

# St Francis Weekly News for THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT 20<sup>th</sup> December 2020



This newsletter may have come to you by email or through your letterbox, if you received it on paper but are happy to receive an email in future please email [deborah.lechmere@ntlworld.com](mailto:deborah.lechmere@ntlworld.com) If you know anybody else who would like this delivered or emailed please contact Deborah or Revd Janet: [revdjanetwyer@outlook.com](mailto:revdjanetwyer@outlook.com)

## WHAT'S HAPPENING IN ST FRANCIS CHURCH?

### IMPORTANT NEWS ABOUT CHRISTMAS SERVICES

UNFORTUNATELY YET ANOTHER LAST MINUTE DEVELOPMENT HAS SEEN US HAVING TO MAKE THE DECISION **NOT** TO GO AHEAD WITH THE EXTRA SERVICES WE HAD PLANNED OVER THE CHRISTMAS PERIOD.

We are very sad to limit our Christmas celebrations in this way, but the recent increase in cases of infection have led us to believe that any extra services we hold in church might mean increasing the risk of transmitting this horrible virus amongst our nearest and dearest and place an added intolerable strain on our already overworked NHS.

Consequently the following services will not now take place as advertised:

SUNDAY 20<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER, 4PM

Candle lit Readings and Music

CHRISTMAS EVE

3pm 'Thorns in the Straw'

5pm 'Light up the World'

The time is coming when all shall be well and we will be able to do all the things we long to do. Until that time let's give thanks for what we can do; on knowing that we are surrounded by God's love and that we are headed for the biggest party ever!

### THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

This week we will light the fourth candle in our Advent Wreath – the candle of Love.

So far the candles have reminded us of the founding mothers and fathers of our faith – people like Abraham and Sarah, who trusted in God's plan for the world and went on to play their part; the Old Testament prophets who spoke God's word to those who had lost their way; and last week we lit the pink candle – the candle that marked the fact that we were half way through our Advent journey. A day to be joyful and rejoice in the reality that Jesus is very close!

The pink candle also represents the prophet John the Baptist who preached repentance and baptised people in the river Jordan to prepare them for Jesus.



On the fourth Sunday of Advent we remember and honour Mary, the mother of the Christ Child. Mary was just a very young woman when God asked her to be the mother of his Son Jesus. Although filled with apprehension and fearful of what the future might bring, Mary loved God so much she simply said 'Yes.' She is a beloved and shining example of self-giving love, how right she should have a principal place among the faithful people represented in the Advent wreath.



### REVD WINNIE'S WINDOW DISPLAY

This week Brother Eeyore has lit the Candle of love.

Brother Eeyore says: 'Love is like a light shining in a dark place. As we look at this candle we celebrate the Love we find in Jesus Christ.'



Oh dear, Looks as though Revd Winnie has got himself in a bit of a tangle! Probably a case of the pre-Christmas panic of 'so much to do and so little time' Perhaps he should listen to what Brother Eeyore is saying, 'Keep looking to the love we find in Jesus and everything else will fall into place Revd Winnie...'

### CHRISTMAS ASSEMBLY FOR HEARTSEASE

On Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> December me and Fr Tracy were delighted to offer the children of Heartsease Primary Academy a very special Christmas Assembly.

Thanks to the wonders of modern technology, the whole school were able to zoom into St Francis Church building and see for themselves the lovely Advent lighting, the Beautiful Christmas Tree and the empty Stable...



A wonderful time was had by all! Not least by the Vicar and Curate who thoroughly enjoyed telling the children the story of Christmas and singing a few favourite Christmas songs.

Fr Tracy with his little

ukulele!

### THE ADVENT TREE

We extend our deep gratitude to all the gifted people who have lovingly made and given the beautiful decorations that are now gracing the Advent Tree.

Just a few days to go now and the tree will be laden – a glorious sign even when we are stripped bare in wintry times; small signs of God's love make new life blossom!

And it looks as though Revd Winnie and Brother Eeyore are going to have a surprise Christmas Visitor!



