

21st December 2025 – Morning Service

Advent 4

Olwen Meller

Advent Candle Liturgy

For unto us a child was born, for this world... Jesus, who is Light of the world. Love was proclaimed, strength and power were promised. Jesus, Light of the World, meet us this day, for we wait on you. Fill us with the light of your love. *The fourth advent candle is lit.*

All pray: **Jesus, Light of the world, with your light, transform this world.**

StF 180 – O come, O come Immanuel

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| 1) O come, O come, Immanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear: | 3) O come, O Rod of Jesse, free
Your own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell your people save,
And give them vict'ry o'er the grave. |
| Ch) <i>Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.</i> | 4) O come, O Key of David, come,
And open wide our heavenly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery: |
| 2) O come, O come, thou Lord of might,
Who to your tribes, on Sinai's height,
In ancient times did give the law
In cloud, and majesty, and awe: | 5) O come, O Day-spring, come and cheer
Our spirits by your advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight: |

Based on Advent Antiphons translated by John Mason Neale

Opening Prayers

Gracious God, coming to your people as a child, bringing to your people new hope, gifting to your people new life; we come before you in worship, we bring before you all we are, we lay before you our gift of praise. Have us know your nearness, make us feel your presence, show us now your will for we too would come, and bring, and gift in the name and for the sake of our coming Lord Jesus Christ.

Advent God, we come responding to your call. You used the most unlikely people in the preparation for your kingdom. A peasant girl became the mother of our Lord, and a simple family nurtured him. Encourage us as we remember the obedience of others.

We meet preparing to greet you. Turn us around to find your way. Guide us into a lifestyle appropriate to your coming kingdom so that we may prepare the way for others and lead them in the path of peace. Be with us Immanuel; the God who comes close. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

StF 169 – Come thou long expected Jesus

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| 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. | 3) Born thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a king,
Born to reign in us for ever,
Now thy gracious kingdom bring. |
| 2) Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth thou art,
Dear desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart. | 4) By thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By thine all-sufficient merit
Raise us to thy glorious throne. |

Charles Wesley

Reading: Luke 1: 26-38 (NIV)

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

Reflection

This reading today allows us to step into the life of Mary as she thought ahead to motherhood, and all the worries that were on her mind. Not just the normal worries of a mother, but the sheer responsibility of parenting and shaping the Son of God. But why was Mary chosen over other women? After all, she wasn't *that* special, she didn't have credentials that seemed suitable for the King of all Kings – or did she?

So, I want us to look at what we can learn from this faithful servant of God.

Firstly, Mary teaches us that no matter who you are, God can use you, if you are willing and available. Availability is becoming more and more tough in today's jobs that expect you to work night and day. Jobs today assume that you are always available and now, with people working from home, it can be hard at times to see when work finishes and family life begins. But, as we know, with jobs you are not really asked about your availability – that's assumed once you sign the contract – it's more about your ability. But isn't it incredible that God doesn't operate this way? Mary teaches us that God isn't interested in your ability, but 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. Mary could have been as young as 15 or 16 when the Angel Gabriel visited her. We might think that this is too young for God to use her, but God didn't think so. No matter who you are, God wants to use you.

She was also poor, and yet the lack of money or social status doesn't affect God's desire to use her. God knew her heart. He wanted her to be part of his plan for salvation.

She's young, she's poor, but she's also from Nazareth. There really wasn't much happening there. In fact, it would be Nathaniel, years later, who would say 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?'. But, you see, it doesn't matter to God about your age, your wealth or your background. Mary didn't allow anything in her background, past or ability to get in the way of her obedience. What shines through about her is her humility, her willingness to be part of God's plan, and her obedience to God's word.

She didn't just volunteer to God's request; it came from a place of her faithfulness to follow the Lord no matter what. Mary teaches us that no matter what problems you face as a believer, you can be assured that God is always with you. As the angel said to her 'Do not be afraid Mary. You have found favour with God.' And yet she had every reason to worry. She knew that Joseph might walk away and disown her. And then the possibility that the wider community would find out with the possibility of stoning. Mary's fears were well-grounded. You see, the message from the angel changed her life. She was getting ready to be married and live a normal life, but her life would never be the same again.

She must have clung to Gabriel's words 'The Lord is with you' – he would give her the strength and courage to face anything. And God makes that same promise to you and me. Mary faced all these scary things, but she knew the Lord would never abandon her.

