



Worshipping & Praying Together as a community dispersed

during the week beginning
Sunday, 20th December 2020
The Fourth Sunday of Advent

The Parish of Christ Church Cathedral, Newcastle.

The worshipping communities of the Cathedral and St Peter's Hamilton.

On this last week of Advent, we turn our attention to reflect on Mary's example of faith and obedience to God, as she received the angel Gabriel's magnificent but mysterious message that God's Son would be born as a human person, and that she had been chosen by God to bear his Son. Mary has a unique and privileged place in salvation history and in the Church because she responded "yes" to becoming the Mother of God. Mary is our first model of discipleship and a revered model of grace and trust in God.

This week to honour Mary as we prepare for the Nativity of our Lord Jesus in a matter of days, we replace the Psalm just for this Sunday with Mary's song of praise in Luke Chapter 1. While Mary was visiting with her elderly cousin, Elizabeth, who was also "with child", the child in Elizabeth's womb, the prophet John the Baptist, leapt as the two women encountered one another for the first times while their babies were in utero. Mary's song is known to us as The Magnificat, named after the first word of its first line in Latin: "*Magnificat anima mea Dominum*" ("My soul magnifies the Lord").

God chose a human to give birth to his Son so that all humanity would know God's salvation. Mary, full of grace, cooperated in this great plan for our salvation. Jesus was born as one of us, fully human and fully divine. This is the mystery we prepare to celebrate at Christmas, the mystery of the Incarnation. In the model of Mary, we pray that we will be people of faith who recognize God's saving plan for us and that we too respond to God with obedience.

We encourage you to participate in our worship at the Cathedral and St Peter's Hamilton this Christmas.

We have a diverse program of services throughout the season, including the traditional 9 Lessons and Carols, Family Services, Traditional Christmas Masses, and our spectacular Orchestral Mass on Christmas Day. We hope to see you and that you will also invite family and friends to share in these holy celebrations.

Registrations are essential:

<https://www.eventbrite.com.au/o/christ-church-cathedral-newcastle-nsw-30413307258>

Christmass

Christ Church Cathedral

52 Church St, Newcastle



The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John 1:5



Mon 21 and Wed 23 December

7pm Nine Lessons and Carols

Christmas Eve

3pm & 5pm Family Service*

7:30pm Christmas Vigil

Christmas Day

7am Christmass Mass

9am Choral Eucharist

**(children wear a nativity costume)*

Please register for all events through

Eventbrite: Christ Church Cathedral Newcastle



Christmass

St Peter's Anglican

148 Denison St, Hamilton

Christmas Day

8am Christmass Mass

10am Family Service

(bring a favourite present to be blessed)



For to us a child is born, to us a Son is given.

Isaiah 9:6



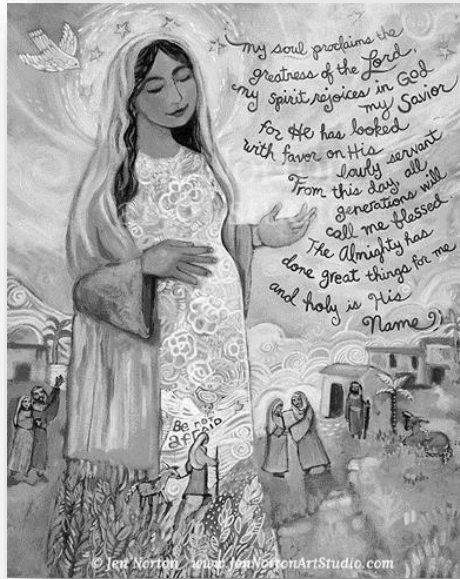
For more information:

www.newcastlecathedral.org.au or 4929 2052

 @ChristChurchCathedralNewcastle



The Fourth Sunday of Advent



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 forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

The Song of Mary

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord:
my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour;
who has looked with favour on his lowly servant:
from this day all generations will call me blessed;

the Almighty has done great things for me:

and holy is his name.

God has mercy on those who fear him:

from generation to generation.

The Lord has shown strength with his arm:

and scattered the proud in their conceit.

Casting down the mighty from their thrones:

and lifting up the lowly.

God filled the hungry with good things:

and sent the rich away empty.

He has come to the aid of his servant Israel:

to remember the promise of mercy,

the promise made to our forebears:

to Abraham and his children forever.