# HEARTSEASE COMMUNITY FRIDGE



## Christmas Eve

We will be open again on **December 24<sup>th</sup>, Christmas Eve** from **7.30pm to 9pm**, but with a change of venue to make things safer for all who come. This will be at Witard Road Baptist church on Witard Road close to the junction of Plumstead Road East.

We know this has been a difficult time for some and we really want to help and support those in need this Christmas and into 2021.

We hope to have a wide selection of fresh fruit, veg and salad food with a variety of other foods available, with some Christmas specials.

The food will be bagged up ready to take away. If you have special dietary needs we may have gluten free products etc but this is not a certainty. Please bring a mask with you if possible.

We look forward to seeing you there!

## WE'LL MISS YOU...

A reminder that on Sunday, December 27th, the first Sunday of Christmas, we will be saying farewell to Eleanor Laming, our much loved pastoral visiting coordinator. The service will start at 10.30am and will also be broadcast on our YouTube channel if you are unable to attend.



## DECEMBER TIER TWO RESTRICTIONS

At the moment St Francis Church is open for Sunday and Christmas worship – unfortunately however, this may change at short notice.

If you are unsure about whether to attend church, please do call Revd Janet [07368 832294] or Fr Tracy [07834 845623] to find out the latest information

Planned services over the Christmas period:

**SUNDAY 20<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER, 10.30AM**  
Advent Holy Communion

**CHRISTMAS EVE**  
24<sup>th</sup> December, 11.30pm  
Midnight Mass

**CHRISTMAS DAY**  
25<sup>th</sup> December, 10.30am  
BCP Holy Communion

**SUNDAY 27<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER, 10.30AM**  
Christmas Season Holy Communion

As ever we will be taking every possible measure to ensure that we adhere strictly to the Covid hygiene regulations – and we ask that you bear with us in terms of asking you to sanitize your hands as you enter the church and if you are able to wear a mask at all times.

As well as rejoicing in sharing Holy Communion one with another in the church building we will continue to broadcast via the St Francis YouTube channel. Just search for 'St Francis Heartsease YouTube'!

## IN LOVING MEMORY TREE & QUIET PRAYER TIME

### Remembering Loved Ones at Christmas



If you would like to honour and celebrate the memory of a loved one this Christmastime the 'In Loving Memory Tree' in church is there for you.

Christmas stars are available for you to write your own prayer or message or you can bring your own card to tie onto the tree.

The prayers and messages will be gathered together on Christmas Day and offered to God during the prayers at the 10.30am service of Holy Communion.

For church opening times before Christmas see below.

### CHURCH OPENING OVER THE CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY

St Francis Church building will be accessible for quiet individual prayer [or for people in a household bubble to pray together] at limited times before and after Christmas.

Monday 21<sup>st</sup> December: 10am – 12pm  
Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> December: 10am – 12pm  
Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> December: 10am – 12pm

Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> December: 10am – 11.30am  
Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> December: 10am – 11.30am  
Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> December: 10am – 11.30am

Prayer resources will be available and you will be able to light a prayer candle if that is something you would like to do.

If you would like to arrange to come at a particular time, or would like to talk to us about guided prayer or asking for prayer support please feel free to call Revd Janet [07368 832294] or Fr Tracy [07834 845623]

### NOTICE BOARD

An update on the Happy Moorhen & William Poulson.

Many thanks to the kind souls who contributed to the appeal fund that was set up to help with William's costs in getting his home habitable again. Jim Green sent me the following message:

**"I passed on the donations to William today. He asked me to pass on his very sincere thanks to all at St Francis. Of course he appreciates the donations, he said, but also the moral support which comes from knowing that people are thinking of him is huge.**

**For an update, the boat is back to its original moorings, the banks are clear of all the debris which had to be removed from the boat. What remains is the long haul of making the boat inside dry, insulated and habitable.**

**Thanks  
Jim"**

#### PASTORAL CARE MATTERS

This Christmas may prove to be particularly difficult for many, many people and some of us may find ourselves struggling with all sorts of issues and encountering all kinds of difficulties both practical and emotional. Please remember you are not alone, if you would like the opportunity to have a chat, or if you need some assistance of any kind please do not hesitate to get in touch with us. We are very happy to talk with you if that would be helpful.

