

## Church at Home

### Advent 3

### Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> December 2020

*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing,  
give thanks in all circumstances;  
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

I Thessalonians 5:16-18

We are coming close to the mystery of Christmas on our Advent journey. The focus for this Sunday is Joy – in fact it is known as *Gaudete Sunday*, which is Latin for ‘rejoice’ and on some Advent wreaths the candle is pink rather than purple in recognition of this change of mood. Christmas excitement is growing as the great Feast Day of the church draws near! Mary’s song of joy picks up this theme as she bubbles over with praise at what God will do through her for the whole world. God’s promise to Abraham long ago is being kept and it will turn everything upside down. As we travel through the last days of our Advent waiting, the sound of celebration is already in the air!

#### **This Sunday’s Bible readings include:**

**Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11:** These are the prophet’s words that Jesus will use to describe himself at the beginning of his ministry in Nazareth. They express the good news of hope that the Christ-child brings into our needy world.

**Luke 1:46b-55:** Here is Mary’s much-loved but very radical song of praise in response to the privilege and miracle of becoming the mother of Jesus. She draws on her knowledge of the Psalms and Hannah’s song from the book of Samuel. Mary is ready for the miracle of Christmas

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-24:** Paul gives us short, memorable guidelines for how to live as Christians awaiting the Lord’s return and ending with a prayer of blessing for us all.

**John 1:6-8, 19-28:** John the Baptist is the lamp pointing to the light of Jesus. He reminds us that the good news is all about Jesus and how special he is. Jesus was from birth the Saviour of the world.

#### **Suggested hymns:**

[Tell out my soul](#) ; [Magnificat by Getty and Townend](#)

[Hark a thrilling voice is sounding](#); [Magnificat](#)

[Rejoice in the Lord always](#) ; [The angels say](#)  
[The angel Gabriel came](#)

Take a moment to bring the past week before God, remembering the good things that God has done for you, and also acknowledging those words, thoughts and deeds that have let God and yourself down. Use the **Collect for Advent** as a prayer of recommitment to the way of Jesus and a reminder of the hope to which we are called:

*Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that on the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious Majesty, to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen.*

## Some initial thoughts on the readings

Luke the storyteller accords Mary's song of praise, known as the Magnificat, a pivotal role in his account of Christmas. These 10 verses are the longest monologue by a woman in the whole New Testament and have been part of evening prayer in the Anglican prayer book since the Reformation. Nevertheless the words have often been overlooked and even downplayed by a Protestant church fearful of appearing too Catholic or of giving too strong voice to women. Luke has no such qualms. Her Magnificat pre-echoes Jesus own Nazareth manifesto which quotes verses in the Old Testament reading from Isaiah. And like John's ministry in today's Gospel reading, Mary points not to herself but to what the light of God is about to accomplish. Her words describe the upside-down, inside-out kingdom of God where the last will be first, the lost found, the poor become rich and the meek shall inherit the earth. This is 'fighting talk' particularly to the ears of Luke's gentle audience who lived under the might of Rome. This psalm of praise by a remarkable Galilean peasant girl, who said 'yes' to God, helps us get ready for the truly revolutionary re-creation that Christmas brings to the world. It prepares us for 'the glorious impossible' that already fills Mary's heart with joy and which will soon be the song of a host of angels on the hillside above Bethlehem.

