



Reflections & Prayers for Sunday

15th August 2021

The Blessed Virgin Mary



Today is the Sunday on which the Church commemorates the Blessed Virgin Mary. Mary: the woman who said yes to God, who defied the social conventions of her day, who gave birth to God's son, who set a pattern of discipleship and love for her boy to follow as he grew to manhood and into his calling. I have come to love the many images of Mary that can be found around the world – not the soft focus, lily white Mary of much western art, but the real images of a real woman. I saw the Madonna pictured above in a side street in Sienna, just in a shop window that caught my eye. All over the world, women and men have come to find in Mary a source of inspiration and a focus for prayer.



StJohnsAL5

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Readings for this Sunday

You may want to find your Bible and read the lessons set for this week:

Isaiah 61: 10 - end

Psalms 45: 10 - end

Galatians 4: 4 - 7

Luke 1: 46-55 *The Magnificat*

Mary's Song of Praise

And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his
servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."



Reflection

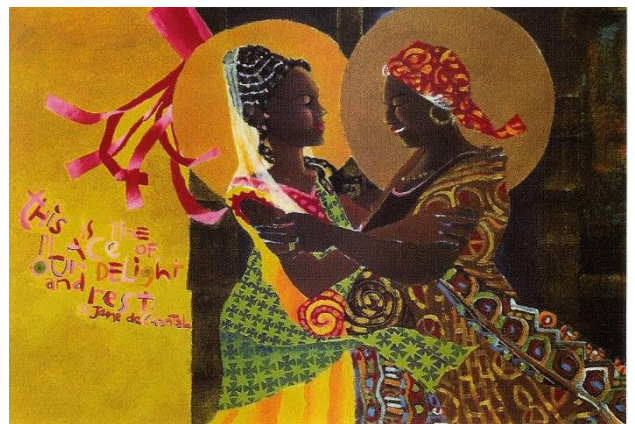
Once again, this week I share with you a reflection from theologian, artist and poet Jan Richardson. She reflects on the Magnificat, Mary's song, writing:

Mary's Magnificat joins an intriguing treasure trove of scriptural songs that are commonly known as canticles. The Magnificat, the Cantic of Mary, the song in praise of the God who turns the world upside down: Mary offers this song in response to a blessing. Luke tells us that when Mary finds herself alone in the wake of the archangel Gabriel's visit, she goes "with haste" to see her kinswoman Elizabeth, who is experiencing a strange pregnancy herself. As soon as she hears Mary's greeting, Elizabeth intuitively knows what has taken place, and she lays a mighty blessing on Mary for how she is participating in the work of God. "Blessed are you among women," Elizabeth cries, "and blessed is the fruit of your womb." Elizabeth continues in a powerful benedictory vein for some verses.

In response, Mary sings.

*My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor
on the lowliness of his servant...
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the
thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful
from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly. (Luke 1, excerpts)*

I find this scene among the most potent in all of scripture. The image of Elizabeth offering her words of blessing, and Mary responding with song: this moment epitomizes the power of the act of blessing. With her gesture of grace, Elizabeth the Blessor challenges us toward similar action: to recognize where God is working in the world, and to participate in bringing this work to completion.



The blessed Mary sings about the God who is doing a new thing, but her song is not entirely original. Within its cadences we hear the ghostly echo of a more ancient song. In one of the first canticles to appear in the scriptures, a woman named Hannah offers praise to God for

responding to her plea for a child. After she leaves her long-awaited son Samuel at the Temple to begin his training as a nazirite, Hannah sings, in part:

*My heart exults in the Lord;
my strength is exalted in my God.
My mouth derides my enemies,
because I rejoice in my victory...
The Lord makes poor and and makes rich;
he brings low, he also exalts.
He raises up the poor from the dust;
he lifts up the needy from the ash heap,
to make them sit with princes
and inherit a seat of honor. (1 Sam. 2.1, 7-8b)*

With a voice of longing and exultation that links them across the generations, both women are singing not only about pregnancy and physical birth. For Hannah and for Mary, the massive change within them is linked to a radical transformation beyond them. There is a congruence between what God has stirred within them—in their wombs, in their souls—and what God is stirring in the world.

I find myself wondering about that kind of congruence, and how God is calling it forth in my own life. Regardless of whether we're called to give birth to physical children, God challenges us to cultivate an interior spirit that is intimately linked with the world beyond us. What's stirring inside me that connects me with the world around me? What is God seeking to bring forth in my life that enables me to participate in the transformation that God is working in all creation? And how is God challenging me to be both Elizabeth, Blessers, and Mary, Blessed?

May you have cause to sing today. Blessings.