We are also able to offer help if you or someone you know needs support with emergency basic food provision. Our contact details are as follows:

Revd Janet [07368 832294]

Father Tracy [07834 845623]

24/7 Answerphone: 01603 431259  
[checked daily]

There is also someone available in church weekday mornings if you would refer to talk to someone face to face. Please be aware that over the Christmas period times the times are a little different:

Monday 21<sup>st</sup> December: 10am – 12pm

Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> December: 10am – 12pm

Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> December: 10am – 12pm

Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> December: 10am – 11.30am

Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> December: 10am – 11.30am

Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> December: 10am – 11.30am

Normal opening will resume on Monday 4<sup>th</sup> January 2021...



#### USEFUL CONTACT NUMBERS

Childline: 0800 1111

Samaritans: 116 123

Domestic Violence Hotline: 0808 2000 247

[If you hear a neighbour in distress please do not hesitate to call this number or 999; you could save a life]

Mind: 0300 123 3393

Age UK: 0800 169 6565

Norfolk Assistance Scheme: **01603 223392**

#### A WORD FROM THE VICAR

Not many words – just a picture that got me thinking about why I'm here! I took this picture to let you know where Revd Winnie's Advent candles were being displayed. I had thought as I looked into the window the camera would see the same as me, the interior of the church. However, what I got was a wonderful image of the cross, prayers, the messages hope, peace and joy - and an amazing image of me amid the community.



Thank you God  
for reminding  
me of what I  
should be  
looking at!

Every Blessing

Revd Janet

## THE CURATE'S CORNER

In my reflection last week I referred to the 'O Antiphons', saying that we hear them in the hymn 'O come, O come, Immanuel'. I've since been asked to elaborate, so I thought I'd do just that – if you like secret codes, read on. I will also talk about why Mary should be an important source of contemplation for us all.

Several years ago, a friend told me that she could always remember an acquaintance's birthday because she was born on 'O Sapientia'. Since I knew that my friend liked to attend the Book of Common Prayer communion service at the cathedral, I asked whether she meant December 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup>. She looked very surprised and said that, of course she meant December 17<sup>th</sup>. Let me explain!

It has been the ancient tradition of the church to sing or say certain texts on the lead up to Christmas at Evening Prayer. When I say ancient, I mean that we know for certain they were being used in Italy in the sixth century, which suggests they are even older. Short texts like these are common in the day services of the church (called 'offices') and they are referred to as 'antiphons'. The simplest meaning of the term antiphon is probably 'reply'; partly because, in sung music, they act rather like a very short chorus, and partly because they form part of our response to God's word in the form of Holy scripture.

These short texts, or antiphons, that are sung at the end of Advent are called 'O antiphons' for a very technical reason: they all begin with 'O'! 'O' as in, 'O Lord our heavenly father'. There are seven of these antiphons, one of each is sung every day from December 17<sup>th</sup> to the 23<sup>rd</sup> inclusive. The first one in this sequence is called 'O Sapientia' which is Latin for 'O Wisdom' – hence December 17<sup>th</sup> is usually marked as 'O Sapientia' on the church calendar to denote the beginning of the sequence.

However – there is a potentially confusing complication. If you look at the church calendar in the front of the Book of Common Prayer, the prayer book of the Anglican church used in some form since 1549, we find that 'O Sapientia' is listed as falling on December 16<sup>th</sup>, not the 17<sup>th</sup>.

This is not a mistake, and is the reason why I asked my friend which date she was referring to. There is a good reason for this. It has always been the tradition in England, as opposed to elsewhere in the church, to sing eight 'O antiphons' rather than seven. This is also very ancient, and predates 1549 by hundreds of years. It seems that the English

offered an eighth antiphon at the end of the sequence on December 23<sup>rd</sup> in honour of Mary the mother of Jesus – hence requiring the sequence to begin on the 16<sup>th</sup>, not the 17<sup>th</sup>. Before I explain why I think that is the case, let's have a look at what these antiphons actually say:



The first seven are those that are said or sung in most of the church, the eighth was only used in England. I say 'was', there may well be places that still do, but according to the Church of England's 'new' calendar which is only about twenty years old, the date for the first of the sequence is the 17<sup>th</sup> December in line with the rest of the church.