StF 187 – The Angel Gabriel from heaven came

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| 1) The Angel Gabriel from heaven came,
his wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame;
'All hail,' said he, 'thou lowly maiden Mary,
most highly favoured lady.'
Gloria! | 3) Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head,
'To me be as it pleaseth God,' she said,
'My soul shall laud and magnify his holy name:'
most highly favoured lady.
Gloria! |
| 2) '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! | 4) Of her, Immanuel, the Christ, was born
in Bethlehem, all on a Christmas morn,
and Christian folk throughout the world
will ever say,
'Most highly favoured lady.'
Gloria! |

Sabine Baring-Gould

Reading: Matthew 1: 18-25 (NIV)

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Reflection

Picture Joseph on the day his world turned upside down. It's just like a TV soap – the cheated husband, the penitent wife, and the shocked neighbours! Though inside Joseph must have been furious, he doesn't seem the type to rant and rave. Angry and hurt, his first thought must have been that she had been unfaithful.

Imagine him pacing up and down the hillside around Nazareth, refusing to come in for supper. He churns over his distress, wishing the clock could be turned back in time before he had ever proposed to Mary or even met her. Hear him rehearsing how he is going to tell his family the wedding is off. See him go inside, his shoulders slumped and his head bowed. First, he tries to calm his mind by picking up his chisel and getting on with his jobs by the dim, flickering oil lamp. But that doesn't help and eventually a huge weariness comes over him. He lies on his bed, pulls the blanket over himself and sighs. Perhaps it will be better in the morning.

He was certainly, as we might say 'in a predicament'. He certainly deserves our sympathy. He is a righteous Jew, concerned to uphold the laws and customs of his world, and those laws say he should divorce Mary even though he is only betrothed to her, and leave her to carry the shame of an illegitimate child. But God intervenes, and this ordinary person does an extraordinary thing – he takes Mary to his home, completes the marriage contract and acknowledges the child as his.

Consider the example of forgiveness that Joseph demonstrated to all around. Consider the risk he took of being shamed himself. And if the 'true' story were ever to be revealed, he would become a laughingstock. Here at the beginning of Jesus' life, we see two of the principles of Jesus' later teaching – the first to be slow to judge and generous in forgiveness, and the second, do not cling to rules for the sake of appearances or through fear of the priestly hierarchy, but practise mercy.

Is it at all possible that Joseph told Jesus this story when he grew up, and that as Jesus pondered it, he drew his lessons from his own remarkable beginning?

Let us pray: Dear Father, may I imitate the trust Joseph put in you and the mercy and love he showed to Mary. Enable me to do extraordinary things for you so that I may provide a safe place for your birth this Christmas. **Amen.**

StF 193 – Born in the night

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| 1) Born in the night, Mary's Child,
a long way from your home;
coming in need, Mary's Child,
born in a borrowed room. | 3) Truth of our life, Mary's Child,
you tell us God is good;
prove it is true, Mary's Child,
go to your cross of wood. |
| 2) Clear shining light, Mary's Child,
your face lights up our way;
light of the world, Mary's Child,
dawn on our darkened day. | 4) Hope of the world, Mary's Child,
you're coming soon to reign;
Saviour of all, Mary's Child,
walk in our streets again. |

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Prayers of Intercession

God and Father of our coming Lord Jesus Christ, the time of Christ's Advent draws near, and we feel a mixture of excitement and apprehension. Excitement for the hope he heralds; apprehension for the judgment he brings. This yearly round brings pain as well as pleasure.

We are inn keepers, for our hearts are too ready to cry 'no room here' and yet we want to be like the shepherds who heard the angels, and gathered in wonder and praise at the cradle.

We are Herods, fearful for our position, and yet we want to be the wise men who bowed and brought gifts. We ache to welcome the Christ-child, and yet we agonise at the cost of commitment.

Living God, fill us with the wonder and keen anticipation for your glory to be revealed. Take from us unfitting fear and give us an expectation of renewal. Speak to us of your enduring nearness as we draw near to you this Christmas time and always. **Amen.**

StF 185 – Sing we the King

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| 1) Sing we the King who is coming to reign;
Glory to Jesus, the Lamb that was slain!
Life and salvation his empire shall bring,
Joy to the nations when Jesus is King: | 3) Souls shall be saved from the burden of sin;
Doubt shall not darken his witness within;
Hell has no terrors, and death has no sting;
Love is victorious when Jesus is King: |
| <i>Ch) Come let us sing: Praise to our King,
Jesus our King, Jesus our King:
This is our song, who to Jesus belong:
Glory to Jesus, to Jesus our King.</i> | 4) Kingdom of Christ, for your coming we pray;
Hasten, O Father, the dawn of the day
When this new song your creation shall sing:
Satan is vanquished, and Jesus is King: |
| 2) All shall be well in his kingdom of peace;
Freedom shall flourish and wisdom increase;
Justice and truth from his sceptre shall spring;
Wrong shall be ended when Jesus is King: | |

Charles Silvester Horne

Blessing

The blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us this Christmastime and for evermore. **Amen.**