

# 5<sup>th</sup> December 2021 – Morning Service

## Advent 2 – Mary Trusted

Megan Ashmore

### Advent Candle

We light this candle to remind us of Mary - whose quiet faithfulness and acceptance of God's call is a model of trust to us all. Lord Jesus you came to call us to serve in your name - help us to trust you as Mary did.

As we light our advent candle - **Light of the world, shine on us.**

As we prepare for Christmas time - **Light of the world, shine on us.**

In this world of pain and darkness - **Light of the world, shine through us.**

To all the people who don't know you - **Light of the world, shine through us.**

Jesus you are coming again - **Light of the world, light the way.**

In our service here today - **Light of the world, light the way.**

### Song – Servant King we wait on you

Servant King we wait on you,	Love that will not let us go,
Watching for that special day,	Born in humble human form,
When your glory will descend to us we pray.	May our hearts respond with faith, in you O Lord.

*Alan Combes CCL No. 515642*

### Prayer

Father God, as we meet to worship you today, may we recognise, reflect upon and respond in faith to your touch on our lives. Help us to accept your call and rejoice in it, just as Mary did when she praised you saying, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour." **Amen.**

Our first hymn this morning is the rousing hymn by Timothy Dudley-Smith, based on those words of Mary:

### StF 186 – Tell out my soul

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| 1) Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!<br>Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;<br>Tender to me the promise of His Word;<br>In God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.              | 3) Tell out, my soul, the greatness of His might!<br>Powers and dominions lay their glory by;<br>Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight;<br>The hungry fed, the humble lifted high. |
| 2) Tell out, my soul, the greatness of His name!<br>Make known His might, the deeds His<br>arm has done;<br>His mercy sure, from age to age the same;<br>His holy Name, the Lord, the mighty One. | 4) Tell out, my soul, the glories of His Word!<br>Firm is His promise, and His mercy sure.<br>Tell out my soul, the greatness of the Lord<br>To children's children and forevermore!           |

*Timothy Dudley-Smith © Timothy Dudley-Smith CCL No. 515642*

### Prayers of adoration and thanks

Holy God, we lift our voices in praise of you, for you are great and worthy to be praised. For, because of your infinite love for us, you provided us with a salvation plan, which entailed giving your Son to us, to lead us back to you when we had gone astray. Unnumbered blessings, faithful promises, tender mercy and loving kindness are all to be found in you. And so we give thanks to you today through our sung praise; our spoken prayers; silent contemplation; and we pray that as we worship we will be renewed by your Spirit so that our souls too will tell out the greatness of the Lord and our hearts rejoice in you, God, our Saviour.

**Amen.**

For Christians, Advent is the season of the year when we prepare to share in the ancient longing for, and celebration of the coming of the Messiah, and to be alert for his Second Coming. Our next hymn reflects on this. In the first verse we sing of when Jesus came two thousand years ago, to show God's love for us. In the second verse we recognise still our need of Jesus coming into our lives today. And in the third verse we look ahead to Jesus' return.

### StF 173 - Into the darkness of this world

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| <p>1) Into the darkness of this world;<br/>Into the shadows of the night;<br/>Into this loveless place You came,<br/>Lightened our burdens, eased our pain<br/>And made these hearts Your home.<br/>Into the darkness once again,<br/>Oh come, Lord Jesus, come</p> <p>Ch) <i>Come with Your love to make us whole.<br/>Come with Your light to lead us on.<br/>Driving the darkness far from our souls.<br/>O come, Lord Jesus, come.</i></p> <p>2) Into the longing of our souls;<br/>Into these heavy hearts of stone;<br/>Shine on us now Your piercing light,<br/>Order our lives and souls aright<br/>By grace and love unknown.<br/>Until in You our hearts unite,<br/>Oh come, Lord Jesus, come.</p> | <p>3) Holy Child, Emmanuel;<br/>Hope of the ages, God with us,<br/>Visit again this broken place,<br/>Till all the earth declares Your praise,<br/>And Your great mercies own.<br/>Now let Your love be born in us,<br/>O come, Lord Jesus, come.</p> <p>E) <i>Come in Your glory, take Your place.<br/>Jesus, the Name above all names.<br/>We long to see You face to face,<br/>O come, Lord Jesus, come.</i></p> |
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Maggi Dawn © 1993 Thankyou Music CCL No. 515642