(A.P.B.A. Page 31)

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 forever! Amen

Luke 1: 26-38

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 forever, 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 on a page by *The Very Reverend Katherine Bowyer*

All of a sudden, this week, Christmas has suddenly become a lot closer. This morning at Morning Prayer I realised that it will be Christmas Eve in a week. As I write this, the phone is ringing off the (metaphorical) hook in the Cathedral Office, and the emails are pouring in. It's hard to stay in the peaceful waiting that is Advent, when everything else seems to be pressing in so hard that at times it feels like time is rushing out of control. It's hard to know what to do first, or next, and this weekend can feel very complicated as people already look towards Christmas. After this weekend, some of you might be going away to be with family, and some might be expecting family to arrive. It all seems very complicated. But then, so too is the Incarnation.

The temptation to rush this last week of Advent is strong. But to do so is to miss the crucial part. For this weekend we travel back, back to the annunciation, back to a girl, and an angel, and God breaking into the world. One of my favourite authors, Sam Portaro, an Episcopalian priest, writes of the annunciation:

“the annunciation was not an announcement after all. It was the beginning of a conversation, and that is a different proposition altogether... God does not do light banter or polite chit-chat... God is certainly straightforward and blunt...and ...Mary [is]...right to be cautious with such invitations to engagement. Conversation is dangerous business; it can change your life. Look at Mary... [she] was [not] the same after [her talk] with God. Neither was God.”

The temptation for us in rushing over today is that we miss the conversation. We miss the engagement. We miss being changed. The temptation of rushing over today and headlong into Christmas is that we are tempted to lock God into a picture perfect Christmas card, with snow and angels and adorable animals, and we are tempted to see God as a helpless babe who needs our help, rather than the Incarnate Word, who brings light to a world in darkness and help beyond our understanding. This is a babe who brings life, and in the presence and knowledge of that Incarnate Word, nothing can ever be the same again.

Mary weighs the angel's words carefully. And Mary is anything but passive. What we miss, when we romanticise Mary, is that her response, is risky business. As Sam Portaro says, following this initial, Almighty “yes”, Mary was not the same, and neither was God. For after this conversation, God dwells with us.

It's complicated, this living in conversation with God. As humans, we often flit between wanting to be told what to do, or telling God what to do. But conversation, true conversation, means that we are fully open to the other – and prepared to be changed, and not only us, but everything around us in order to live fully into the relationship with God. Earlier in Advent we heard those beautiful words from Isaiah, words of comfort, but words also which spoke of living in a changed landscape with God, because relationship had changed.

The conversation at the heart of the annunciation means that everything is changed. But first, we have to say yes. We have to be prepared to change.

One year, many years ago, when I was a young woman, possibly not even twenty, the organist in our parish church changed the traditional Lesson and Carols service. Rather than the passages of Scripture which we'll hear later this week, we heard poetry and pieces of prose. He asked me to read the poem by Edwin Muir which I included in my pastoral this week. This poem has become one of my very favourite poems, for it captures this sense of deep conversation which transforms, and also invites us to stay in a moment which is both a moment in time and a moment beyond time and transcending time. In the rush of our life, in the rush of this week, what would it mean for us to spend time in such a conversation with God? Are we prepared to make time to stop the rush of time?

For this is Advent. And it's complicated.

¹ Sam Portaro, *Brightest and Best: A Companion to the Lesser Feasts and Fasts, revised and updated*, Cowley Publications, 2001, p.66.

Readings for next week

Christmas Eve

Isaiah 9: 2-7

Psalms 96

Titus 2: 11-14

Luke 2: 1-14 (15-20)

Christmas Day

Isaiah 62: 6-12

Psalms 97

Titus 3: 4-8a

Luke 2: (1-7) 8-20

The First Sunday After

Christmas (27th Dec 2020)

Isaiah 61:10 – 62.3

Psalms 148

Galatians 4: 4-7

Luke 2:22-40

Prayers for use during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Ever present God,
be with us in our isolation,
be close to us in our distancing,
be healing in our sickness,
be joy in our sadness,
be light in our darkness,
be wisdom in our confusion,
be all that is familiar when all is
unfamiliar,
that when the doors reopen
we may with the zeal of Pentecost
inhabit our communities
and speak of your goodness
to an emerging world.
For Jesus' sake. **Amen.**

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy
in this time of uncertainty and
distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and
fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us
from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

To join in our services online:

You Tube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXyas2uhJUNOnDetOpPdUOg>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/christchurchcathedralnewcastle/>

Please do not hesitate to contact Dean Katherine or Reverend Angela if you have any concerns at this time and if you would like for us to visit you at home.

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