

**Sunday Update**  
**20<sup>th</sup> December 2020**

**Luke 1:46-55**

46 *And Mary said:*

*'My soul glorifies the Lord*

*47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,*

*48 for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.*

*From now on all generations will call me blessed,*

*49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me – holy is his name.*

*50 His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.*

*51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;*

*he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.*

*52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.*

*53 He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.*

*54 He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful*

*55 to Abraham and his descendants for ever, even as he said to our fathers.'*

Do you have a favourite Christmas carol? We've been listening to them on the radio for a few weeks now, in all kinds of versions and arrangements. I find it hard to choose a favourite: I like most of them, but there are some that I can't quite sum up enthusiasm for as much as the others. Maybe your favourite is a big, bold carol like *Hark the herald angels sing* and you love to sing it out at the top of your voice. (I'm saying nothing about being in tune!) Or maybe your favourite is a more reflective carol like *In the Bleak midwinter* which ends by challenging us about our response to Christmas. For some, their favourite carol comes from their childhood and *Away in a manger* might top that list, or one of the few carols that find their origin in Scotland, *Child in a manger*. I remember, as a teenager, discovering the *Calypso Carol (See Him lying in a bed of straw)* and it being, for me, one of the first pieces of Church music that came with a swing! I hope that you enjoy listening to the carols listed below and that over the next week or so, your favourites feature in some of our Zoom services.

Today's passage is the very first Christmas carol. It is Mary's song of praise which we call *The Magnificat*, called after the first word of the song in the Latin version. It is the first of four songs in the opening chapters of Luke's gospel, the others coming from Zechariah, the angels and Simoen. Why not have a look at all four of them, as in different ways, they celebrate the coming of Jesus. Tom Wriight says of Mary's song: "It's one of the most famous songs in Christianity. It's been whispered in monasteries, chanted in cathedrals, recited in small remote churches by evening candlelight, and set to music with trumpets and kettledrums by Johann Sebastian Bach." We sing it as the hymn *Tell out my soul the greatness of the Lord*. Music creates a mood in a way that words on their own can't do; songs bring out some of the deepest emotions in our hearts and minds and other people's songs give us a voice in some quite profound ways. Mary's song does that for many people across the world today.

Mary's song is a celebration of two themes: first, it celebrates what God has done and secondly the turning upside down of the world and its values. First of all, Mary's mind is full of the ways in which God is at work to save the world. "*My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour... He has performed mighty deeds with His arm...*" (verses 47 and 51) The song is full of almost quotes from the Old Testament as she finds a way to celebrate her place in God's work to save the world. Like many places in the Old Testament, she speaks in the past tense, as if God has already done all of this, yet she is still a long

way from giving birth and even further away from the cross and resurrection of Jesus, the events that completed God's salvation. But so sure is she that God will keep His promises that she speaks as if this is already done. God will do this, so she can speak as if God has already done this. God will be her Saviour; God will do mighty deeds to save the world. All of this saving work is focused on the baby which she is carrying; Jesus is the centre of the salvation of God. Mary may not yet know how this will all work out, but she knows that her baby will be the One to do all of this.

Our Christmas carols celebrate the coming of Jesus and what He came to do; they express the same truths in so many different and evocative ways. This should be the heart of our celebration at Christmas, remembering the promises that God has made and the great achievements of God in completing our salvation. Almost unfailingly, the best of our Christmas carols point us to Jesus so that we can not only remember Him but renew our faith in Him. The carols that we sing give us a voice with which we can put that sense of celebration into words. Even in days when our other Christmas celebrations will be muted, and when our sense of joy might be hard to find, I wonder if we can find the space to rejoice in God's power and grace coming into the world in Jesus, and finding fulfilment in His work to save us. God is mighty and loving; Mary celebrates these qualities through Jesus; so can we.