All of these short texts are in the form of a greeting, and seek to remind us of the coming of Jesus as the Messiah, the 'anointed one' or Christ in accordance with scripture and the prophets.

You will see that the series of 'greetings' is directed to Wisdom (Isaiah 28:29), Adonai (a Hebrew name for God, see Exodus 3:2), the Root of Jesse (Isaiah 11, see my reflection last week), Key of David (see Isaiah 22:22), Morning Star or Dayspring (see Isaiah 9:2 and Luke 1:78), King of the Nations (Isaiah 2:4), and Immanuel or God with us (Isaiah 7:14). The final one used in England greets Mary, and begins 'O Virgin of virgins, how shall this be?'. Note that my scripture references are minimal; there are many others too.

There is something else about this sequence of antiphons which is really fascinating, and may well be proof of how old they are. Let's consider the set

of seven. If we take the Latin titles (O Sapientia, etc) and look at the first letter of the second word, we get a sequence of letters SARCORE. Reversing these, we get EROCRAS. 'Ero cras', in Latin, means 'tomorrow I come' – referring to the arrival of the Christ at Christmas. Highly unlikely to be a coincidence as the earliest Christians used codes like this a lot – they are called acrostics. And this may demonstrate the great age of these antiphons. The Da Vinci code has nothing on the real stuff!

Ah, I hear you say. But this is bound to be messed up by adding the eighth antiphon to Mary, surely? Well... no. Because if we look at the sequence again, we end up with VEROCRAS. 'Vero cras', in Latin, means 'truly I come'. How marvellous!

This brings me to the question of why the ancient English tradition differs, and in particular, why it chooses to honour Mary. The answer may be very surprising in view of the huge sensitivity that surrounds the veneration of Mary.

In 1486, the Venetian ambassador visited England, and wrote back home saying this about the English:

'They are very religious. They all attend Mass every day and say many paternosters on their rosaries in public. And whoever is at all able to read carries with them the Office of Our Lady; and they recite it in church with some companion in a low voice, verse by verse, after the manner of churchmen'.

This interesting text, with many others, tells us that the veneration of Mary in England was considered by those on the continent to be quite remarkable. Festivals connected with Mary were greatly revered and celebrated. Christmas was not excepted, because of course it is a feast that celebrates the birth of Christ – to Mary.

One thing that really set England apart was a title that was commonly used to describe the whole country in the middle ages: 'Dowry of Mary'.

The word Dowry comes from the Latin word, 'Dos' meaning gift or donation and so 'Mary's Dowry' means that England was given to Mary as a gift. This word dowry is now understood to mean the donation accompanying a bride, but in Medieval times, the meaning of dowry was, 'that part of a husband's estate which on his death is set aside for his wife's maintenance in the event of him leaving her a widow.' This means that England has been set apart among all the nations for Mary.

The title must have been fairly widespread by 1399, as in that year the Archbishop of Canterbury wrote:

'The contemplation of the great mystery of the Incarnation has drawn all Christian nations to venerate her, from whom came the first beginnings of our Redemption. But we English, being the servants of her special inheritance and her own dowry, as we are commonly called, ought to surpass others in the fervour of our praise and devotions.'

The cause of all this? Mostly due to Walsingham, that village in Norfolk not far away from us. Medieval England had many Marian Shrines but unique among them was the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham. Walsingham became a major site of pilgrimage in the medieval world and became known as 'England's Nazareth'. This title was appropriate because of the replica of the Holy House (the house in which Mary was told she would become the mother of Jesus) - which could be found there.

