemic, and we fight over vaccines, and put national economic plans in place, rather than global, and high streets reel in the wake of covid-19, I have to interrupt.

He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

And as administrations settle in the US and the fallout there-of, and the UK skirts with the lie of the land due to Brexit and China and the West and Russia fall out, and the world shrinks in its vision as people's expectations fall between what they would expect at this time of year and what is in reality possible, I have to interrupt.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;

And as communities redraw the paradigm of our age in the light of coronavirus and political changes, and injustices arise in their wake that have the potential to be used to redraw how we do economics and neighbourhoods and welfare and church, and I fear the chance is missed, I have to interrupt.

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

The reality is that in the midst of our world right now—and it so happens to be the legacy of pandemic that has given us the greatest existential experience of a generation—God ironically breaks in with a song. It is a song that interrupts. It is meant to. It is meant to jar and annoy and provoke us. That is what happened first time around to a young woman whose life was pushed into the place of an outcast. And it still must.

This song of Mary has upset and annoyed governments, who have refused to let it be spoken, and people of faith who would rather surrender to the Victorian romance of Christmas, interrupts all of that with the core theme of incarnation.

It is a powerful message because it is a message of hope, and hope is powerful when it disrupts the ways of the majority and powerful.
It is a vision of another way of organising the world and vision is powerful when it confronts those who have relied on an alternative that is less than adequate.
It is a word of justice and justice is powerful as a motive for those who have lived with injustice.
And so God interrupts Mary's life, a Nation's, the powerful, the politicians and the theologians.

God interrupts the church, the season and the world
as each surrenders to what it imagines is inevitable,
post pandemic, with a reminder of what is possible
now more than ever before.

May we interrupt the season with God's song,
God's message, God's word.

In closing I share with you these words from Romans 16:

²⁵ Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, ²⁶ but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from ²⁷ faith— ²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

Prayer

Loving God, in your unending love you sent an angel to Mary,
telling her that she is blessed and highly favoured;
as you were with her,
we know today that you are with us and we give thanks.
Knowing your presence and rejoicing in the surety of your love
we pray today for your blessing and your guidance.
On this winter's day we remember the gift of your creation,
given to us for sustenance and shelter, for us to enjoy and to protect,
yet we have squandered this gift, and put the lives of future generations in jeopardy, we ask for the
strength to make changes
now to protect and renew our planet before it is too late.
In this time of uncertain futures, we pray for your church,
both world-wide and this community of believers
gathered before you today,
grant us the wisdom to create and support new growth as we dedicate ourselves once more to your
great commission.
At this time of plenty, we give thanks for all that we have,
for the joy that this season brings and the time we set aside to celebrate, but we also remember
those among us
and those around us with little, who struggle and go hungry,
help us to be more generous and more loving this year.
We pray, today, for ourselves, your beloved children,
as we seek to follow you.
As Christmas approaches, and expectations of plenty, of community, of happiness are set, we
remember that not all people
enjoy this time of year, that the joy of others can cause pain in some, we ask for the wisdom to care
for and be sensitive to those who need our help at this time of year, especially in light of the new
restrictions placed on us at this time that we might care for the lost and the least among us, and be
mindful of the message of hope we are called to share. Amen.

Hymn Once in royal David's city

Offering Plate available as you leave

Blessing and Sung Amen