

SUNDAY 20th December 2020

Introit TiS 272 Come, thou long-expected Jesus (verses 1 and 3)

Call to Worship:

“I am the Lord’s servant. May it be as You have said.”

A young woman named Mary opened her heart to your song.
She heard the promise that she would give birth to a son
who would break the bonds of oppression and transform the world

And she believed.

You are a God who acts to save

You are a God who does marvellous things!

Prayer:

In the rush of preparation for holiday celebration, we come to this place to be fed by God. We need the hope, peace, joy and love that this season represents. We need to listen again with wonder at the magnificent words of Mary as she proclaims her faithful participation in God’s most miraculous gift. Open our hearts this day, Lord, to receive the words and the blessings, to be fed and then to be those who will share with others as you have shared with us. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen

Acknowledgement of Country:

I wish to acknowledge the custodians of this land, the Bangerang people of the Yorta Yorta nation and their Elders past, present and emerging. I acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.

Welcome

TiS 217 Love divine, all loves excelling

Lighting of the Advent candles

Leader: We long for the presence of Christ, Emmanuel, God with us.

All: **Come, Lord Jesus.**

The 4 candles are lit :

Reader: LOVE comes to earth to live among us, full of grace and truth .

All: **Come, Lord Jesus.**

Reader: God so LOVED the world that he gave his only Son.

All: **Christ, shine in our hearts today.**

Sing:

Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
Walls made of living stone.

Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in your church gathered today.

Prayer of Confession

Challenging God,
Every notion we have about power, success, wealth, and achievement,
you take and toss out the window.
More importantly, you come to us,
to upset our notion that we have to save ourselves.

We confess we are not the people you hope us to be, Advent God.
The very ones you favour, we too often ignore or ridicule.
The ones you knock off their pedestals, we admire and emulate.
We are so focused on having more and more, we risk being sent away empty.

Forgive us, Mighty God, and look with grace upon us.
We would live secure in your love;
we would be the ones of peace for our world, we would seek to do your will,
as did Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

Silence is kept

Even now - yes, even in this very moment,
God comes to us, bringing hope,
bringing forgiveness, bringing grace as freely offered gifts to us.
**May we open our hearts to the God who is with us,
and receive the gifts which have been offered to us.
Thanks be to God. Amen.**

An Early Word

Christmas Bowl video

Hymn Mary's Song (sung to the tune of Amazing Grace)

My soul proclaims the Lord, my God.
My spirit sings his praise.
He looks on me, he lifts me up,
And gladness fills my days.

All nations now will share my joy;
His gifts he has outpoured.
His little one he has made great.
I magnify the Lord.

His mercy is for evermore,
His name I praise again.
His strong right arm puts down the proud
and raises lowly man.

He fills the hungry with good things;
The rich he sends away.
The promise made to Abraham
is filled to endless day.

Scripture Reading: Luke 1:26-56

Reflection :

Did you know - the oldest Christmas carol is not "Silent Night," "Joy to the World," or another favourite. Rather, it is "The Magnificat," also known as "The Song of Mary," the only carol that comes from the pages of the Bible. Sung by Jesus's mother - it is also the most radical carol of all. This song is called "The Magnificat" due to the Latin translation of the first verse: "My soul magnifies the Lord." And through it Mary, a teenager, alone and pregnant with Jesus, gives voice to what this Saviour will accomplish.

You won't hear Mary's song in the background while shopping at the supermarket. Unlike other carols that speak of tidings of comfort and joy, The Magnificat speaks of comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable - sending the rich away empty. This isn't the Mary portrayed in Western art and popular religion as placid and docile. This is a Mary who cries out to her God against the powers that be.

The setting is Nazareth, in ancient Palestine. A devout Jew, Mary is a rural peasant - young, female, a member of a people subjected to economic exploitation by powerful ruling groups. Like other Jewish girls of her class, she's most likely illiterate, though she knows the Hebrew Scriptures from oral tradition. Those girls were typically married off at around 13 years old, bearing children soon enough, and there's no reason to believe Mary was any different. In the New Testament's Gospel of Luke, she suddenly finds herself pregnant, and Joseph, the carpenter with whom she's betrothed in an arranged marriage, knows he's not the father.

Facing public shame and possible stoning for presumed adultery, Mary travels into the hill country, to stay for a few months with her much older cousin Elizabeth who is also pregnant. It's not hard to imagine these two women together - giddy, excited, nervous, and perhaps still living with a hint of disbelief.

