

## Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> December 2020 – Bulwell United Reformed Church

Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent - the reading for today is Luke 1: 26-38. Mary has an encounter with a heavenly visitor who brings unsettling news. The conversation that follows launches Mary into life-changing decisions, which she accepts willingly - the world is turned upside down by an obedient teenage girl. *A short service for personal communion focusing on confessing Jesus is Lord is included. Please have your bread & wine/juice ready.*

### **A prayer of approach**

God, you approached the world in the words of an angel asking consent, and bringing life unexpected. Now we approach you, in the joy of welcome knowing that you will never turn us away. We celebrate you as we turn to you, glad that we are gathered for the feast of kindness and courage.

**Amen.**

### **A prayer of confession**

Today, days before we celebrate your self-giving in life, in conversation, in generosity and in courage, we turn to you knowing how often we fall short in life, in conversation, in generosity and in courage. Forgive us, and make us more like you, not because it will make you love us more, but because it is for our sake, and for the sake of the people you love so much, that you came among us.

**Amen.**

**Our Father who art in heaven...**

Song **Hark the Herald Angels Sing/King of heaven - Paul Baloche**

[\(304\) Paul Baloche - Hark The Herald Angels Sing / King Of Heaven \(Official Live Video\) - YouTube](#)

### **Luke 1:26-38 - An Angel tells about the Birth of Jesus**

<sup>26</sup> One month later God sent the angel Gabriel to the town of Nazareth in Galilee <sup>27</sup> with a message for a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to Joseph from the family of King David. <sup>28</sup> The angel greeted Mary and said, "You are truly blessed! The Lord is with you."

<sup>29</sup> Mary was confused by the angel's words and wondered what they meant. <sup>30</sup> Then the angel told Mary, "Don't be afraid! God is pleased with you, <sup>31</sup> and you will have a son. His name will be Jesus.

<sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of God Most High. The Lord God will make him king, as his ancestor David was. <sup>33</sup> He will rule the people of Israel forever, and his kingdom will never end."

<sup>34</sup> Mary asked the angel, "How can this happen? I am not married!"

<sup>35</sup> The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come down to you, and God's power will come over you. So your child will be called the holy Son of God. <sup>36</sup> Your relative Elizabeth is also going to have a son, even though she is old. No one thought she could ever have a baby, but in three months she will have a son. <sup>37</sup> Nothing is impossible for God!"



<sup>38</sup> Mary said, "I am the Lord's servant! Let it happen as you have said." And the angel left her.

Contemporary English Version (CEV)

### **Mary – Pure Faith**

This is a story of pure faith. We can of course, find in our life and discipleship, things can become very complicated. It can be difficult to know how to speak about Jesus in a world where people will be offended if others confront their beliefs. Christian beliefs are challenged from every angle, philosophically, religiously and scientifically. Those of us who attend church can have very set views about a vast range of issues making discussion of faith quite difficult at times. So a Scriptural story describing faith in such a beautiful and straightforward manner is powerful and refreshing. God's people must not allow the complexities of life to cloud their judgement about faith, allowing 'simple' faith to become confused with 'simplistic' faith.

Our story here is about 'simple faith' at its most powerful. Mary shows us that our lives are most blessed when we drop our pre-conceptions, our problems and our worries, and rely utterly on the grace and favour of God already revealed to us. There is no force on earth capable of standing in the way of faith like this.

True, there is so much more for us to discover about Jesus and the salvation He offers. Jesus teaches us about the full nature of God and the reality of the human condition, so that when we respond in faith to Him we may indeed be truly repentant and willing to be changed and 'born anew' (John 3:3f.). Jesus teaches us about the Kingdom of God, which we may experience now as a sample of what God has for us in the future beyond death. The Gospels in particular reveal Jesus' battles with the evils of religiosity, with the devil's temptations and with Satan's power in this world and can therefore reveal the nature of the battles we face while living in a mortal and sinful world.

Yet our starting point is the miracle of grace whereby any one of us may, with Mary, perceive that God's hand is indeed upon us and we are blessed, because He loves us. Then, with powerful and utterly simple integrity, we say our 'Yes' to God's 'Yes', and the eternal contract of salvation is opened out before us through Jesus our Saviour.

