

## **20 December, 2020 Advent 4B A precarious peace**

2 Samuel 7:1-11,16 Psalm 89:1-4, 9-26 or Luke 1:46b-55, Romans 16:25-27, **Luke 1:26-38 Luke 1:46b-55**

I could sing of your love forever – mp4 start at 1:00

This Child – Kendrick - from recording – Lyrics on ppt.

Mary's song of praise <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=McNw8klCLnA> saved

*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel [Acoustic Sessions*

### **CALL TO WORSHIP**

God comes in the person of Jesus, to bring peace to the nations and joy to the people. We are here to worship and to be restored in God's peace.

### **PRAYER OF INVOCATION**

God of eternity, in the events of the birth of Jesus, we find faithful people waiting, waiting, waiting for your day to be revealed. You are the one that comes, ever coming in love and salvation. Help us to be open to your coming here this day. Amen.

Psalm 89:1-4, 9-26 (Leone)

Talk 1 Pam

Taken from the first line of Psalm 89 that we just had read *I could sing of your love forever* – mp4 start at 1:00

### **PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Oh God, in the craziness of the pre-Christmas season we lose sight of its significance amid the rush to please others.

We focus on gift-giving rather than your gifting. We focus on carols and parties and feasts and forget the meaning of Jesus' incarnation, life, teaching, death and resurrection.

We guard our time jealously and pass by the needy, ignoring your call to love the least, reach the lost, support works of justice and declare your gospel.

Forgive us we pray. Forgive the mayhem we create, our selfishness and blindness and reveal your higher purposes, day by day and minute by minute. For the sake of Christ, we pray. Amen,

### **WORDS OF ASSURANCE**

God is trustworthy, faithful and true. In the name of Christ, we can know our sins are forgiven. Thanks be to God.

### **PRAYER OF ADORATION AND THANKSGIVING**

God of the creative moment, we praise and thank you for your gift of peace that comes to us in the stories of Advent and Christmas, and in your presence here.

We come before you in humility, acknowledging that your thoughts are far beyond us. Your goodness fills us with awe. We are overwhelmed with wonder that the coming of the Christ-child, born in simplicity and couched in fragility is the means of salvation and the declaration of your eternal love.

All glory, honour, praise and thanks be yours, this day and forever. Amen.

### **DISCIPLESHIP THOUGHT**

God's purposes are held in a moment in time, reliant on the obedience of a few to respond faithfully to God's call and held in the birth of a baby at a time when life was cheap and infant mortality high. In his book, *Damascus*, author Christos Tsiolkas describes the plight of an unwed mother and the consequences for children born out of wedlock destined to be left out in the desert to die. It is a chilling account. It underscores what could have happened if Joseph had chosen a different path or if Mary had disbelieved the angel and gone out into the desert herself. From the safety of our Christmas preparations it is easy to forget just how precarious all the aspects of the days leading up to the birth of Jesus, his early childhood, and his growing up in an occupied land really are. But then, is it not the case that life is always precarious, and God is always coming to those of faith with risky invitations to fulfil the divine purpose?

### **OFFERTORY SENTENCE**

God calls us to serve through obedient discipleship and the offering of all we have and are. Let us make our

offerings with glad hearts.

Mention offertory options – Online – details at our website, tin by the door.

### **OFFERTORY PRAYER**

Small as we are in the scope of eternity, small as our offering is in the face of the needs of our world, in your hands all becomes a miracle of life and peace. Receive our gifts, we pray. Amen.

*This child* – Kendrick (lyrics on ppt)

**Luke 1:26-38 Luke 1:46b-55** (Leone)

Talk 2 – Peter

*Mary's song of praise* - with lyrics

### **PRAYER OF INTERCESSION (Leone)**

Merciful God, from of old your prophets dreamed of the Day of the Lord, of a day when nations might dwell in peace, and every soul might flourish. We join all those who have prayed for peace, lifting up the plight of nations, praying for leaders to embrace truth and justice, longing for your reign of love to be realised everywhere.

Loving God, let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Gracious God, as we stand on the eve of Christmas, we are mindful of the inequality that exists in every city and country.

We pray that people will have food to eat, shelter and care, celebrations that bring joy and a real awareness of your saving grace.

Spirit of life, we know that there are people here amongst us and within our wider circle whom we know are in need of your blessing. *In silence we name them now...*

We do not name them because they are more special or deserving than others, but because you call us to pray for their wholeness and you have placed them upon our hearts and lips. May they know your presence, your healing touch, and be strengthened in faith.

In this season of madness and season of gladness call us to prayer and to cling closely to your presence, in the name of Jesus, bringer of peace. Amen.

*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* [Acoustic Sessions] – something for everyone in this recording)

### **Benediction**

#### **Romans 16:25-27**

Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith— to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

***Psalm 89:1-4 Contemporary English Version***

**(A special psalm by Ethan the Ezrahite.)**

**The LORD's Agreement with David**

Our LORD, I will sing of your love forever.

