

# 19 December 2021

hymn

Blessed be God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

**Blessed be God's kingdom, now and for ever.**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.  
**And also with you.**

## Sentence

Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord. Luke 1.45

## Prayer of Preparation

[Let us pray.]

**Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known,  
and from whom no secrets are hidden:**

**cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,**

**that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

## Prayer of the Day

Gracious God, you have visited your people and redeemed us in your Son:

as we prepare to celebrate his birth, make our hearts leap for joy at the sound of your word,  
and move us by your Spirit to bless your wonderful works.

We ask this through him whose coming is certain, whose Day draws near, your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## Micah 5.2-5a

<sup>2</sup> '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.' <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> And he will be our peace when the Assyrians invade our land and march through our fortresses. We will raise against them seven shepherds, even eight commanders,

## Song of Mary

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord: my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,

Who 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.

God has mercy on those who fear him: from generation to generation.

The Lord has shown strength with his arm: and scattered the proud in their conceit,

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

God 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 the promise of mercy,

The promise made to our forebears: to Abraham and his children for ever.

Glory to God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; as in the beginning, so now, and for ever. Amen.

## Hebrews 10.5-10

<sup>5</sup> Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: 'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; <sup>6</sup> with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. <sup>7</sup> Then I said, "Here I am – it is written about me in the scroll – I have come to do your will, my God.'" <sup>8</sup> First he said, 'Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them' – though they were offered in accordance with the law. <sup>9</sup> Then he said, 'Here I am, I have come to do your will.' He sets aside the first to establish the second. <sup>10</sup> And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

## Luke 1.39-45

<sup>39</sup> At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, <sup>40</sup> where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup> When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. <sup>42</sup> In a loud voice she exclaimed: 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!' <sup>43</sup> But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? <sup>44</sup> As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. <sup>45</sup> Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfil his promises to her!

### Sermon

#### Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

#### Introduction to Prayers

Let us pray for the world and for the Church.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3.16

#### Invitation to confession

The Lord comes, bringing to light things now hidden in darkness, and disclosing the purposes of the heart. Let us open our hearts and prepare for his coming, confessing our sins in penitence and faith.

#### Confession

Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, confident in God's forgiveness.

Merciful God, our maker and our judge,

we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, and in what we have failed to do:

we have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves;

we repent, and are sorry for all our sins. Father, forgive us. Strengthen us to love and obey you in newness of life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

#### Absolution

Almighty God, who has promised forgiveness to all who turn to him in faith: pardon you and set you free from all your sins, strengthen you in all goodness and keep you in eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

#### The peace

We are the body of Christ. **His Spirit is with us.**

Christ has reconciled us to God in one body by the cross.

**We meet in his name and share his peace.**

#### Hymn

#### OFFERTORY

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have these gifts to share.

Accept and use our offerings for your glory and for the service of your kingdom.

**Blessed be God for ever.**

#### Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

All glory and honour be yours always and everywhere, mighty Creator, everliving God.

We give you thanks and praise for your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ,  
who by the power of your Spirit was born of Mary and lived as one of us.

By his death on the cross and rising to new life, he offered the one true sacrifice for sin  
and obtained an eternal deliverance for his people.

We thank you that when he shall come again in power and great triumph to judge the world,  
we may with joy behold his appearing, and in confidence stand before him  
who redeems us from sin and death and makes us heirs of everlasting life.

Therefore with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven,  
we proclaim your great and glorious name, for ever praising you and saying:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

**Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.**

Holy God, we thank you for these gifts of your creation, this bread and wine,  
and we pray that we who eat and drink them in obedience to our Saviour Christ, by the power of the Holy  
Spirit, may be partakers of his body and blood, and be made one with him and with each other in peace and  
love.

On the night he was betrayed Jesus took bread; and when he had given you thanks  
he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take, eat. This is my body given for you.

Do this in remembrance of me.'

After supper, he took the cup, and again giving you thanks he gave it to his disciples, saying,  
'Drink from this, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant shed for you and for many for the  
forgiveness of sins.

Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

**Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.**

Therefore we do as our Saviour has commanded: proclaiming his offering of himself  
made once for all upon the cross, his mighty resurrection and glorious ascension,  
and looking for his coming again, we celebrate, with this bread and this cup,

**Blessing and honour and glory and power are yours for ever and ever. Amen.**

We who are many are one body, **for we all share in the one bread.**

The gifts of God for the people of God.

Come let us take this holy sacrament of the body and blood of Christ in remembrance that he died for us,  
and feed on him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving.

The body of Christ [the bread of heaven] keep you in eternal life.

The blood of Christ [the cup of salvation] keep you in eternal life.

God for whom we wait, we thank you that you have fed us  
with the bread of life and the cup of salvation.

As we joyfully await your Son, keep us ever watchful  
that we may be ready to stand before him on the day of his coming.