The best record for how this came about is a medieval poem called the Pynson Ballad which tells the story of a rich Saxon widow called Richeldis who was shown the house by Mary herself. It tells of how 'in spirit our Lady led Richeldis to Nazareth and showed her the house where the angel Gabriel had greeted her.' Mary asked that it be a place of remembrance and joy, saying in the ballad:

'Walsingham - in you is built New Nazareth, where shall be held in constant memory the great joy of my salutation, first of my joys - their foundation and origin, Root of mankind's gracious redemption.'

Richeldis was not a visionary and did not get permission from a bishop or priest to have the house built – she had the house constructed with her own money in the way Mary had shown her, acting on the fruit of her deep prayer. The house was built sometime around 1061.

We will never return to those days of the middle ages, and it should be remembered that they were not at all as romantic as many a TV drama might have us believe, so maybe that's just as well! But we should nevertheless also remember our strong, fully human connection with our Lord Jesus, born of a woman. A woman who was unafraid to say yes to God's request of her, a woman who can truly be said to be the first, and the greatest, disciple. This has to be the right reason to hold her in veneration, to meditate on her obedience and devotion.

Being the mother of Jesus means that she is also our mother, if we are truly sisters and brothers in Christ. It's very appropriate too, that we see so much more of her depicted in art at this time of year, at Christmas.

I wish all my sisters and brothers a very happy Christmas!

Every blessing

Fr Tracy

#### FOR OUR PRAYERS

We pray for those who are in acute need of prayer at this time: Megan; Denise H; Christine; John P; Scott; Stephen C; Margaret T; David & Cynthia S; Maegan; Tom; Riley & his mum and family; Jeanette, David & Grace; Paula; Pete; Lauren; Fr Brian; Hazel; Ben; Frazer.

We continue to pray for all those in our Church, friends and family who are managing long term health issues including Doreen; Rosemary; Sheila; John; Joy; Shirley.

We remember with love all those who have died in recent days and pray for their family and friends.

#### PRAYER FOR THESE UNCERTAIN TIMES

**The Church of St Francis  
Heartsease**

**Heavenly Father  
We ask your blessing upon us.  
Hold the Heartsease Community,  
and all the world,  
in your arms of love.  
Be with us.  
Give us your strength,  
peace, and healing grace.  
Watch over us,  
protect us from harm;  
and keep in safety  
all those who care for the sick  
and attend to our needs,  
in Jesus name we pray.  
Amen**

God of compassion,  
be close to those who are ill, afraid or feeling isolated. In their loneliness, be their consolation; in their anxiety, be their hope;

in their darkness, be their light;  
through him who suffered alone on the cross,  
but reigns with you in glory,  
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

#### PRAYERS FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

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 is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever. Amen

Eternal God,  
as Mary waited for the birth of your Son,  
so we wait for his coming in glory;  
bring us through the birth pangs  
of this present age to see, with her,  
our great salvation  
in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Heavenly Father,  
who chose the Blessed Virgin Mary  
to be the mother of the promised saviour:  
fill us your servants with your grace,  
that in all things we may embrace your holy will  
and with her rejoice in your salvation;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

#### READINGS FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

2 SAMUEL 7:1 - 13, 16

Now when the king was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, 'See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.' Nathan said to the king, 'Go, do all that you have in mind; for the Lord is with you.'

But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan: Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?' Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the Lord of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over

my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house.



When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.

**MAGNIFICAT (THE SONG OF MARY)**



My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour; ♦ he has looked with favour on his lowly servant.

From this day all generations

will call me blessed; ♦ the Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his name.

He has mercy on those who fear him, ♦ from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm ♦ and has scattered the proud in their conceit,

Casting down the mighty from their thrones ♦ and lifting up the lowly.

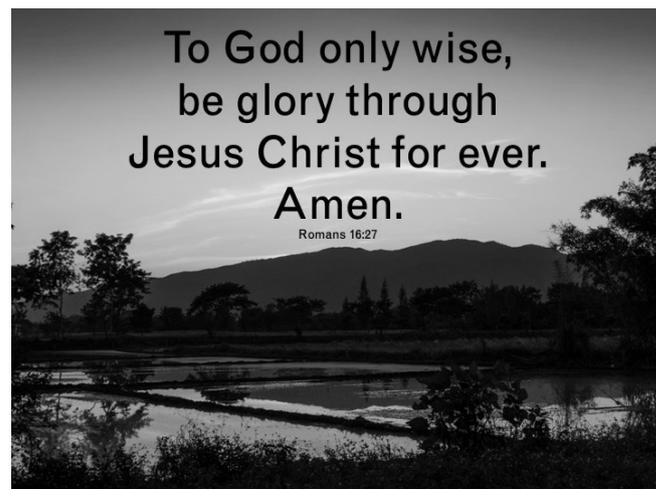
He has filled the hungry with good things ♦ and sent the rich away empty.