Secondly, Mary reflects on a world that is being turned upside down. For her, that is personal, but she sees the same truth for the world. Personally, she is glad that God *"has been mindful of the humble state of his servant"* (verse 48) – Mary's story is not one of greatness and wealth and power, but of being humble; yet God chose Mary to be the mother of His Son. We use the word "ordinary" and somehow give it overtones that demean the person we describe that way, when in fact it should carry no overtones, but be a simple description of a worthy person! What Mary sees of God dealing with her personally, she also sees in a grander scale, for the whole world and its values: *"He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble."* (verse 52) Jesus turned the world upside down; Mary sees that even before He is born, but that was how He lived His life, caring for the poor and the needy, for the sinners; in the church Paul celebrated the fact that not many of the new Christians were wise, influential, or of noble birth, but *"God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong."* (1 Corinthians 1:27) There are people across the world who have been inspired by Mary's words to want to change their world; Archbishop William Temple called the Magnificat "a most revolutionary canticle!"

I'd love to see something of the world turned upside down! I was watching a game show the other day and there were two contestants, one the epitome of celebrity, so desperate to win, while the other was calmness personified, happy just to be there and have achieved so much. There were two sets of values there on the TV screen for everyone to see! So much of the world in which we live is about power and influence, is about wealth and consumption; we were told that "kindness" would be the new value in our post-Covid world, but it is only seen in snatches! GK Chesterton, the author, was once asked "What is wrong with the world?" His answer: "I am!" He saw that human nature is the issue behind the world's ills. Changing human nature is the work of the Saviour; Jesus came to make us new people, not better versions of the old model. What do we value most? Being rich, powerful, or influential? I came across this question the other day: "What is there about my life that I want to turn upside down?" It's a great question; I wonder how you would answer it.

Mary celebrates the work of God in salvation; Mary sees God turning the world upside down. She knows that, at the heart of both of these, is the Son that she is about to bear. Jesus is the centre of our salvation; Jesus turns our world upside down and makes us new! As we come to celebrate

Christmas, sing Mary's song on your heart and sing your favourite Christmas carols; rejoice in Jesus your Saviour and Jesus who gives life meaning and value in a new way.

*Prayer: Father, thank you for Mary, for her faith, for her song. Thank You that she sees Jesus as the One who will save her and save the world; thank you that she sees Jesus turning the world upside down. May Christmas be a time for us to renew our faith, say again that Jesus is our Saviour; may Christmas be a time for us to value love, kindness, hope, humility, and learn to be like Jesus.*

*Day by day, dear Lord of you  
Three things I pray:  
To see you more clearly,  
To love you more dearly,  
To follow you more nearly,  
Day by day.*

From December's Prayer Focus:  
*Even if we cannot gather in person  
Emmanuel, God with us.  
Even if some Christmas traditions have had to go  
Emmanuel, God with us.  
Even if we might not be able to hug family and friends  
Emmanuel, God with us.  
Even if we cannot sing Christmas carols beside each other  
Emmanuel, God with us.  
Even if Christmas cheer is harder this year  
Emmanuel, God with us.  
(Prayer written by Christian Aid Scotland.)*

Please take time during the week to pray for the people referred to in these topics:

- For a world crying out for something of value to believe in, light in the darkness of fear and anxiety; help us to point people to Jesus. May the eyes of many be opened to see the value of love, kindness, hope and humility; if need be, turns the lives of many upside down, discovering a new set of values. Help us to share the light of Christ with the values by which we live our lives.
- For Christmas services all over Scotland this week, that those who lead these services will speak something of the truth of Christmas and Christ's coming; that those who attend services inside buildings or on-line would have a deep sense of God with them, finding the light of Christ in their hearts. Help the Church across the world to share the light with others.

At Christmas, we give thanks for all those who have worked hard in our communities in 2020, to keep people safe and to help others. At Christmas, we pray for all the Covid-related matters for which we have been praying for months, remembering people who suffer, medical staff who care for them, residents in Care homes and their families and the staff; and those who have been bereaved in 2020. May the grace and peace of Christmas fill their hearts and their lives.

- For effects of lockdown again, new measures and their impact; pray that they work to curb spread of Covid, let numbers go down again and people be safe; let our society be open again and let us be free from fear and anxiety. For the plans centred on Christmas, that the nation will stay safe and people will respect the need to keep other, more vulnerable, people safe.
- NHS staff as the numbers in hospital are high again; for care home staff such as Lorimer House, those caring in the community – God keep them safe.
- For the vaccine, giving thanks that it is becoming available; for wise use of the first doses, given to people in greatest need across the world.

