

COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION
SUNDAY 19 DECEMBER 2021 – 4th OF ADVENT

COLLECT

God our redeemer,
who prepared the Blessed Virgin Mary
to be the mother of your Son:
grant that, as she looked for his coming as our saviour,
so we may be ready to greet him
when he comes again as our judge;
who lives and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Psalm 80.1-8

- 1 Hear, O Shepherd of Israel, ♦
you that led Joseph like a flock;
- 2 Shine forth, you that are enthroned upon the cherubim, ♦
before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh.
- 3 Stir up your mighty strength ♦
and come to our salvation.
- 4 Turn us again, O God; ♦
show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.
- 5 O Lord God of hosts, ♦
how long will you be angry at your people's prayer?
- 6 You feed them with the bread of tears; ♦
you give them abundance of tears to drink.
- 7 You have made us the derision of our neighbours, ♦
and our enemies laugh us to scorn.
- 8 Turn us again, O God of hosts; ♦
show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.

Hebrews 10.5–10

- ⁵Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,
'Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,
but a body you have prepared for me;
- ⁶in burnt-offerings and sin-offerings
you have taken no pleasure.
- ⁷Then I said, "See, God, I have come to do your will, O God"

(in the scroll of the book it is written of me).’

⁸When he said above, ‘You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt-offerings and sin-offerings’ (these are offered according to the law), ⁹then he added, ‘See, I have come to do your will.’ He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. ¹⁰And it is by God’s will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Luke 1.39–55

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴²and exclaimed with a loud cry, ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.’

⁴⁶ And Mary said,

‘My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,

⁴⁸ for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

⁵⁰ His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;

⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,

⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.’

A Reflection from Peter...

Think for a moment of a painting of the Annunciation, the angel Gabriel telling Mary she is to be the mother of the Son of God. Almost certainly you will find yourself thinking of a picture of extraordinary peace and recollection: Mary waiting patiently – almost as if she was expecting the angel! It's not that we believe Mary was just waiting quietly – we suspect it was much more of a sudden surprise – but representing Mary as so peaceful, so quiet and prayerful helps us appreciate just what a huge step she took when she said yes to God. Today we hear the next bit of the Gospel. The angel has gone and Mary rushes off to see her cousin Elizabeth. This scene has not attracted nearly so many artists. There are comparatively few paintings of the Visitation and they are, not surprisingly, much more homely, more natural. Here are two expectant mothers, one about to give birth, the other bursting with the news that she is pregnant, meeting to catch up, to compare notes. But even here the ordinary is overlaid with the awareness of God's presence and power: Luke tells us 'Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.' Right in the midst of their doubtless very ordinary chatter about what was happening to them both, Elizabeth recognises the importance of the moment: 'Why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?' As this Advent draws to a close and the light of Christmas breaks in we pause and reflect on the way that God worked with Mary and Elizabeth – and the way he works with us. God comes to us in the ordinary things of life – making a home, bringing up children, coping with pandemics, being bewildered by the carryings on of public figures – and out of anything and everything God brings new life, new possibilities, new hope. We give thanks for all God has done for us and with us and pray that we may go on being ready to say yes to all that God longs still to do for us.