

Worship At Home
Sunday 13th December 2020
Advent 3

Today we light a candle of joy. The true joy of knowing God and the joy shared with the world through the birth of that special baby Jesus.

As we light the candle we focus on the joy in our lives and take a moment to share something with our neighbour that we are rejoicing in and are happy about this week.



Let us Pray

Lord, come amongst us. God of hope, shine your light upon us, Flickering, like a candle flame, Advent God, we put our hope in you. Lord we come to you to give thanks for all we have and for all those we love. Remind us Lord that there is much in life which makes us full of joy and happiness. Remind us to be sharers of this joy and thankfulness so that all might feel it in this advent season. As we come to worship today, help us to take hold of the joy you offer us. May this be a joyful time even in these dark times. **Amen**

Listen or sing or read the words of this hymn - CH4 472 Come, thou long-expected Jesus

1 Come, thou long expected Jesus
Born to set thy people free
From our fears and sins release us
Let us find our rest in thee
Israel's strength and consolation
Hope of all the earth thou art
Dear desire of every nation
Joy of every longing heart.

Chorus

*Come, thou long expected Jesus
Come, thou long expected King
Come, thou long expected Jesus
Come, thou long expected King*

2 Born thy people to deliver
Born a child and yet a king
Born to reign in us forever
Now thy gracious kingdom bring
By thine own eternal spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone
By thine own sufficient merit
Raise us to thy glorious throne

Chorus

*Come, thou long expected Jesus
Come, thou long expected King
Come, thou long expected Jesus
Come, thou long expected King*

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Let us pray

Lord, you dropped in on Mary: drop in on us today. Lord, you told her not to fear: give us your confidence and hope. Lord, you revealed the nature of your Messiah: make Jesus clear to us today. Lord, you helped Mary to say yes: help us to say 'yes' to you. May we come to you with the humility of Mary, ready not just to know your will, but to do it. Lord, our hearts praise you, our souls are glad because you are our Saviour, because you have remembered us, your servants; because you have shown mercy to all who honour you. We praise you because of all the great things you have done for us.

We confess that we do not always show the humility of Mary, nor her joy, her obedience and her willingness to be part of your plans for the world.

Forgive us, Lord, grant us a big vision of where we fit in the eternal scheme of things, and grant us the courage of Mary, that we may step out in faith and trust in you for all aspects of our lives.

Amen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8E9G7631bs>

Reading : -

Reflection:

Once there was a Canadian farmer who decided that he needed to buy a chain saw to help him remove some of the many trees which grew on his farm.

A logging foreman sold him one that the foreman guaranteed would cut down 15 trees in a single day.

A week later, a very unhappy farmer came back to report that the power saw must be faulty - it averaged only 3 trees a day.

The foreman grabbed the saw, pulled the cord, and the saw promptly went "Bzzzzzzzzz."

"Hey" demanded the startled farmer, "what's that noise?"



Obviously, the farmer had missed the point. He did not make the connection that the saw must be cranked.

Unlike the Canadian farmer, who possibly didn't listen as the details were given to him about how to operate his new saw or maybe he didn't take the time to read the instruction. Mary received a visit from the angel informing her that she has been chosen by God. She listened carefully to the words of the Angel and responded appropriately. "May it be unto me as you have described". An amazing response from someone so young.

If you were looking for the perfect mother to leave your one and only child with, who would she be? Would she be wealthy? Would she live in a nice place? Would she be famous, well educated? Mature? Experienced? What would be her characteristics/values?

When we want to go for a new job this usually begins with an application. Next comes the interview. Those of us who have sat on interview panels will know that not everyone is as attentive to the details on their application as they should be and when it comes to the interview some are better prepared for this than others.

So, what was God looking for in the person He would chose as mother for His Son?
God doesn't operate the way we do.

God wasn't looking for someone with lots of experience. God isn't as interested in your **ABILITY** as He is in your **AVAILability**. No matter who you are, God can use you! Verses 26-27 paint a picture of an ordinary girl with some serious liabilities:

She was **YOUNG**. Maybe around 14-16 years old.

Remember that in those days, it was not unusual for girls to be engaged, as young as 13 or 14 years of age. Mary could well have been as young as 14 or 15 when Gabriel visited her. You and I might think this girl is too young for God to use her, but apparently God didn't think so.

Mary was **POOR**. ...but she was also **FROM NAZARETH** a town with a bad reputation. You and I might have thought No way. No telling what this girl grew up seeing and hearing in a bad town like that.

But apparently God didn't take this into consideration in choosing Mary to be mother to the Son of God.

Mary was young, poor, and from Nazareth—all characteristics that we might have thought would make her seem unusable by God. But God chose Mary for one of the most important jobs He ever asked anyone to do. Through God's choice of Mary, we see that **NO MATTER WHO YOU ARE, THE LORD CAN USE YOU**. God! **CAN** use us if we trust Him!

Out of all the queens, princesses, and daughters of the wealthy and influential, God chose a poor teenager from a town with a bad reputation to be Jesus' mother. Mary had some negatives, but she had two things God looks for: humility and faith. She knew she wasn't worthy of the honour God offered her, yet she still believed God could use her if she trusted Him.

