



ADVENT 4 – SUNDAY 20th DECEMBER 2020

We're allowed to worship in church again so it will be good to see you at 10am. But for those who are still keeping to your homes we'll carry on be producing [Worship@Home](#).

Today you'll need your Advent wreath or candles, your Bible and cross and use this service to focus your hearts and minds on God.



INTRODUCTION

Finally, on the fourth Sunday in Advent, we come to the eve of the Nativity. Encountering Mary this week makes it feel as though it's just round the corner. If we've been really well organised we'll have done all that's necessary already and will be sitting back in style and letting it approach. Have you made your lists? And are you crossing items off to your satisfaction?

And what about the Advent list – of shortcomings and the things we aren't so good at?

This has already been a year like no other and now we're preparing for a Christmas like no other. With customary pragmatism this year, most of us will have said 'it is what it is and we'll do what we can'.

But some elements don't seem to have changed. Despite the restrictions on traditional gatherings and journeys, advertisers are desperate for us to spend as much as usual and broadcasters are filling the schedules with the same kind of glitter and tinsel as usual.

So how will our Christmas be different? We won't have the usual menu of services at St Max. No carol service and no crib service, no midnight communion on Christmas Eve. But instead there will be the Team carol service online from 8am next Sunday – featuring readers and singers from St Max as well as the rest of the Team. There will be a pop-up Nativity for the Wednesday Worshippers on 23rd December. There'll be the 10 am service on Christmas Day. And plenty more on offer online from the great churches in the land and worldwide.

And of course, the proper place to celebrate the birth of Christ is in each faithful heart, whether alone or with family or friends. Like Mary, keep all these things in your heart and treasure them.

Revd Jan

ADVENT WREATH DEVOTIONS

Reflection

When Mary learned of her destiny she was 'much perplexed' but as the child grew so did her certainty. A birth brings the **joy** of new life, even when the circumstances seem set against it. Not every child is born into a loving home. Not every child grows in the knowledge that they are loved.

Not every child has enough to eat or a safe lodging.

The child of Mary knew danger and fled from it to Egypt.

Even as they faced life as refugees, his mother '*kept all these things in her heart*' and guarded her joy.



What brings us joy? How can we guard and keep it in troubled times?

Today we light the first, second, third, and fourth candles of the Advent wreath. The first candle is FAITH, the second candle is HOPE, the third candle is PEACE, and the fourth candle is **JOY.**"

Light four candles

Scripture Luke 1.26-31

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.'

But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.'

Prayer

Gracious God, you came to us in human flesh and you abide with us in the Holy Spirit. Fill us with your joy, and help us shine as a light to the world. Through Jesus Christ, who makes our joy complete. Amen."

Invitation to confession

When the Lord comes, he will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness, and will disclose the purposes of the heart.

Therefore, in the light of Christ let us confess our sins.

PRAYERS OF PENITENCE

Lord Jesus, you came to gather the nations into the peace of your kingdom:

Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

You come in word and sacrament to strengthen us in holiness: Christ, have mercy. Christ, have mercy.

You will come in glory with salvation for your people:

Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

May almighty God, who sent his son into the world to save sinners, bring us his pardon and peace, now and forever. Amen



GLORIA

**Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to his people on earth.**

**Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.**

Lord Jesus Christ, only son of the Father,

Lord God Lamb of God,

you take away the sins of the world have mercy upon us;

you are seated at the right hand of the Father receive our prayer.

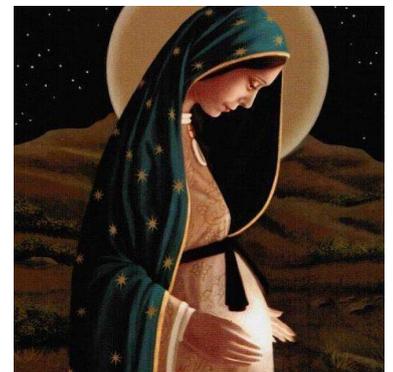
For you alone are Holy One,

**you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. Amen**



THE COLLECT

Eternal God, as Mary waited for the birth of your Son,
so we wait for his coming in glory;
bring us through the birth pangs of this present age
to see, with her, our great salvation in Jesus Christ
our Lord. Amen



OLD TESTAMENT READING 2 SAMUEL 7.1-11.16

Now when the king was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, 'See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.' Nathan said to the king, 'Go, do all that you have in mind; for the Lord is with you.'

But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan: Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle.

Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?' Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the Lord of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth.

And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies.

Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established forever.



This is the word of the Lord – **Thanks be to God**

NEW TESTAMENT READING ROMANS 16.25-27

Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory for ever! Amen.

This is the word of the Lord – **Thanks be to God**

GOSPEL READING LUKE 1.26-38

Alleluia, alleluia. Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God. Alleluia

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke

Glory to you O Lord

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David.

The virgin's name was Mary.



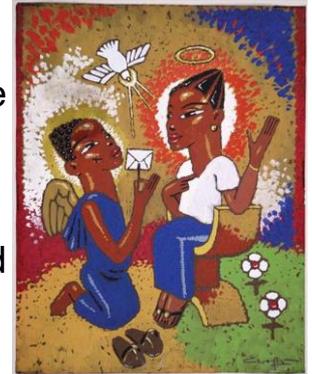
And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.



The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.'

Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?'

The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.'



And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.'

Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.