- Extract from Jan Richardson's blog:
<https://adventdoor.com/2008/12/16/mary-magnifier/>

Prayers

A collect for this week

O God our deliverer,
you cast down the mighty,
and lift up those of no account;
as Elisabeth and Mary embraced with songs of liberation,
so may we also be pregnant with your Spirit,
and affirm one another in hope for the world,
through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Janet Morley

Prayers for others and for ourselves

As we pray to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
we say with Mary: Lord, have mercy on those who fear you.
Holy is your name.

Your prophet of old foretold a day when a virgin would conceive
and bear a son who would be called God-with-us.
Help us to look forward to your deliverance
and to seek the fullness of your kingdom.
Lord, have mercy on those who fear you. **Holy is your name.**

Your angel declared to Mary that she was to be
the mother of the Saviour.
Help every Christian person to be open to your word
and obedient to your will.
Lord, have mercy on those who fear you. **Holy is your name.**

Mary rejoiced with Elizabeth and sang your praise,
'My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord.'
Help us to live joyful lives that sing your praise.
Lord, have mercy on those who fear you. **Holy is your name.**

Mary bore a son of David's line,
a king whose reign would never end.
Bless the nations of the world with Christ's gift of peace.
Lord, have mercy on those who fear you. **Holy is your name.**

The child Jesus grew in wisdom and stature
in the home of Mary and Joseph.
Strengthen our homes and families,
and keep under your protection all those whom we love.
Lord, have mercy on those who fear you. **Holy is your name.**

At the foot of the cross of Christ stood his mother,
and from the cross she received his lifeless body in her arms.
Give comfort and healing to all who suffer
and all who watch the suffering of those they love.
Lord, have mercy on those who fear you. **Holy is your name.**

The apostle John saw a vision of a woman in heaven,
robed with the sun.
Bring us with all those who have died in the faith of Christ
to share the joy of heaven with Mary and all the saints.
Lord, have mercy on those who fear you. **Holy is your name.**

Almighty and everlasting God,
your handmaid Mary magnified your name
and rejoiced in your saving love:
trusting in that same love,
we ask all these our prayers
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

A blessing for today:

When the Word became flesh
earth was joined to heaven in the womb of Mary:
may the love and obedience of Mary be your example.

May the peace of Christ
rule in your hearts and homes.

May you be filled with the joy of the Spirit
and the gifts of your eternal home.

And the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always.
Amen.

Parish Prayers for the week ahead

In the Anglican Cycle of Prayer for:

Sunday	The Anglican Church of Southern Africa
Monday	The Diocese of Easton – The Episcopal Church
Tuesday	The Diocese of Eau Claire – The Episcopal Church
Wednesday	The Diocese of Central Ecuador – The Episcopal Church

Thursday	The Diocese of Edinburgh – The Scottish Episcopal Church
Friday	The Diocese of Edmonton – The Anglican Church of Canada
Saturday	The Diocese of Saint Edmundsbury & Ipswich – The Church of England

In our Diocesan Cycle of Prayer:

Sunday	Parish of Little Wymondley (Deanery of Hitchin)
Monday	Parish of Norton (Deanery of Hitchin)
Tuesday	Parish of Offley (Deanery of Hitchin)
Wednesday	Parish of Pirton (Deanery of Hitchin)
Thursday	Parish of Radwell (Deanery of Hitchin)
Friday	Parish of St Ippolyts (Deanery of Hitchin)
Saturday	Parish of St Paul's Walden (Deanery of Hitchin)

For the homes and families in:

Sunday	Prospect Lane, Queens Road
Monday	Ranleigh Walk, Ravenscroft
Tuesday	Redbourn Lane, Rowan Way
Wednesday	St John's Road, St Michael's Close
Thursday	St Paul's Close, Sandhurst Court
Friday	Sherwoods Rise, Sibley Avenue
Saturday	Southdown Road, Stonehurst Court

The Sick:

Claire, Sue, Christine, Hermione, Karen, Chris and all whose names are entered on our St Luke's Cell Prayer List.

For the recently deceased:

Ken Bolt, Brenda Guy, Joy Peak.

On their year's mind:

Violet Venning, Stanley King, Emily Keech, Elizabeth Harvard-Watts, Alan Finch, Sheila Williams, Jim Jarvis, Alan Stephenson.

Church Opening times

Other services / in Church congregation

- Evening Prayer on Wednesdays at 5.00pm
- Sunday 9.30am Parish Eucharist
- Short Family service on Sunday 19 September at 4.00 pm

Private Prayer

- Saturday opening (in addition to Sunday), 11.00am – 4.00pm

A reminder... of this phone service:

Daily Hope – dial 0800 804 8044 for prayer, reflection, music and worship services from the Church of England. A weekly service is available from 9 am every Sunday.

Church at home:

We are delighted to produce each week these printed papers. If you would prefer not to receive these papers each week, please let Julie in the parish office know. If you are aware of others in the parish who would also value the opportunity to worship at home in this way, do please contact a member of the Ministry team or Julie (Parish Office Tel: 01582 712776).