Upon meeting, Elizabeth breaks out with the spirit-inspired words that call Mary blessed. She declares the child Mary is bearing as blessed and recognizes Mary's faith in God's promises as a blessing, too. It is on the heels of this spiritual declaration and affirmation from her cousin Elizabeth, who herself is a living miracle as a pregnant woman past her child-bearing years, that Mary breaks forth into song. Her song is authentic, raw, beautiful, and truthful. It speaks about the plight of the lowly and the power of God's promises. Her song includes words of the prophets and holds in it God's legacy of love and faithfulness and justice.

Commentators speak of her song as a song of reversals.

Mary is no stranger to the marginalized life. She does not come from a wealthy background. She does not hold any position of power. She probably knows what it is like to be overlooked, passed over, underrepresented, and silenced by the culture around her. A poor Jewish girl in a community under the rule of the Roman Empire, she knows how she is perceived and seen by the dominant culture.

But she also knows what it's like to be seen and chosen by God. Mary sings of what she has seen and proclaims what her heart now knows. She is a demonstration of God's ability to breathe life and purpose and meaning into a person's existence even when the world thinks you aren't worthy or significant. Mary's song shines light on the nature and character of God. She sings in gratitude for God's love for her and for all.

In a moment when she would have had every right to sing a lament for the complexity of her position and unprecedented situation, she sings a Hallelujah for God's mercy from generation to generation.

In a 1933 sermon, German Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer called Mary's song "the most passionate, the wildest, one might say the most revolutionary Advent hymn ever sung." Bonhoeffer, who would be hung 12 years later for resisting Nazism, added: "This is not the gentle, tender, dreamy Mary ... This song has none of the sweet, nostalgic, or even playful tones of ... Christmas carols. It is instead a hard, strong, inexorable song about collapsing thrones and humbled lords of this world ... "

Mary sings a song of love for the loveless. She sings a song of hope for the hopeless. She sings a song of joy for ages to come, and she sings to our situation today.

Mary's song is an unprecedented song for an unprecedented time. As Christians in the face of a pandemic that is still raging around the world, we know what it is like to live in uncertain times. We are surrounded by pain. We see oppression. We see the high and the proud impact the lowly and the marginalized. We see the gaps between the haves and the have nots - gaps in terms of access to healthcare and education and equality

And yet, it is in this season of Advent that we remember Christ is coming, and Christ has the power to change our song. Christ is coming, and Christ has the power to turn ordinary servants into agents of hope and justice, singing songs of a promise and a future., songs that point to God's love mercy, no matter who is in power and no matter who is in control.

What is your song?

Mary's song is a reflection of her resounding 'yes' to God's call on her life, and a reflection of God's limitless love for us all.

May we find the words that give us a new song in this most special week leading to Christmas Day. Amen.

TiS 658 Here I am, Lord

Announcements

Offering and Dedication

Loving God, at this Advent time we remember your gifts of hope, peace, joy and love. You call us to give generously and love extravagantly in response to all you have given us.

We give back to you all that we are, all that we have and all that we will be, through your love freely given to us.

May we share your love with our families, friends, neighbours and strangers, those nearby and far away.

As we experience the wonder of this season, may we know the beauty of giving and receiving. Amen

Prayers for Others:

Merciful God,
May Mary's song be heard through the ages,
drowning out the din of Christmas chaos.

Today we particularly pray that it may be heard in Syria and by Syrian refugees who have been given refuge in Jordan

In a world darkened by war clouds and the shadow of hunger,
may Mary's song be heard -
in the forgotten places, and places where human hope and expectation has dried up,
in the lives of the poor, bringing hope,
in the lives of the sad and despairing, bringing joy,
in the lives of the weary and homeless bringing rest and comfort.
May it be a song that stirs reverent fear in the hearts of those who assume power.

And may the joyful promises of justice and overturned power prompt us all
to overflowing action.

We pray in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray, saying...

*. 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 forever. Amen.*

Hymn: TiS 268 Joy to the world

Sending Out:

Loving God, our hearts echo the ancient cry:

Come, O come Emmanuel!

Go with God's love shining in your hearts.

Look with eyes of compassion, be alert to the promptings of God's Spirit.

Be ready to share God's love with all whom you meet,

Be alert to the unfolding purposes of God in your life and the lives of those around you.

Amen. Come, O come Emmanuel!

TiS 781 Father, bless us as we go