REFLECTION

Mary has been a powerful figure throughout the ages. She has stood for all the contested images of womanhood and has been at her most powerful when women were lacking all power in society and in the church.

She's been a difficult role model for modern women, but in recent decades, the picture of her has changed almost totally. Even in the RC church, where Mary seemed to be almost as important as God and Jesus combined. She's become a different kind of symbol. They still say Hail Mary, full of grace, blessed art thou among women, but the idea of what kind of woman she was is different.

The picture of Mary I grew up with was heavily influenced by the Protestant heritage: in stark reaction to the RC devotion to Mary, the Reformers wrote her out of salvation history along with all the saints). In a way, they could have been following Matthew's gospel, where Mary is given very little attention. For Matthew the key actor in the nativity story is Joseph. He's the one visited by angels, who makes all the decisions. It's almost surprising he gives her a name. She's mostly silent, mute, and is only there to make sure the baby is born.

She gets her destiny handed to her on a plate, with not even the courtesy of a messenger, and she takes it; no questions, no complaints, no explanations.

But Matthew is not the only gospel to give us nativity stories. Today we read from the gospel of Luke and he gives us a very different story. In Luke's birth stories, and in fact throughout his gospel, women consistently play an active role in Jesus' life

and ministry. So in Luke it's Mary who's visited by an angel, and not just any old angel but Gabriel, one of the three archangels. She is given, not exactly a choice – I suspect you don't argue with archangels – but advance notice! She gives her consent; she agrees to her destiny.

We hear her reflections on that destiny in words that are still sung week by week in churches all over the world. *My soul magnifies the Lord ... he has put down the mighty from their seat and exalted the humble and weak.* Yes, it's Luke putting words into Mary's mouth but it's a different Mary. As we read on throughout the story, she's a player in the drama of Jesus.

In Luke's gospel, she is the first human agent in the unfolding of the divine revelation. The story could lose Joseph, lose the shepherds and stable, lose the star and wise men and Jesus would still be the Messiah. Lose Mary and none of it happens. She is the one through whom God has acted, with her co-operation.

But this Mary, who listens to the angel and responds out of her own identity, ready for all that it could mean to her, is a Mary we can relate to. There were other occasions in her life when she must have gritted her teeth and forced herself to see it through, when Jesus became a person she didn't recognise, a religious fanatic; leaving the safe life she wanted for him to travel with an ill assorted bunch of cronies she didn't know; when he turned his back on the girls they wanted him to marry and cut himself off from his home and family.

And when it all ended so badly with his wracked body hanging on a cross. Who knows how she consoled herself? Did she remember the child of the promise she bore so long before?

Mary's story is recognised by all mothers and fathers, of children who become something that is unique and extraordinary. And all of them start with the miracle of birth.

The miracle of this birth however is something else altogether. For today, let us say with Christians through the ages Hail Mary, full of grace. Blessed art thou among women and the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION



In joyful expectation of his coming to our aid we pray to Jesus.
Come to your Church as Lord and judge.

We pray for our Archbishops, Justin and Stephen, our bishops, David and Mark, the clergy, lay leaders and people of the Turton Moorland Team.

We pray for Christian congregations preparing to celebrate the birth of our Lord and Saviour in so many situations of danger and peril.

Help us all to live in the light of your coming and give us a longing for your kingdom.

Maranatha: **Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

Come to your world as King of the nations.

We pray for all governments and those in authority. Forgive them their failures to protect their people from disease; their refusal to listen to those who are hurting; their privileging wealth and status over common humanity.

We pray particularly for our own land and the uncertain future before us. May we be prepared to offer help to those most affected by changed relations with our brothers and sisters in Europe.

Before you rulers will stand in silence.

Maranatha: **Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

Come to the suffering as Saviour and comforter.

We pray for those who will be in hospital over Christmas and those who treat them; those being cared for at home; those who are recovering from illness.

We pray for all those whose mental health has been badly affected over the last year: give them all trust in your providing and faith that they can recover.

Break into our lives, where we struggle with sickness and distress, and set us free to serve you forever.

Maranatha: **Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

Come to us as shepherd and guardian of our souls.

We remember those who have died: those of our own family, our friends; those who we remember with thanksgiving.

Give us with all the faithful departed a share in your victory over evil and death.

Maranatha: **Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

Come from heaven, Lord Jesus, with power and great glory.

Lift us up to meet you, that with St Maxentius and all your saints and angels we may live and reign with you in your new creation.

Maranatha: **Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

Silence is kept.

Come, Lord Jesus, do not delay;

give new courage to your people who trust in your love.

By your coming, raise us to share in the joy of your kingdom on earth as in heaven where you live and reign with the Father and the Spirit, one God forever and ever.

Amen.

THE LORD'S 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.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For the Kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

With love and compassion, **come, Lord Jesus.**

With judgement and mercy, **come, Lord Jesus.**

In power and glory, **come, Lord Jesus.**

In wisdom and truth, **come, Lord Jesus.**

THE BLESSING

May God the Father, who loved the world so much that he sent his only Son, give us grace to prepare for life eternal. **Amen.**

May God the Son, who comes to us as redeemer and judge, reveal to us the path from darkness to light. **Amen.**

May God the Holy Spirit, by whose working the Virgin Mary conceived the Christ, help us bear the fruits of holiness. **Amen.**

The blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, rest upon us, now and always. Amen.