He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, ♦ to remember his promise of mercy,

The promise made to our ancestors, ♦ to Abraham and his children for ever.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

ROMANS 16: 25 - END



Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith — to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory for ever! Amen.

LUKE 1:26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David.

The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with

you.' But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.'

Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.'

Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.



#### REFLECTION FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

While the focus today is on Mary I want to start with a promise made 1,000 years before Mary was born. Our Old Testament reading tells us how King David, having established peace and security for Israel, and having built himself a nice comfortable palace, decided to do the same for the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of God's presence among his people.

But God speaks to Nathan the Prophet and gives him a message for David. Essentially the message is that it is not David's role to build the temple for

the Ark of the Covenant; that will be the job of David's successor.

But along with this rather discouraging message come some wonderful promises. "I will raise up offspring after you who shall come from your body and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever."

While on one level this is referring to Solomon, David's son, it has a meaning on a much deeper level. For it doesn't just promise that David's son will be in the line of succession, it promises a kingdom that will be established forever. David's direct descendants ruled over Israel for about 400 years until the people were taken into exile, but the Jews who returned to the land clung on to the promise made here that another king would arise from David's line who would save God's people.

So our story moves forward about 1,000 years from the time of David to a young woman named Mary living in a town called Nazareth.

Mary was probably 15-16 years of age, as this was the normal age at which Jewish girls were betrothed. We have no idea how old Joseph was, but it is possible he was 30-40 years old, as the age gap between husband and wife was generally more than would be usual today. .

Mary was betrothed to Joseph. This is stronger than what we understand by engagement. It was a solemn contractual pledge that she would marry him, and could only be put aside by a divorce.

Gabriel comes to Mary and says "Hail you who are highly favoured". Mary looks up startled. Don't be afraid says Gabriel, You've found favour with God, and you're going to have a baby! He will be great and will be the son of the most high and the Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. Here is God's promise to David through Nathan coming true. Mary, who knew her Scriptures, would almost certainly have recognised this.

But unsurprisingly her first thoughts are on more practical matters. How can I have a baby? I am not married yet?

Gabriel responds "By the power of the Holy Spirit"

Mary's immediate thought must have been. Oh no, how on earth can I explain this to Joseph. In these days when only half of the babies in this country are born inside a marriage relationship we have lost sight of the sheer awfulness of what Gabriel was proposing. Although betrothed it is unlikely that

Mary and Joseph had kissed each other, they certainly would not have been to bed together.

The news that Mary was having a baby before they had got married would be absolutely shocking to Joseph and to both their families.

Even as she said yes she must have been considering the consequences of doing so. But she did say yes and her life, and everyone else's was changed as a result.

After the birth narratives we hear little more of Mary

We have the story of Jesus staying in the temple and the wedding at Cana. John tells us she was at the foot of the cross, and it must have broken her heart to see the son she treasured hanging there like a common criminal.

She is mentioned as being in the upper room with the disciples in Acts so she was part of the early church. She probably found it easier than most to understand and believe in the resurrection because of all the sayings she had treasured and pondered in her heart.

So that's the life of Mary. I think two things stand out for me from today's readings.

The first is that God always keeps his promises, even though his timescales may not be the same as ours. God's promise to David that his successor would establish an everlasting kingdom came wonderfully true 1,000 years after it was made in the person of Mary's baby, Jesus.

The second thing is the bravery of Mary and her willingness to trust and obey.



In the sixth month after Elizabeth became pregnant, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth. He was sent to Mary. She was engaged to a man called Joseph. The angel came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you!'