In today's reading, we encounter two expectant mothers-to-be. Two cousins, Elizabeth and Mary, are both pregnant. **But for all their expectancy, there is much in this story that is UNexpected.** To begin with, both of their pregnancies were a surprise. Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah had suffered from infertility. For whatever reason, they couldn't conceive. By now, Elizabeth was past the typical child-bearing years. In those times, the chief purpose of a woman and a wife was to bear offspring. The inability to have a baby was a valid justification for a man to divorce his wife. But Zechariah had not divorced Elizabeth, and that speaks something about the relationship these two had. Society looked with scorn on a woman who couldn't bear a child. Elizabeth had endured the whispers in public settings and the looks of pity from the kind-hearted.

But now, after all these years, Elizabeth was expecting! Word spread throughout her community and her family.

Now, with her emerging baby, Elizabeth stood vindicated. **She was having a baby!** She walked a little taller and her heart was filled with joy.

Her cousin Mary also had an unexpected pregnancy. But whereas Elizabeth's pregnancy lifted up her social standing, it had the exact opposite affect on Mary. Mary was pregnant when she shouldn't be. Mary's unexpected pregnancy left her very vulnerable. First of all, how would her betrothed, Joseph, respond? He could publicly condemn her and call for her to be stoned for infidelity. Instead, he opted to quietly divorce her, which speaks to his good character.

Joseph was also surprised by the unexpected. An encounter with an angel convinced him to go ahead with the marriage to Mary. So as Mary's belly grew, her safety and place in society were protected by her marriage. Mary journeys to visit her expectant cousin Elizabeth in the Judean countryside. **This was in the days before phones and text messages.** So, it's quite likely that Elizabeth had no knowledge of her visitor until she heard the sound of Mary's voice greeting at her door. And at the sound of Mary's voice, the baby in Elizabeth's womb leaps.

An unexpected visitor and a surprising joy. Elizabeth channels little John's joy. The kick he gave her spreads into her own soul. Two women are unexpectedly pregnant. And their joy multiplies when shared. Mary stays with Elizabeth for three months. They share their expectancy for a trimester. We can only imagine the support they give one another. Like pregnant women everywhere, they share their experiences. They strengthen and counsel each other.

Not much happens outwardly during pregnancy. A woman's belly gradually expands, but the main work is largely hidden. That baby is being knit together in secret. And it occurs without any active agency on the part of the mother. What's happening occurs outside of her control. It happens in the dark; it continues while she sleeps.

In our walk of faith, the Holy Spirit is at work within our souls. There are measures at work that will ever remain outside of our understanding. We see only through a mirror dimly. Oh, we might recognize that our faith is expanding, much like the waistline of an expectant mother. But the workings of the Holy Spirit are beyond our control. May we ever be open to the unexpected workings of the Holy Spirit! May our souls leap for joy!

Let us pray

Lord, we pray for your Church here and throughout the world, especially for Christians who live under totalitarian regimes, or in cultures which are anti-Christian. We pray that you will³

Lord, we call you blessed. **Holy is your name.** We pray for all in authority and leadership, that they may understand the message of Mary, that power, wealth and influence are valuable and fragile, and need to be handled with extreme care. Lord, we call you blessed.

We pray for young people everywhere, that they might follow the example of Mary in her obedience to God, and her willingness to be part of his plans for the world. Lord, we call you blessed. We pray for all who suffer, that they might be comforted, raised up and brought again to a place of rejoicing. Lord, we call you blessed. **May we trust in you as Mary trusted you. May we be open to the prompting of your Holy Spirit. And may we be obedient servants. Amen.**

Listen or sing or read the words of this hymn - CH4 320 Joy to the World

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|---|---|
| 1 Joy to the World , the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King; Let every heart prepare Him room, And Heaven and nature sing, And Heaven and nature sing, And Heaven, and Heaven, and nature sing. | 3 No more let sins and sorrows grow, Nor thorns infest the ground; He comes to make His blessings flow Far as the curse is found, Far as the curse is found, Far as, far as, the curse is found. |
| 2 Joy to the World, the Saviour reigns! Let men their songs employ; While fields and floods, rocks, hills & plains Repeat the sounding joy, Repeat the sounding joy, Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy. | 4 He rules the world with truth and grace, And makes the nations prove The glories of His righteousness, And wonders of His love, And wonders of His love, And wonders, wonders, of His love. |

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H31QccmPUsI>

Our God,
you give us always what we need, and not what we think will make us happy. We ask for success, and you show us how to grow through failure. We ask for peace, and you set us a challenge. We ask for growth in numbers, and you give us a microscope to search for signs of the kingdom. But when we are hungry, you feed us; when we grieve, you console us; when we are weary, you let us rest.
And now, what do you need and want from us? Not money; not right belief not ritual praise; not even the doing of good unless that springs freely from lives steeped in love. So all that we can offer is what you have already given. We give it back with gratitude and joy.

We have worshipped together in hope. We have sung God's praises. We have shared the hope of new beginnings. Now may God's blessing of hope, peace and joy be with us this day, this week, this Advent season.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all evermore. **Amen.**

*Thank you to those who have taken the time to contact me. Take care out there this week. May the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you this day and each day. Rev. Susan Thorburn, sthorburn@churchofscotland.org.uk
If you choose to email me, please can you tell me who you are and where you live. Thank you.*

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