- For the way we and others behave with regard to Covid, to be careful and not reckless; for people to be wise in the way we behave, to observe social distancing and to take notice of people who may be weaker and more vulnerable.
- Those still working from home – what does the future look like? Is this the way they will do their work from now on? Others deeply wishing they were back in an office; some facing a long prospect of this continuing into 2021; may they be healthy in body, mind and spirit.
- People whose hearts and minds are feeling “shut-in”; some coming to the end of furlough, going back to work; others having lost their job and feeling a lack of purpose in life; people for whom the physical lockdown is affecting their mental health and sense of well-being and freedom. For victims of domestic violence, with nowhere to escape to.
- Our community, caring for vulnerable people, helping those in need, for resilience and strength.
- Our political leaders, trying to make difficult decisions in the right way.
- For one another, sustaining our faith when there is nothing of the outward life of the church.
- People who are weak and vulnerable today, those who mourn, those who are sick, those who are isolated and lonely; those in hospital; those who are still shielding; pray for people you know by name.

Here are some links to hymns you might know and love; this week we have a selection of Christmas carols; go and have a listen. (Some of the links look a bit different this week, but they should all work as usual!)

It came upon the midnight clear

[It Came Upon the Midnight Clear \[with lyrics for congregations\] - YouTube](#)

See Him lying on a bed of straw

[CALYPSO CAROL SEE HIM LYING ON OF STRAW - YouTube](#)

Infant Holy

[Infant Holy, Infant Lowly - YouTube](#)

In the bleak midwinter

[In the Bleak Midwinter \(Official Lyric Video\) - Keith & Kristyn Getty - YouTube](#)

O come all ye faithful

[O come all ye faithful - YouTube](#)

A very different song from Amy Grant – Mary’s Song (Breath of heaven) is a more reflective song seeing the world from Mary’s place; it is poignant and worth a listen - [Amy Grant - Breath Of Heaven \(Mary's Song\) \(Lyric Video\) - YouTube](#)

Remember the prayer e-mail line at [prayerjgpc@gmail.com](mailto:prayerjgpc@gmail.com)

#### **Some other resources:**

- Each Sunday at 10.30am, we will have a short time together using Zoom; a link has been sent out in the e-mail with this update which should enable you to join in.
- This reflection is available on our own church website under the “sermons” tab and there is an archive of sermon material there for you to read and links to the video reflections – [www.jgpc.org.uk](http://www.jgpc.org.uk)
- If you have a smartphone, the Bible2020 app will give you a short bible reading each day (from the Scottish Bible Society)
- Scripture Union daily bible readings can be found at <https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/wordlive>
- The Church of Scotland website has prayers and reflections from the Moderator and details of lots of on-line streamed church services - <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/>

- Claremont Church in East Kilbride are making services available over a phone line: here are the contact details which you can share with people who are not on line: **Sunday Services @ 10:30 - same details every week** 020 3937 2973; PIN: 352 598 857#

**DAILY BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS** - New issues of “**Every Day with Jesus**” Booklet for January and February 2021 are now available. The Editor is Micha Jazz, Director of Resources of Waverley Abbey, who continue to publish the booklet, and Micha Jazz is now producing the daily notes from God’s Word for your life and relationships, replacing insight from the late Selwyn Hughes. .Please contact Ian Aitken who will be delighted to arrange copies. Other Bible Study materials are also available with Michael Merriman. **Let the Bible feed you.**

### **Christmas Events:**

**Family Carol Service** on Christmas Eve at 6.30pm; bring a tea-light to bring some sparkle to Christmas Eve as we hear our favourite carols and find hope in the coming of Jesus.

**Christmas Day Service** for all the family at 10.30am; bring a present to the service; let’s rejoice in the coming of Jesus to the world to bring light and joy.

All of these services will take place on Zoom: here is the link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83064379290?pwd=UUx4QmRJZ1hhdHp3VnpCbkpjcllxZz09>

**Christmas Eve Nativity Play** – would you like to take part in our Nativity play? There will be a Zoom meeting at 7.30pm on Tuesday; come if you’re interested; bring some props for the part you might want to play; we’ll record it so that we can play it back on Christmas Eve. The link is the same as above.