But Mary was confused by what he had said and wondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son. You must call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. The Lord God will make him a king like his father David of long ago. King of a kingdom that has no end. King of all God's people.'

Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, because I am not yet married?'

The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come to you. The power of the Most High God will cover you. So the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. Your relative Elizabeth is also six months pregnant, even though she is old. For nothing will be impossible with God.'

Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let what you have said be done to me.'

Then the angel left her.

Mary laid herself open to the possibility of public disgrace, scorn and even death.

Mary looked after, cherished and encouraged her son as he grew up.

She suffered the pain of standing at the foot of the cross and watching her son die.

For all this we should honour Mary in setting us an example of bravery trust and obedience.

As we look forward to Christmas:

Let's celebrate a God who keeps his promises, and as once again we welcome our Lord in his coming to earth, let's remember Mary and the example she sets.

Let's try to be good at listening to God even when he seems to be saying something utterly outrageous.

Let's try to learn from him what he wants of us by prayer, Bible reading and worship.

When we do know what he wants of us let's be prepared to get on with it wholeheartedly without worrying about the cost in time, trouble, or social standing.

Let's make sure that we trust him in every aspect of our lives.

If we are prepared to do this, as individuals and as a church, then, just as Mary did, we can look forward to seeing God working his purpose out in our hearts and in our lives and that's a recipe for a truly happy Christmas.

David Lechmere (Lay Reader)

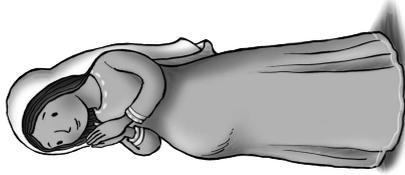


Name .....



**Luke 1.26-38**

God chooses an ordinary girl for the extraordinary job of being the mother of Jesus.



## Family time

**Talk** Turn over a series of small objects and discuss together what they look like upside-down.

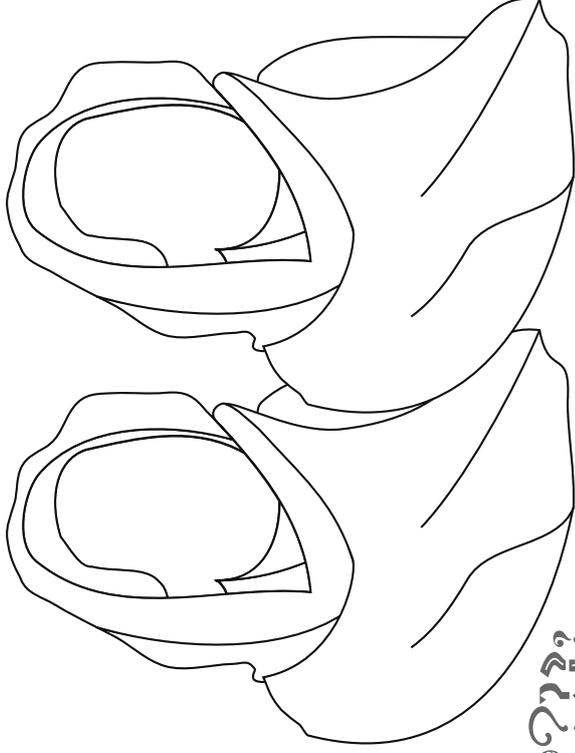
**Do** Create your own collage of Mary and angel pictures, perhaps using Christmas cards as you receive them or old ones from last year. Stick it onto your fridge until Christmas day to remind you of the way this ordinary girl helped God to turn the world upside-down.

**Pray** Make up an acrostic prayer together using the words 'upside-down'.

## Activity time



Add expressions to Mary's faces to show how she might have felt before and after the angel came.



## Puzzle

Try to write your name upside-down in the box.



# ROOTS children's sheet

20-26 December 2020



Can you unscramble the message to work out what the angel said?

'uYo lwil cebmoe  
rgenptan dna gvei  
htirb ot a nso.'



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Name .....

# Colouring time

Mary's life is turned upside-down by God's plan for the world.

