

Worship at Home 24th December 2023 Christmas Eve with Revd David Speirs

Opening Prayer:

Loving God, through all ages
You have desired to be in close relationship with us, draw us into closeness with You today. In the busyness of the world let us remember that yours has always been a story of connection, that you burst into our world with the Incarnation, and your son still bursts into our lives every day. Help us as a community to recognise your interventions and welcome our interruptions in our lives today and always.

Amen.

Prayer by Sally Fraser, Church of Scotland Weekly Worship, Year B 24 December 2023: <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/worship/weekly-worship/monthly/2023-december/fourth-sunday-of-advent-year-b-24-december-2023>

STF 187 – The angel Gabriel from heaven came

<https://youtu.be/-Sp3fU7-5XQ?feature=shared>

The angel Gabriel from heaven came,
With wings as drifted snow, with eyes as flame." All hail to thee, O lowly maiden Mary,
Most highly favoured lady." Gloria!

"For known a blessed mother thou shalt be,
All generations laud and honour thee;
Thy son shall be Immanuel, by seers foretold,
Most highly favoured lady." Gloria!

Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head;
"To me be as it pleaseth God," she said.
"My soul shall laud and magnify God's holy name."
Most highly favoured lady." Gloria!

Of her, Immanuel, the Christ, was born.
In Bethlehem all on a Christmas morn,
And Christian folk through-out the world will ever say:
"Most highly favoured lady." Gloria!
Sabine Baring-Gould (1834 -1924)

Please read:

Luke 1:26-56

<https://bible.oremus.org/?qj=569489870>

Time to Reflect

This Christmas Eve we focus on Mary's story as she receives the news of her upcoming pregnancy from the angel Gabriel,

then goes to meet with her cousin Elizabeth, and sings the Magnificat.

Mary is the young woman chosen by God to bear the saviour Jesus. This choosing in turn reveals something of God's intentions for the world in the incarnation of his Son. By choosing Mary, a person of lowly status in her society, God is making clear who is favoured in his sight, specifically those who have the lowliest status. By doing this God is being fully consistent with other past examples of selecting candidates. Indeed, Jesus' own ancestor, the great King David, was himself on appearances an unlikely choice by God. Yet David was selected not due to his outward appearance and status but due to the strength and orientation of his heart:

"for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."
(1 Samuel 16:7, NRSVA)

God sees Mary's heart and her inner strength and courage, knowing that she will be the best mother for his Son. Following on from her encounter with the angel, Mary goes on to sing the Magnificat which demonstrates her own remarkable insight and understanding of what God is doing. In her singing Mary announces God's favour not only to her but to all people of lowly status.

Mary's song demonstrates her understanding of the state that her society finds itself in. A society under the oppression of a mighty empire and ruled by a corrupt and ruthless vassal king. She is aware of the suffering of the ordinary people and the longing they have to be free from their oppression. Mary knows that the coming Christ child will be the one who can transform everything. A king who will lift up the lowly and in so doing bring down and humble powerful rulers. The coming saviour who would promote the much longed for justice, peace, and righteousness amongst his people.

The question we might ask ourselves is whether we can have the same heart and understanding as Mary does? Can we too see that God loves the poor, the broken, the vulnerable, those on the margins? If we can see that then can we also see our role,

as members of God's Kingdom and as disciples of Jesus, to share that Godly love with those around us?

As we prepare to celebrate Christmas, and the wonder of the incarnation, we remember that God's response to a sinful world is not to punish it but to instead send his only Son that we might find forgiveness, reconciliation, and eternal life. We also receive Jesus knowing that God wants to reorder our lives and our communities so they might reflect the Kingdom of God. This means a fundamental upending of our priorities in which we too favour the lowly amongst us.

This Christmas season I encourage you to try and see the coming of Christ through Mary's eyes: Giving hope to the hopeless and joy to the broken hearted; lifting up and casting down so that the very least might know that they are loved. For when we begin to see Christmas in the way that Mary saw the coming of Christ, we might also discern our role in working in partnership with God to establish peace and justice in our time.

Have a blessed Christmas!

Prayer of Intercession

You are invited to pray silently for:

The needs of the world...
The Church and its calling...
Loved ones going through difficult times...
For peace, justice, and reconciliation...
In Jesus name. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven...

STF 213 – O Little town of Bethlehem

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-X-XhCVOKzU>

O little town of Bethlehem
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight

O morning stars together
Proclaim the holy birth
And praises sing to God the King
And Peace to all the earth!
For Christ is born of Mary
And gathered all above
While mortals sleep, the angels keep
Their watch of wondering love

How silently, how silently
The wondrous gift is given
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of His heaven
No ear may hear His coming
But in this world of sin
Where meek souls will receive him still
The dear Christ enters in

O holy Child of Bethlehem
Descend to us, we pray
Cast out our sin and enter in
Be born to us today!
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell
O come to us, abide with us
Our Lord Immanuel!

Phillips Brooks (1835 – 1893)

Final Prayer

Thank you, Scandalous God,
For giving yourself to the world,
Not in the powerful and extraordinary,
But in weakness and the familiar:
In a baby; in bread and wine.
Thank you. For offering, at journey's end,
a new beginning; For setting, in the poverty of
a stable, the richest jewel of your love;
For revealing, in a particular place,
your light for all nations.

Thank you for bringing us to Bethlehem,
House of Bread, Where the empty are filled,
And the filled are emptied;
Where the poor find riches,
And the rich recognize their poverty;
Where all who kneel and hold out their hands
Are unstintingly fed. **Amen.**

Prayer by Kate Compston, from *Bread of Tomorrow*:
<https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2014/12/christmas-prayer-bethlehem-house-of.html>