**Christmas Offerings** This Christmas we want to give you the opportunity to help children in need. We are supporting 3 charities: the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, SWAN UK, and CLIC Sargent; all of these charities support children and their families and we would encourage you to be generous to them over Christmas. You can give via the Church bank account, if you already know the details; you can give by the “Donate” button on the website and choosing Juniper Green Parish Church; you can give the Minister a cheque or some cash. Please be generous and share the light this Christmas.

### **Bring some sparkle to Christmas:**

**The Star:** download a star from [www.jgpc.org.uk](http://www.jgpc.org.uk) and colour it in, then place it in your window; when you’re walking through the community see how many stars you can find; Christmas is not cancelled!

**The Pebble:** find a pebble and draw a character from the nativity story, then place the stone on the steps at the front door of the church; let’s see what we can create there to remind the world that Christmas is not cancelled.

**The Nativity Trail:** some members of the nativity cast have been let loose in the shops and businesses in Juniper Green; see if you can find them; there is a guide to download on the church website.

**#CommunityChristmas**

## Mary's story

These resources are designed to help you explore the Bible as a family together at home while we can't go to church. Be as creative as you want to be and enjoy spending time with each other and with God.

### Prepare yourself...

Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent. The fourth candle represents love. You may want to light a candle in your home as you say this prayer together, then leave it lit as you do the rest of the activities together. (Remember to blow it out at the end!)

It is almost here,  
only a few more sleeps to the big day,  
we are excited,  
we are waiting,  
we want to know what is going to happen,  
but we have to be patient.  
We hear the story of Mary,  
how excited she must have been,  
how scary it must have seemed.  
Thank you, God, for sending  
your son Jesus to be with us,  
the real gift at this time of year.  
Thank you for your unending love for us.  
**Amen.**



### Question...



Have you ever been given a surprise?  
What was it like? How did you feel?  
Are there different kinds of surprises?

### Challenge...

In 1 minute how many names and words  
can you think of to describe God?



### Read the Bible...

Today's verses are found in Luke 1:26-56. You can read them in a Bible or find them here:  
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+1%3A26-56&version=GNT>

You could try reading the verses in different versions to see if it adds to your understanding of the passage. Or try miming out the story as someone else reads it.

## Talk together...



God chose an ordinary girl for the extraordinary job of being the mother of Jesus.

- How do you think Mary felt when she saw the angel Gabriel?
- What do you think Mary thought when she heard the message about having such a special baby?
- Do you think Mary was a good choice?
- Have you ever felt small or ordinary?
- Have you ever felt special?
- What do you think this story is trying to tell us about people who are ordinary?
- What do you think the best thing about being a parent is?
- The Bible says that Mary was obedient to God. What does it mean to be obedient?
- How can we be obedient to God?
- Mary sang a song praising God for what he was doing, how can we celebrate and praise God for his gift of love to us?

## Praise together...



[When love was born](#) by Mark Schultz

## Pray together...

Sometimes I say yes,  
and sometimes I say maybe,  
and sometimes I say no,  
and sometimes I am too distracted  
to know what I'm being asked.  
Help me, O God of time,  
to find and make time for all the demands  
that come my way,  
so that I might say yes with joy,  
when I can.  
Amen.

## Play together...

Play a game of Simon says. Take it in turns to be the leader. This game is about listening and being obedient to what you're told to do (or not do!). How could we show we are listening to God and being obedient to him just like Mary?

## Make together...

Paper strip angel – You'll need: White card, paper clips, glue stick, scissors, pencil, ruler, twine or ribbon.

Measure out each of the strips you'll need from the white card:

Wings – 2 strips of 2cm x 15cm

Head – 2cm x 10cm

Top of body – 2cm x 20cm

Bottom of body – 2cm x 8cm

To make:

- Wings – place glue on one end and stick the other end on top of it to form a teardrop shape.
- Head – form a circle and glue ends together to secure.
- Body – take long strip and form into an arch shape, place glue on both ends of the arch and stick on the short piece to form a bell shape.
- Attach head and wings to body and secure with paper clips until glue has dried. Add a loop of twine or ribbon so the angel can hang on your Christmas tree.