### Reflection

Maggi Dawn wrote "Into the darkness" in 1992, in response to a request from her local parish priest, Vicar John Sentamu. She is quoted as saying, "He was always looking for ways to encourage musicians to produce new and interesting music for the Church. I had already written quite a number of short songs, and one day he said to me, 'What we really need is some new hymns – and Advent is coming up. Don't write about Christmas. Write about Advent'. "Into the darkness" is my response to his request, but in the process of looking into the themes of Advent I began to be intrigued as to why we rush into Christmas without paying enough attention to Advent."

At a recent Local Preacher's meeting, this fact of rushing into the Christmas story also came up. Hindsight is a wonderful thing, and as resurrection people we are truly blessed to have a bigger picture of God's salvation plan. But it also leads us to anticipate the resolution of the season and in turn miss out on the values which arise from waiting.

I have made a list of a few things we wait for:

- A New baby
- Spring
- To be served in a shop – thinking particularly of having to buy shoes for the new school year!
- A special day or event
- An appointment
- Exam results
- A bus
- Traffic lights

And then I considered the need for waiting in each case

- A new baby – for the baby to develop
- Spring – because the earth relies on the cycle of the seasons
- To be served – for fairness; to receive what we require
- A special day or event – appropriateness of occasion
- An appointment – opportunity that has been offered to us
- Exam results – to make sure they are done thoroughly
- A bus – runs according to a timetable
- Traffic lights – safety, security

Aggravating though they may be, those needs translate into core values: acceptance; obedience; integrity; respect; responsibility; and kingdom values: righteousness; humility; joy; faithfulness; love and hope. With the shops selling Christmas cards before the children go back to school after the Summer break, movie channels showing Christmas films from the end of September, and personally as a music teacher currently rehearsing twelve different Christmas performances I know the difficulty in trying to keep the birth of Jesus at bay for Christmas Day and focus on the meaning of the season of Advent. So let's welcome this opportunity to take a moment of quiet, and rest in God's presence, asking Him to foster within us the patience to acknowledge this Advent season, and to remove the temptation to overlook this time of waiting. [Silence]

## Prayer

God of season and time, of earth and heaven, of what was, and is, and is to come, we confess to you that we do not always acknowledge nor appreciate this special season of waiting. It is in waiting that our relationship with you may grow stronger. It is in waiting that our understanding of your kingdom may be broadened. It is in waiting that our love and servitude to others may be encouraged. As we wait for the return of your son, Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord, we remember the responses of those who awaited his birth, and recognised him as your son. We pray that we may learn from them and live like them.

**Amen.**

## Reading: Luke 3: 1 – 6 - The Proclamation of John the Baptist

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

## Comment

Esme (my daughter) put up our Christmas tree last weekend. If it was up to me I would put it up on the day before Christmas Eve and take it down the day after Boxing Day! As it is, it is up. But at great cost! In order to fit it in so that we can still see the telly, and have the sofa bed out for additional guests, and provide seating for all, it involves a lot of manoeuvring, which in turn requires the use of the Hoover and duster as months' worth of unseen dust is exposed!! But she's happy, and I am satisfied that my house is clean. Advent is a time for us to prepare to welcome Jesus once more. It is a time to expose the dark, unseen corners of our hearts and to ask God to help us clean up the mess caused by sin. It is a time to seek to make straight the paths of righteousness and smooth the way for others to be led to Jesus. Like John the Baptist, and the prophets of old, we should be proclaiming the good news of the coming of Jesus to all we meet.

