

Welcome to this act of worship marking the 4th Sunday in Advent. This week we are focussed on Mary and her song, 'The Magnificat', which contains words of praise and protest. The symbol this week is a protest banner, representing the imperative to challenge injustice, that is present in Mary's song, through the power of God's love, received and shared.



Advent liturgy

Preparations almost complete, the time is nearly here.

Promises and praises echo all around,
Silencing the noises of injustice.

O hush the noise,
Let's hear the angels sing.

The promise of God for the servant lowly,
God who comes to the help of all,

Whose ancient promise still stands today.
O hush the noise,
Let's hear the angels sing.

And we watch and we seek,
And we learn, we pray and we praise,
And we wait and we wait.
O hush the noise,
Let's hear the angels sing.

Hymn StF 186 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!

Timothy Dudley-Smith

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumbered blessings, give my spirit voice;
tender to me the promise of his word;
in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!
Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;
his mercy sure, from age to age the same;
his holy name, the Lord, the mighty One.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!
Powers and dominions lay their glory by.
Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
to children's children and for evermore!

Prayers

You are invited to light a candle if you would like to, as a focus for a time of prayer.

Magnificent God, with Mary we praise your name.

We honour your faithfulness through history; we celebrate your presence with us today;
we trust your promises for the future and we pray for the life-giving peace of your Son
for all the world, this Christmas and always. Amen.

Take some time to sit quietly and bring to God those things which trouble you, for which you want to seek forgiveness, then pray this prayer which assures us of God's forgiveness and acceptance

Dear God, what I most long for is peace.

Peace of heart, mind, and spirit; peace from burdens, guilt and past mistakes.

Thank you that I can know your gift of peace, given through your gracious forgiveness, loving acceptance and the assurance of your continuing presence with me. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Readings

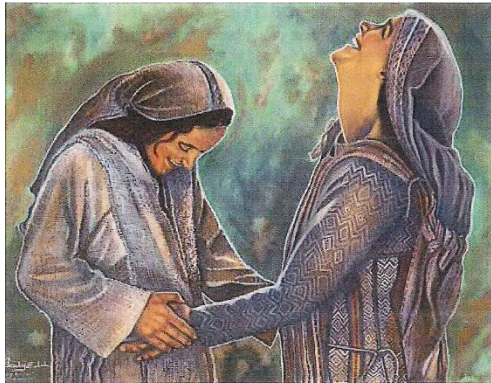
Micah 5: 2-5a

'But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.'

Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labour bears a son, and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be our peace.

Luke 1: 39-55

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfil his promises to her!'



"Mary and Elizabeth: Count Your Blessings"

Mary's song

And Mary said: 'My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me – holy is his name.
His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

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

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

He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants for ever, just as he promised our ancestors.'

Reflection

The fourth Sunday in Advent is traditionally the time when we remember Mary, Jesus' mother. Mary sang praise to God for God's blessings, in the words of The Magnificat, after her joyous meeting with Elizabeth. Through Elizabeth, Mary is affirmed in her role as the mother of God and this affirmation results in her outpouring of praise and trust in God's promises.

We hear the promise of God's blessings too in the verses from the prophet Micah, blessings of peace and security through a ruler who will come from Bethlehem; one of the least of the clans of Judah.

God's promised blessings can come, unexpectedly, from small, out of the way places, through ordinary people, and can rest on ordinary people. Mary attests to this truth as she and Elizabeth share experience of being pregnant through God's mighty gifting.

Mary's praise bubbles up inside her and bursts out in song. She praises God for what God has done for her personally, in calling her to bear the Son of God. Her praise then expands out to include what God has

done for his people and will do for those who are faithful to God. A kingdom hoped and longed for for so many generations was at last coming into being through Mary's son, Jesus.

As we set our own stories of community alongside that of the first Christmas, a common thread is one of great blessing, both given and received, and a call to look forward and to do all that we can to embrace and embody God's kingdom, a kingdom of righteousness and peace.

As we celebrate the birth of Jesus, as we gather to ponder on the face of God who was willing to risk all to bless humanity with salvation, may we be open to receive everything that God wants to bless us with this Christmas. Amen

Prayers for Others

Almighty God, thank you for the great love that you have for all people;

We rejoice in your presence and in your peace.

We pray for your whole church as it prepares for the Christmas season, encouraging people to come before you in joy and celebration.

Bless all who share the joy of knowing you & your love.

Silence

God ever present, reveal yourself in peace and joy

Renewing God, thank you for places and times of relaxation & refreshment

We remember all who are overworked or heavily burdened, especially those who care for others at home, in hospitals, in care homes, in hostels, in hospices and ask for your renewing strength.

We remember those who are deeply in debt or feel that they are struggling to cope with life, and we give thanks for people who come alongside them offering practical help and support.

Silence

God, ever present, reveal yourself in peace and joy.

Welcoming God, thank you for our homes and our loved ones.

Bless all whom we know with an awareness of you and your love

We pray for all who suffer from broken relationships, homes where there is little joy, where violence and abuse is perpetrated.

Silence

God, ever present, reveal yourself in peace and joy

Compassionate God, send your blessing upon all who are oppressed, weighed down by sorrow and pain.

We remember those who are ill, those who feel they are losing mobility and independence.

We pray for all who are struggling at this time.

Silence

God, ever present, reveal yourself in peace and joy.

Everlasting God, thank you for the gift of life and for life eternal.

We remember new parents, the joy and the tiredness that comes with caring for new babies

We remember those who have died and who have entered the joy of your kingdom.

Silence

Loving God, accept our prayers in the name of Jesus. Amen

Hymn

StF 188 There's a light upon the mountains

Henry Burton

There's a light upon the mountains, and the day is at the spring,
When our eyes shall see the beauty and the glory of the King;
Weary was our heart with waiting, and the night-watch seemed so long,
But His triumph-day is breaking, and we hail it with a song.

There's a hush of expectation, and a quiet in the air;
And the breath of God is moving in the fervent breath of prayer;
For the suffering, dying Jesus is the Christ upon the throne,
And the travail of our spirit is the travail of His own.

He is breaking down the barriers, he is casting up the way;
He is calling for His angels to build up the gates of day;
But His angels here are human, not the shining hosts above,
For the drum-beats of His army are the heart-beats of our love.

Hark! we hear a distant music, and it comes with fuller swell;
'Tis the triumph song of Jesus, of our King Emmanuel;
Zion, go now forth to meet Him, and my soul, be swift to bring
All your finest and your noblest for the triumph of our King.

Blessing & sending

Emmanuel, God with us, fire our imaginations with the sweep of your salvation.
Catch us up in the cause of your kingdom, already breaking into this world.
And let your Spirit, wild as the wind, gentle as the dove, move within us and among us.
Strengthen our faith and send us out with your love & peace in our hearts.