

**Bulletin for Sunday 19th December 2021**

Good Morning, Friends, on the fourth Sunday in Advent. Just a few more days of waiting... We pause as we prepare to worship..... and then praise God as we sing:

Hymn:           The Angel Gabriel from heaven came           (R&S 139)

Prayer: God of love and hope,  
as Mary prepared to bring her baby into the world  
help us to prepare for this coming Christmas...  
while we are surrounded by memories and traditions  
may we also be aware of stirrings of new life -  
knowing that you are with us today  
and you will be with us tomorrow.  
Emmanuel - God with us...  
God of love and hope, joy and peace - always!  
We ask your blessing on everything that we do,  
and everything that we give, in your service,  
now and always. In Jesus' name. Amen

followed by The Lord's Prayer

Reading:           Micah ch.5 verses 2-5a and Luke ch.1 verses 39-55

Reflection:    Why did Mary go 'with haste'? Perhaps, in that country of political unrest under Roman occupation, travel for a young woman on her own wasn't very safe... Or perhaps life at home was a bit fraught after she announced her pregnancy... But perhaps also she was looking for reassurance in this strange new world she so shockingly found herself in. When she saw that Elizabeth - against all hope and expectation - was indeed pregnant too, it must have been a wonderful relief: tangible proof that what the angel said was true, and that God was working in mysterious ways through them both.

The song that Luke then puts in her mouth isn't quite what we might expect from a young woman, pregnant for the first time. Why this concern for God's justice and care for the oppressed, when she could have been knitting little cardigans and socks?! It occurs to me that if this rang true with early readers of the gospel, maybe it reflects Mary's character as she was remembered. Maybe God chose as Jesus' mother a young woman not only of strong faith, caring and intelligent, but also with a good understanding of God's priorities, and a willingness - a strong-minded determination, even - to give them voice. That would surely not be so surprising, when you look at the character of her son. So let's join in the song of justice and joy that she sung:

Hymn: Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord (R&S 740)

Prayer: God of love, we know you care about justice for the lowly...  
Born in a stable, and forced to flee into Egypt,  
we hold before you the homeless and refugees...  
Feeder of the five thousand,  
we hold before you the poor and the starving...  
Compassionate healer, we hold before you the sick,  
the anxious, the lonely and the despairing...  
We pray for our communities and our neighbours,  
for all those we love... and worry about...  
Loving God, hear all our prayers,  
spoken and unspoken, in Jesus' name. Amen

Hymn: O Little town of Bethlehem (R&S 145)

Blessing: May we await Christ's coming with hope.....  
and may the blessing of God  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
be with us and with all those we love  
now and always. Amen

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There won't be a ' Sunday at Six 'Zoom this week (19th) or next (26th), but the evening service will resume on 2nd January.

We all have a part to play in caring for each other and doing what we can to keep everyone safe from Covid - wearing masks, giving people space and having plenty of ventilation. The URC's advice is at

<https://urc.org.uk/covid-plan-b-synod-moderators-updated-guidance/>

Please also let us know if you have a positive Covid test after recently being in church.

It's unfortunately impossible to make our churches entirely risk-free.

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