We must surely accept Mary's unique example of pure faith and service, and we should give thanks that it powerfully illustrates the glory of God's salvation. Mary's faith is a vital part of the Gospel because God used it to begin the path of Salvation. Her faith is pure, it is simple, it is offered to all, including the least significant in society, and it is all sufficient.

### **Prayers of Intercession (Advent 4)**

Lord God,

Hear us as we pray for the patience and understanding to help all those throughout our world today,

For those who are lost and lonely at this time, without a home, bed or family to share a meal with,

Without the hope and excitement that special morning brings to so many

We remember that Jesus was born in a lowly manger, yet his light shines so brightly for all.

We pray for those who are struggling with health issues,  
For those in hospital, care homes and hospices,  
removed from the comfort of their own homes, missing their friends and families.  
We give thanks for those who are caring for all these people at this time.

Lord we pray for people throughout the world living in situations of vulnerability  
In countries where the political atmosphere is unstable,  
Where corrupt leadership puts the lives of the people in danger,  
We pray for patience, peace and understanding to these lands

Hear us as we pray for those living with the threat of violence within their own homes,  
Where debt, unemployment and hopelessness seems to be everywhere  
When the only way out is an impossible option  
Provide those people with love Lord, and hold them within your arms

We pray for the fragility of our planet, help us to we continue to make the correct decisions  
with regards to this precious garden you have provided for us,  
that we remember that we are but the custodians of the earth  
Give us the time and patience to make the changes that are required to protect your world  
Lord.

Lord, we also pray for those close to us this morning,  
Those in need of a helping hand, an understanding ear and the loving patience of a friend  
We hold them close to our hearts and ask that they feel your love today  
And in this time of silence we say their names to you now Lord.

(time of silence)

Thank you Lord, for hearing our prayers this morning, and as we go into the week of Jesus' birth, help us to carry forward his love and patience to all those we meet and spend time with. In your loving name we pray.

**Amen**

**Song O Little Town of Bethlehem – Lou Fellingham**  
[\(300\) O Little Town Of Bethlehem - Official Lyric Video - YouTube](#)

### **HOLY COMMUNION - Advent 4 - General Prayer of Thanksgiving**

We give you all thanks and praise, O God,  
for you rest your hand upon us,  
calling us to be your holy saints and giving us life again.  
Before time began, your Holy Spirit brooded over the chaos  
and brought the earth and its inhabitants to birth.



Through your prophets speaking in the holy scriptures you promised us a child born as a sign  
of your saving presence with us.  
Your promise has taken flesh in your child, Jesus the Christ, who was born of the line of  
David.

When he was killed by your enemies, your Spirit brought him forth again by resurrection from the dead.

Through him the light of your presence has been restored and we have been called into the obedience of faith that we might belong to Jesus Christ forever, living by the hope conceived in us by the Holy Spirit.

***Therefore, with our hearts lifted high,  
we offer you thanks and praise at all times  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.***



### **The Breaking of the Bread and Pouring of the Wine**

Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast.  
*1 Corinthians 5:7*

### **The Sharing of the Bread and the Wine**

*Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.  
Blessed are those who are called to the wedding feast of the Lamb. Alleluia.*  
Take, eat; this is the body of Christ, broken for you. Do this in remembrance of him.  
This cup is the new covenant in the blood of Christ, shed for you and for all, for the forgiveness of sin. Drink of it, all of you, in remembrance of him.

### **Prayer after communion**

Most gracious God, we praise you for what you have given and for what you have promised us here. You have made us one with all your people in heaven and on earth. You have fed us with the bread of life and renewed us for your service.  
Now we give ourselves to you; and we ask that our daily living may be part of the life of your kingdom, and that our love may be your love reaching out into the life of the world; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

### **A sending out prayer**

God of surprises,  
you chose Mary as the ark of your covenant with us.  
And with her 'Yes',  
you entered the world of body and blood.  
Nurtured by your body and blood,  
we go out, to look for surprise  
and wonder all around us.  
**Amen.**