In a moment we are going to sing our next hymn “On Jordan’s Bank the Baptist cry announces that the Lord is nigh”. The following is taken from the Singing the Faith website and is a short synopsis of the meaning behind the verses: *The first two verses are a call to all people to “make straight the way for God within” – in other words to put ourselves in a frame of mind and heart that makes a fruitful relationship with God possible. To help this process, we confess our dependency on God’s grace (v3), and pray for the needs of those around us (v4). Verse 5 is a standalone hymn of praise. It acknowledges that only God can make our personal transformation and the transformation of the world possible.*

### **StF 182 – On Jordan’s bank**

- 1) On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry  
announces that the Lord is nigh.  
Awake and harken, for he brings  
glad tidings from the King of kings!
- 2) Then cleansed be every life from sin:  
make straight the way for God within,  
and let us all our hearts prepare  
for Christ to come and enter there.
- 3) For you are our salvation Lord,  
our refuge and our great reward.  
Without your grace we waste away  
like flowers that wither and decay.
- 4) To heal the sick stretch out your hand  
and bid the fallen sinner stand.  
Shine forth and let your light restore  
earth’s own true loveliness once more.
- 5) To god the Son all glory be  
whose advent sets his people free.  
whom with the Father we adore,  
and Holy Spirit, evermore.

*John Chandler CCL No. 515642*

### **A reflection from Mary based on Luke 1:26-38**

*I cannot, to this day, tell you why it happened. I cannot, to this day, tell you how it happened. Maybe I fell asleep. Perhaps it was all a dream. But this I know... this I thought in my mind...*

*It had been a busy day. There had been much to do, sweeping, cleaning, mending, baking, dusting, bed-making. I was alone and very tired. Perhaps I just nodded off – just for a moment, you understand. But I know there was a bright light, and, for a moment, great fear, and then the voice...*

*How could I invent these things? I am a young girl, I know so little...*

*There was a voice in the light, saying, ‘God has blessed you, Mary’. Yes, it said my name, just like that! And I did not feel blessed, only very, very frightened. But I listened...*

*‘You will conceive a son, and call him Jesus. And he will be the Son of God’.*

*He calls this a blessing! To be a disgrace to my family, to be a disgrace to Joseph, to never be fit to marry. What kind of blessing can possibly come from this? What blessing could there be in a child conceived in this way? And the Son of God! This is madness! Yet the voice went on...*

*‘You will have a child, born of the Holy Spirit, a sacred, holy child. Do not be afraid’.*

*Then, suddenly, the light was gone, and with it went my fear. I moved, and found that my heart was saying ‘Let it be as God wills.’ I am his to command. What will come, will come. Just as the Lord wills it.*

### **Reflection**

Mary, such a young girl with limited experience of life, picked out by God for a special visitation; chosen by God for a unique purpose; honoured by God to be the mother of His own Son; acknowledged by God to have a key role in His salvation plan. And her response? “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

The commentator, Scott Matthews writes:

*Maybe she answered quickly because she didn't really understand. She didn't realize the whispers and stares that would follow her for the next 30 years. Maybe she accepted the challenge so readily because she didn't know Jewish law very well. She didn't know that this virgin birth opened her up to be divorced and shamed by Joseph. Or maybe she did understand, she did know what God was asking. She did have some idea of the cost, and she was willing to pay the price anyway. And that's why God chose her— because He knew that Mary's heart was completely devoted to Him, and that she would be completely devoted to the task of raising the young Messiah.*

Mary was keen to serve the Lord in whatever way He called her to, but at the same time she was surprised, not quite expecting the call to come in that form. Yet, ultimately her desire to serve God outweighed the fears and doubts, and her response demonstrated the kingdom values we thought of earlier: righteousness; humility; joy; faithfulness; love and hope; all bound together by trust. Mary was prepared to let go of control of her life, her plans for the future, her reputation and relationship with others, in pursuit of doing God's will.

Let's just think about that for a moment. Mary was open to God's surprising ways. Her initial fears changed to total trust as she acknowledged the Spirit moving in her heart and yielded to it. God had plans for Mary, and Mary accepted them in trust.

God has plans for us too. Maybe they will fit nicely with our own plans – maybe they will not. Are we willing to surrender to God's call upon our lives whatever the cost?