Everyone yet to be born will hear me praise your faithfulness.

I will tell them, God's love can always be trusted, and his faithfulness lasts as long as the heavens."

You said, "David, my servant, is my chosen one, and this is the agreement I made with him:

David, one of your descendants will always be king."

**19-26**

In a vision, you once said to your faithful followers: I have helped a mighty hero. I chose him from my people and made him famous.

David, my servant, is the one I chose to be king, and I will always be there to help and strengthen him.

"No enemy will outsmart David, and he won't be defeated I will strike down and crush his troublesome enemies.

He will always be able to depend on my love, and I will make him strong with my own power.

I will let him rule the lands across the rivers and seas.

He will say to me, 'You are my Father and my God, as well as the mighty rock where I am safe.'

**Luke 1:26-38 Contemporary English Version**

**An Angel Tells about the Birth of Jesus**

One month later God sent the angel Gabriel to the town of Nazareth in Galilee with a message for a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to Joseph from the family of King David. The angel greeted Mary and said, "You are truly blessed! The Lord is with you."

Mary was confused by the angel's words and wondered what they meant. Then the angel told Mary, "Don't be afraid! God is pleased with you, and you will have a son. His name will be Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of God Most High. The Lord God will make him king, as his ancestor David was. He will rule the people of Israel forever, and his kingdom will never end."

Mary asked the angel, "How can this happen? I am not married!"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come down to you, and God's power will come over you. So your child will be called the holy Son of God. Your relative Elizabeth is also going to have a son, even though she is old. No one thought she could ever have a baby, but in three months she will have a son. Nothing is impossible for God!"

Mary said, "I am the Lord's servant! Let it happen as you have said." And the angel left her.

## HYMNS

### 2 Samuel 7: 1-11, 16

Come, thou long-expected Jesus	TiS.272 AHB.200
Do not be afraid, I am with you	TiS.16 SA.28
Hail to the Lord's anointed	TiS.275 AHB.203
Long ago prophets knew	TiS.283 SA.61
O bless the God of Israel	TiS.284
O come, O come, Emmanuel	TiS.265 AHB.193
To us a child of royal birth	TiS.308 AHB.230

### Luke 1: 47-55

My soul gives glory to my God	TiS.172
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord	TiS.161 AHB.109

### Romans 16: 25-27

God gives us a future	TiS.687
Immortal, invisible, God only wise	TiS.143 AHB.80
Joy to the world! the Lord is come	TiS.269 AHB.224
May the mind of Christ my Saviour	TiS.609 AHB.537
Of the Father's love begotten	TiS.290 AHB.215
Thanks to God whose word was spoken	TiS.431 AHB.339

### Luke 1: 26-38

All things bright and beautiful	TiS.135 AHB.70
Behold a rose is growing	TiS.294
Hail Redeemer, King divine	TiS.237 AHB.188
Jesus! the name high over all	TiS.218 AHB.150
Long ago, prophets knew	TiS.283 SA.61
No wind at the window	TiS.287
Not the powerful, not the privileged	TiS.288
Once in royal David's city	TiS.312 AHB.237
The angel Gabriel from heaven came	TiS.302 AHB.222

The angel appeared to a woman in a town in Galilee called Nazareth. So!!!

We can visit Nazareth today. What is it like? (PPT)

The town of over 60,000 people - the largest Palestinian city in Israel. Over 70% of the population are Muslims. About 20% are Christians with the majority being Greek Orthodox. Protestants are very much in the minority.

In Nazareth you can visit the Church of the Annunciation (Franciscan) with copper detail and relief work on the doors emphasising international peace.

Inside are banners, tapestries from all over the world depicting Mary and Christ. (PPT)

The church is intended to be a place of reconciliation for all the Christian traditions.

In Nazareth there are tensions between Arab Muslims and Christians, some of whom have been forced to leave Nazareth and live elsewhere.

In the time of Jesus, Nazareth's population might have been a couple of hundred people. The Nazareth of today may seem very different from the one 2000 years ago yet there are similarities - Still political tensions. Still the divisions between races and beliefs. Still a hard road for women whose identity continues to depend on having a husband and children, especially sons.

Luke tells us that the angel had also appeared to Zechariah, father of John the Baptist with extraordinary news.....

The angel Gabriel appeared to a young woman in a town called Nazareth with a message of grace.

The announcement to Mary was to her puzzling, perplexing: "Rejoice, highly favoured one! The Lord is with you."

Reiterated in word plays in the Greek text is grace. "Hail Graced One!" "You have found grace with God."

What would this woman have had to rejoice about in her everyday reality? really? We don't really know because in the biblical text we are not told, but most likely she was

- A young girl.
- Rural life. What lay ahead for most girls her age?
- Not just any rural life but coming from Nazareth. The disciples were asked 'can anything good come from Nazareth?' In the hills, hard to grow crops, pasture land.
- Marriage at 12 or 13. Lots of children.
- Hard work in Galilee - not the favoured place of the Roman Empire. Hotbed of sedition.

