

# **ST. ANDREW'S, BLACKROCK & BRAY - 13TH DECEMBER 2020**

## **MAGNIFY THE LORD (LUKE 1:39-56)**

### **Welcome and Announcements**

*"Welcome to our 'Church at Home' service transcript for Sunday 13th December. We are continuing our sermon series 'Hoping for Christmas' looking at the events around, and leading up to, the very first Christmas from Luke's gospel. On Sunday we were looking at Mary's song of praise and prophecy." - Rev. Andrew Gill*

### **Scripture Sentence - Lamentations 3:25-26**

*The Lord is good to those who look to him,  
to anyone who seeks him;  
it is good to wait in patience for deliverance by the Lord.*

### **Collect for the Third Sunday of Advent**

God of power and mercy,  
you call us once again  
to celebrate the coming of your Son.  
Remove those things which hinder love of you,  
that when he comes  
he may find us waiting  
in awe and wonder for him;  
who lives and reigns with you  
and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and forever.  
Amen

## **Reading - Luke 1:39-56 (NIV)**

*At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfil his promises to her!'*

*And Mary said:*

*'My soul glorifies the Lord  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,  
for he has been mindful  
of the humble state of his servant.  
From now on all generations will call me blessed,  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me –  
holy is his name.  
His mercy extends to those who fear him,  
from generation to generation.*

*He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;  
he has scattered those who are proud in  
their inmost thoughts.*

*He has brought down rulers from their thrones  
but has lifted up the humble.*

*He has filled the hungry with good things  
but has sent the rich away empty.*

*He has helped his servant Israel,  
remembering to be merciful  
to Abraham and his descendants for ever,  
just as he promised our ancestors.'*

*Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.*

### **Sermon - 'His Name is Jesus'**

For many of us, we're starting to realise that this Christmas is not going to be the Christmas we would want. Things are going to be different. We are not going to be able to have the big parties or the large family gatherings. There may be certain traditions that will be unable to happen this year. Even in church, while we are delighted to be open again, we are disappointed that we cannot sing carols. This year things are going to be different and things may not feel as they should. We put up the tree, listen to the music, and eat the food, but we know that this year things just won't feel quite right. In this moment, we can look to the truth of Christmas, we can look to the manger and see Jesus and the hope of his kingdom that he brings.

We're doing a series at the moment called 'Hoping for Christmas' and we are looking at Luke chapters one and two about the events leading up to, and surrounding the birth of Jesus. These stories are written for people who know that life is not as it should be, and for those who are in need of hope. In these stories, and the truth of the birth of Jesus, we are offered hope. And the more needy we are, then the more hope we will receive. In the passage we are reading this morning, we see that with the birth of Jesus comes the arrival of his Kingdom, and in the Kingdom of Christ the low are lifted, but those that have pushed their way to the top will be brought low. When his Kingdom is fully here, Jesus will put everything right, and everything will finally be as it should. We may be experiencing difficulty in our present, but we can have great hope for our future.

This story picks up immediately from where we left off last week. So if you remember the angel Gabriel came to Mary, told her that she was going to have a son who is going to be this great King, and then the angel told her that her relative Elizabeth, in her old age (even though she thought she was barren) would also have a child. So Mary straight away goes to travel to see Elizabeth, and as she greets her, John, unborn in her womb leaps for joy! Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, says, “blessed are you among women”, and then Mary replies in verses 46 to 55. These verses are known as the magnificat, after the first word in the latin translation, and it is essentially a hymn, it is a song of praise. Actually these opening chapters of Luke are a bit like a musical. There has been a bit of plot, and now there is a song which gives us a moment to reflect and to understand the events that we have read so far. She begins in verse 46, *“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.”*

‘My soul magnifies the lord!’ I just love this description of what it is to worship. Our world tries so hard to make God smaller, to make him seem unimportant. Every year the traces of Jesus in how our culture celebrates Christmas gets less and less. When we worship God, and glorify him, we magnify him and make him bigger in our lives, and through our lives we help others to see him too. Note also, that even though this is a song, it is her soul that does the magnifying, not her voice. Of course, singing is an important part of our worship, but it is not the only part. Right now we can’t sing together in church, but we can still magnify God in our souls. God is always more concerned about what is coming out of our hearts, than what is coming out of our mouths. You can sing the greatest carol, at the top of your voice, hitting every note perfectly and beautifully, yet your heart can be far away from God, full of bitterness, or anger, or pride, or unforgiveness. Likewise your lips can be silent, but in the depths of your soul you are filled with praise and thanksgiving. Maybe this Christmas, when we can't sing, it

gives us an opportunity to worship in other ways, through silence, in service, in giving generously, and practicing gratitude. God had blessed Mary, and so her spirit rejoices because of his might, his holiness, and his mercy.

Mary was an ordinary girl, she was a nobody from nowhere, she was insignificant in the eyes of the world. But God noticed her, he saw her faith, and he blessed her in the most extraordinary way, by choosing her to be the mother of our Lord. Now of course God blessed Mary in a unique and special way, but she knows that his grace is for all who trust in him. Verse 50 she says, *“His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.”*

Here this song turns from the personal to the general, and in the next few verses Mary paints a picture of the Kingdom of Christ. It shows a little glimpse of what it will look like when it is fully here, and we see a reversal of the order of this world. And she says that the proud will be brought low, but those that are low will be lifted up. And we see this theme throughout the whole of scripture, we see it in the prophets, we see it in the teachings of Jesus, those at the bottom God will lift up, those that are at the top of our world will be brought low. If you imagine the kingdom of God like an escalator. Those that are poor, weak, and oppressed are at the bottom right now, but they moving upwards. However, the proud, the rich, the wealthy, the arrogant, might be at the top in this world, but in the Kingdom of God they are descending and coming down.

For us this is an encouragement, because if we are feeling low, we can trust that one day God will put everything right. Christmas might not cheer us up, but Christ will lift us up. These verses encourage us, but they also challenge us, in our attitude and our actions. They challenge us in our attitude; are we being humble or are we being proud? Is our desire to worship, or is our

desire to want more? Are we being greedy or are we being grateful? We need to maximise Christ and minimise ourselves.

These verses challenge our attitude, but they must also challenge our actions. This hymn of Mary not only encourages us to worship God, but it also invites us to work with God. Because God is at work in his world improving the situations of the poor, the weak, the oppressed, and the marginalised. Through our charitable giving, our faithful prayers, and our practical concern for those in need, we partner with Christ as he lifts up the lowly, and fills the hungry with good things.

### **Prayer**

God our Saviour,  
my soul magnifies you, and my spirit rejoices in your  
might, holiness, and mercy.

You have blessed me with the greatest gift of all,  
your son Jesus Christ.

Mighty God, scatter my proud thoughts,  
and fill me with the humility of Christ.

May his love inspire me,  
and your strength enable me,  
to help the poor,  
feed the hungry,  
and glorify you in all I do.

Amen.