

In our Gospel, we hear Mary's great song of praise, known as the Magnificat. She has already been visited by the Angel Gabriel and told that she was to have a child, Jesus - and that Elizabeth her elderly relative was already 6 months 'with child') so sets off to visit her relative; possibly because it's all quite a lot to take on board! As soon as Elizabeth sees and hears Mary, she is filled with the Holy Spirit, we hear, and can sense that this is no ordinary woman - or pregnancy. It is Mary's profound song of praise, in response, that has become so well-known and loved.

But what about Mary herself?

She, along with Elizabeth - John the Baptist's mother - and Simeon and Anna in the temple, stand for all the saints of the old covenant who were instrumental in God's Word being made flesh. In this way, it has been said that Mary creates a link between the Old and New Testaments.

We do not hear a lot of detail about Mary, but what we can assume, is that she was young and inexperienced. She was a 'hidden' person; quietly devout, when she was chosen by God; quite unremarkable on one level; easily 'missed'. What was *demande*d of her though - the attributes which God *saw* in her, *are* quite remarkable.

What did she do?

Mary *trusted* the Angel Gabriel's message. She did not blindly, unthinkingly say yes, but *used her intelligence* to check it out, asking 'how can this be?' This was completely unknown territory; but Mary was *willing to put herself on the line*, in *humble obedience*, and *openness* to God's will. In doing so, she risked disgrace and rejection by her fiancé, family and community.

Would I be – would *we* be - so trusting, open and obedient, I wonder?...

But for all her meekness, Mary's song of praise to God, is hugely insightful and actually pretty *revolutionary*.

It has been said that the public recitation of the Magnificat was banned in India under British rule, and that in the 1980s, it was also banned in Guatemala!

We know that Jesus' life and teaching turned society's and 'the world's' rules on their heads; Mary had a grasp of these paradoxes even before Jesus was born.

Mary proclaims 'he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts' - this is morally controversial and pretty challenging! If we are feeling slightly self-righteous or superior, there's no better come-down, than comparing ourselves with Jesus' example! He enables us to see ourselves as we truly are; flawed, but nevertheless totally loved.

Mary goes on to declare 'He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly'. (I think this might be the most controversial bit!). Christianity is not interested in the 'world's' or society's labels and prestige. It's on a whole different level. All are equal in God's eyes; there *is* no hierarchy. [pause] God has changed the old world order for the new; choosing Mary, a lowly and '*insignificant*' person, for dignity and greatness.

I think we can all, as I do, take great encouragement from the fact that God so often chooses the least likely people for certain tasks, as God sees the

potential that others miss, knowing us inside-out. There *are* no 'no-hopers' or 'write-offs' in God's book – *despite* Him knowing us so well!

Mary also proclaims 'He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty'. Again, society's rules are turned on their heads! The teaching of Christianity is *not* to amass as much material property as we can, contrary to what the media would have us believe, or to have too much, while our neighbour is starving. I know that this one is a constant challenge to me; but there is a whole sermon in itself here!

So, we give thanks to God, for choosing the most ordinary among us to do His work, if we are but willing. We give thanks for Mary – her humanity, her obedience, her trust.

And we ask that our minds and hearts be renewed afresh, as we reflect on her life and example. Amen

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