And yet this young girl has perhaps insight and maturity beyond her years, in contrast to Zechariah the father of John the Baptist, Mary holds no official position among the people. She is not described as righteous in terms of observing the Torah. Her experience of God's messenger does not take place in a religious setting. She is among the most powerLESS people in her society.

- She is young in a world which values AGE.
- She is a female in a world ruled by MEN.
- She is poor in a stratified economy.
- She has neither husband nor child to validate her existence.

We don't know who her father or brother is. That SHE should have found favour with God and be highly gifted shows Luke's understanding of the nature of God. Many traditions in order to venerate Mary have added to her esteem by declaring that she herself was immaculately conceived that she was pure by virtue of her lack of sexuality, was sinless etc. I do not hold that it is necessary to hold such views. More consistent with the OT view of God is that He makes remarkable and very unpredictable choices at times in terms of upon whom his favour or Grace rests. Yet again the lineage is clearly there to be traced right back throughout the pages of biblical history.

The promise to Mary is that she shall bear a son - whose name means "Emmanuel" = GOD IS WITH YOU.

But what kind of a son? The child is to be the Messiah, the long-awaited descendant of David who will restore the glories of David's Kingdom and usher in a period of freedom, prosperity and peace for Israel. These were normal, conventional expectations of the Messiah. That promise we heard in Psalm 89. But a Messiah born among the marginalised. Surely not!

Mary reacts strongly to the announcement. There is total disbelief and questioning of the message: To bear a King? A threat to the existing powers when she is young and betrothed. (a stronger agreement than our understanding of engagement today) Betrothal meant that Mary was incorporated legally into the line of Joseph, the descendant of King David. The legal act of betrothal was very important. Virgins who lost their betrothed before marriage were regarded as widows. The significance of Jesus is announced even before his birth.

He has a lot to live up to. Even before he has uttered a syllable the church has learnt that he is someone who will make a real difference. His career is laid out in extravagant terms. Here will be one greater even than John the Baptist - identified quite clearly with God.

The virgin birth served originally to emphasise the uniqueness of Christ. For Luke what is important is the grace and favour of the Word of God that is able to bring forth life out of nothing.

Possibly both Matthew and Luke received traditions of the illegitimacy of Jesus and transmitted it very differently. Both stress that the child is Messiah and holy, in spite or because of his origins.

An audience familiar with stories of miraculous conceptions of heroes and immortals would think either of divine and human paternity or of the divine mating with the virgin (sacred marriage). Greek readers were familiar with those sorts of stories. By contrast the Jewish traditions would not be prepared to think of virginal conception. In those traditions, divine paternity did not replace **human paternity**.

Mary is to name the child. She is the receiver of the promise. She is not bearing a child **for** her husband. **Mary is to function as a prophet**. "The Holy Spirit will come over you".

In the same way Luke spoke about the Spirit descending upon the group of disciples gathered in the upper room in Acts 1

Mary is filled with the Holy Spirit - a creative, life-giving Spirit that is introducing a new act on the part of God - like the act of creation depicted in Gen 1. God is doing something new! **This is an act of grace**. It's not a particular reward for a righteous life, although Mary is praised for her belief. She has no need of a sign or proofs, unlike Zechariah father of John the Baptist, who asked for a sign and became mute.

Mary is urged to trust.

Is she however, just a passive character? "I am the handmaid of the Lord". Is she just a submissive female? Is this an endorsement of a patriarchal model of female inferiority, dependence and helplessness?

Notion of slavery is not a positive one. This remains something of a difficulty for modern readers of the Gospel story. But others were also referred to as slaves of God. Moses, Abraham, David, Isaac, the prophets, Jacob and Hannah. Even Jesus himself claimed to be among them as "one who serves". The female slaves in Acts at the end times would prophecy.

The prophetic spirit comes through Mary's Song of Praise, the Magnificat, which we are about to hear in song.

A marvellous song of liberation. A challenge issued to the existing structures of power and oppression. She declares God to be the one who bypasses those at the centre of power in favour of the lowly and marginalised. All the verbs are in the past tense -It is something to be claimed here and now. The Magnificat concludes with an invitation to Mary's Community and the church to join her in making this experience of liberation and salvation their own.

What is Luke's message?

It is an affirmation about the way God acts and continues to act.

For Zechariah and Mary to respond to God's extraordinary announcements, required more than ordinary reserves of faith and trust. God is being generous. They are **invited to be generous in receiving the gifts of God.**

**The old cultural barriers of age and sterility, youth and virginity have been overturned.**

Luke tells us that God is always acting, but often in surprising and paradoxical ways. **The ways of God often reverse human expectations.**

You and I are invited to reflect on the ways of God in the world - in our hearts and minds, our families and communities, our churches and neighbourhoods. We are invited to be on the lookout for the God who makes all things new, in often surprising ways.

May God be with you. Emmanuel. And may you see the unimaginable transpire by the Spirit of God who makes all things possible.