Remember, God promises that He will be with us as we work through them. And He will always equip us for the work He calls us to do. Do we trust God enough to say yes to His call?

God's plans – God's promises – Our choice.

This Advent time, may we open our hearts and minds to hear and respond to God's call on our lives; endeavour to wait with patience for His promises to be fulfilled, and give our hearts and lives in service to Him, trusting that with God all things are possible. And as we delight in His love for us so we go out praising His name and showing His light to all.

## **Prayers of Intercession**

Almighty God, we pray for this beautiful world which you created for us to enjoy. We ask for a blessing on charities and individuals who seek to be good stewards of your earth, and for campaigners and scientists championing new ways of living so that the earth's resources are preserved. We pray that the discussions held at COP26 last month will translate into appropriate action that generations to come will still marvel at your wondrous creation and not live in fear of the land.

L: Shine forth            **R: and let your light restore earth's own true loveliness once more**

Merciful God, whose love knows no bounds, we pray for people who today are living in fear of the land – land that floods and ruins homes and livestock; land that does not receive enough water, and where droughts cause crops and livestock to die, and with it, hopes and means for the future. We ask forgiveness for the part we play in polluting the world and wasting its resources. Forgive us our selfishness and teach us how to think of the impact our decisions make on our neighbours both near and far.

L: Shine forth            **R: and let your light restore earth's own true loveliness once more**

Gracious God, we pray for your children all over the world who, with us, wait for the coming of Christ to complete your great salvation plan. While we wait, we ask that you will continue to work in our lives, focussing our thoughts on you; guiding us to read and study your word; and drawing us to spend time in prayer with you. We remember those who have not heard the good news of the gospel and pray that this Advent time more ears will hear your word, more eyes see your glory and more hearts come to know the Saviour of the world.

L: Shine forth            **R: and let your light restore earth's own true loveliness once more**

Compassionate God, who came to bring life to the poor, the oppressed, the sick, the lonely, the lost, and the bereaved, we name before you all those for whom we are concerned. In silent prayer we bring their lives to you trusting that you will hear and answer our prayers, and acknowledging that your will is to be done... [Silence]

L: Shine forth

**R: and let your light restore earth's own true loveliness once more**

Lord, our ways are not your ways, and your thoughts are not our thoughts. Help us to align ourselves with you. L: Shine forth

**R: and let your light restore earth's own true loveliness once more**

**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.**

I ummed and ahed over this final hymn. It says all the right things to sum up our thoughts but I wondered if it led us to the stable too soon! But no, it teases us. It tells us that is where this bit of the journey will end, but we are not there yet! It reminds us of what is coming and offers us the opportunity to respond by stating that we will make Jesus welcome when he comes.

### StF 178 – Long ago, prophets knew

1) Long ago, prophets knew  
Christ would come, born a Jew.  
Come to make all things new;  
Bear his People's burden,  
Freely love and pardon.

Ch) *Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring!*  
*Sing, choirs, sing, sing, sing!*  
*When he comes,*  
*When he comes,*  
*Who will make him welcome?*

2) God in time, God in man,  
This is God's timeless plan:  
He will come, as a man,  
Born himself of woman,  
God divinely human.

3) Mary, hail! Though afraid,  
She believed, she obeyed.  
In her womb God is laid;  
Till the time expected  
Nurtured and protected.

4) Journey ends! Where afar  
Bethlem shines, like a star,  
Stable door stands ajar.  
Unborn Son of Mary,  
Saviour, do not tarry!

E) *Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring!*  
*Sing, choirs, sing, sing, sing!*  
*Jesus comes!*  
*Jesus comes!*  
*We will make him welcome!*

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### Blessing

God of hope, who brought love into this world, be the love that dwells between us.

God of hope, who brought peace into this world, be the peace that dwells between us.

God of hope, who brought joy into this world, be the joy that dwells between us.

God of hope, the rock we stand upon, be the centre, the focus of our lives always, and particularly at this Advent time. And the blessing of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore. **Amen**