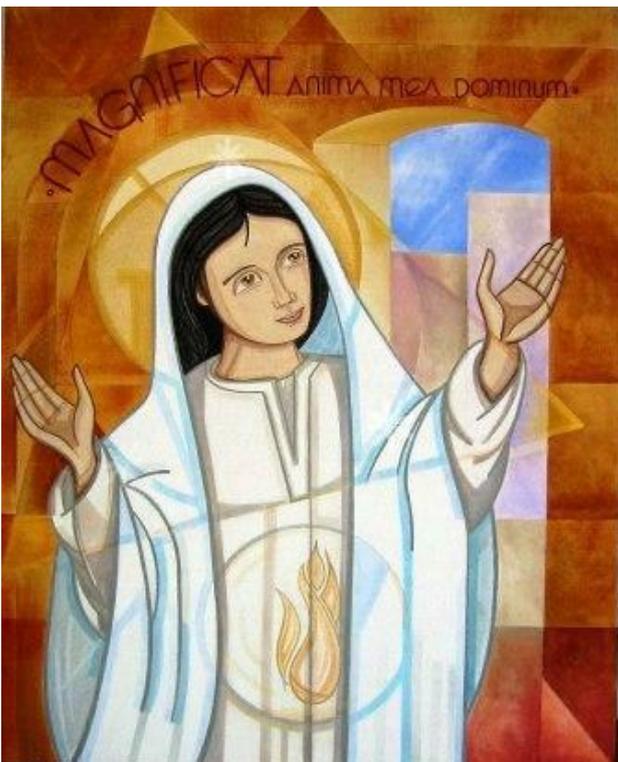
Read through **today's story from Luke** in your Bible at home or find it [here](#)

[Here](#) is today's Gospel story from John with wooden figures and wondering questions for the whole family

This is **our all-age Advent song** : [Lord Jesus, come](#)

### Visual for a focus table:

Mary's song is called The Magnificat, which is its first word in Latin and means 'praise' or 'magnify'. Find a magnifying glass that helps us see the invisible and turns the small into something big. Mary magnified God who had magnified her!



### Here is an acrostic version of the Magnificat

by Amy Scott Robinson

**M**y soul magnifies the Lord,  
**A**nd my spirit rejoices in my saviour!  
**G**enerations will call me blessed,  
**N**aming God as holy and mighty.  
**I**n strength he has scattered the proud,  
**F**ed the hungry and left the rich empty.  
**I**srael will see his mercy again.  
**C**hildren of Israel, you know what he promised  
**A**braham and his offspring for ever?  
**T**his is happening now.

**Can you make up an acrostic of words linked to the story of Christmas using the letters of ADVENT or CHRISTMAS?**

**Reflecting on the Magnificat** - from a 2017 blog by Rachel Held Evans

**Unsentimental Advent** <https://rachelheldevans.com/blog/unsentimental-advent>

It's an unconventional birth announcement. Defiant. Prophetic. Unsentimental.

We like to paint Mary in the softer hues—her robes clean, hair combed and covered, body poised in prayerful surrender—but this young woman was a fierce one, full of strength and fury. When she accepts



Ben Wildflower's depiction of Mary, based on the Magnificat

the dangerous charge before her, (every birth was risky in those days, this one especially so), rather than reciting a maternal blessing, Mary offers a prophecy.

When sung in a warm, candlelit church at Advent, it can be easy to blunt these words, to imagine them as symbolic, non-specific, comforting.

With the Magnificat, Mary not only announces a birth, she announces the inauguration of a new kingdom, one that stands in stark contrast to every other kingdom—past, present, and future—that relies on violence and exploitation to achieve 'greatness'. With the Magnificat, Mary declares that God has indeed chosen sides.

And it's not with the powerful, but the humble. It's not with the rich, but with the poor. It's not with the occupying force, but with people on the margins. It's not with narcissistic kings, but with an un-wed, un-believed teenage girl entrusted with the holy task of birthing, nursing, and nurturing God.

This is the stunning claim of the incarnation: God has made a home among the very people the world casts aside. And in her defiant prayer, Mary—a dark-skinned woman, a refugee, a religious minority in an occupied land—names this reality.

**For our prayers**, let us remember:

- our leaders making decisions about control of the virus, the rollout of the vaccine and people's expectations around Christmas
- our hospital staff treating patients suffering from COVID 19; relatives waiting anxiously to visit; and those waiting for other operations
- employers and employees on furlough, worried about the security of their jobs and businesses
- today's news headlines and any particular situations and people in other countries that God has placed on your heart
- those known to us who are ill, in hospital, awaiting treatment, anxious or who have been bereaved

Add any other particular people and situations that The Holy Spirit brings to your mind as you have been praying and then say our family prayer, **The Lord's Prayer**.

End the time of church-at-home by saying out loud the words of **The Grace**, reaching out your hands to include in your imagination all those you know and love, who live here in the village and beyond

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