Father, we offer ourselves to you as a living sacrifice through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory.

**Hymn**

Christ the Sun of Righteousness shine upon you, and make you ready to meet him when he comes in glory;  
and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with  
you always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord:

**In the name of Christ. Amen**



The fourth Sunday of Advent, the Sunday of Love.

What is love? It's another of these things which we initially think of as an emotion or something we feel but so much more, so much deeper and enduring than a simple emotion. In English we can say, I love ice-cream, I love my garden, I love my spouse and my family, and I love God but mean fractionally different things in every statement. The Greeks had 7 different words for love, 4 of which are used in the Bible which we can roughly define but the reality is that in many instances they used them interchangeably so we should not get too attached to the definitions.

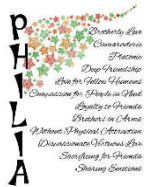


Eros is Greek for sensual or romantic love. When the glow of Eros love fades a little is when some couples break up. Within marriage, eros love is to be celebrated and enjoyed as a beautiful blessing from God. Often, if we make the decision to let it, eros loves grows into something deeper: family love, friendship, and unconditional love.



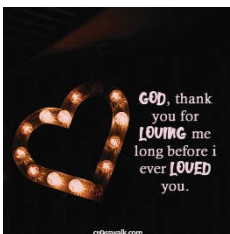
Storge describes family love, the affectionate bond that develops naturally between parents and children, and brothers and sisters.

Christians are members of God's family. Our lives are knit together by something stronger than physical ties—the bonds of the Spirit. God calls his children to love each other with the deep affection of storge love.



Philia is the type of intimate love in the Bible that most Christians practice toward each other. This Greek term describes the powerful emotional bond seen in deep friendships.

Philia is the most general type of love in Scripture, encompassing love for fellow humans, care, respect, and compassion for people in need. The concept of brotherly love that unites believers is unique to Christianity. Jesus said philia would be an identifier of his followers: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another."



Agape is the highest of the four types of love in the Bible. This term defines God's immeasurable, incomparable love for humankind. It is the divine love that comes from God. Agape love is perfect, unconditional, sacrificial, and pure. Jesus Christ demonstrated this kind of divine love to his Father and to all

humanity in the way he lived and died.

Love is one of the most powerful emotions humans can experience. For Christian believers, love is the truest test of genuine faith. Through the Bible, we discover how to experience love in its many forms and to share it with others as God intended.

In our gospel reading today at last, we have something we associate with the Christmas story.



So, we all know the story, Zachariah and Elizabeth were an older couple who had never had children until one day Zachariah was taking his turn in the temple as priest when God sends a heavenly messenger to tell him that they are going to have a baby who will prepare the way of the Lord: John the Baptist. Zachariah takes a moment to understand and believe so the Lord gives him a sign - he can't speak until the baby is born.

A few months later the angel comes to Mary to tell her that she is going to be the mother of the Messiah and as an aside tells her that Elizabeth is pregnant. Mary sets off to visit her beloved cousin and our reading today is the result.



You have to wonder if Mary was having a rough time at home, perhaps even her family were a little unsure of this angel story and like any small town I'm sure the tongues were wagging, but Mary had someone who loved her, trusted her, and believed her, someone who had also seen the Lord at work in her own life and could help and support her. To be chosen by God often means at one and the same time a crown of joy and the cross of sorrow. The piercing truth is that God does not choose a person for ease and comfort but for a task that will take all that head and heart and hand can bring to it but through that time he also brings others to support us.

Mary's visit to Elizabeth is a wonderful human portrait of the older woman, pregnant at last after hope had gone and the younger woman, pregnant far sooner than she had expected. We don't need to define whether this was family or friendship love, it was love and exactly the support that Mary needed.

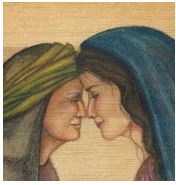


The meeting of the women is greeted by a sign: The child in Elizabeth's womb leaps for Joy and Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit and speaks words of prophecy.

There was no way for Elizabeth to have know that Mary was pregnant, the implication is that this news was given to her by the spirit. She does not bless Mary but recognised that Mary was already blessed because Mary is the 'mother of my Lord'. Elizabeth has already recognised that this unborn child is her Messiah and Lord.

The angel had promised Zechariah that he would have joy and now joy has come to Elizabeth through the visitation of Mary. The unborn John has already begun to fulfil his calling as one who would declare the Lord's coming and prepare a place for him.





Elizabeth also pronounces a beatitude on Mary for her faith that the promise to her would be fulfilled. We know it is true because we know the story of the Angel coming to Mary and Mary's response. Blessing always comes from trusting that God's word will be fulfilled.

Mary and Elizabeth, like so many Jews of their time, searched the scriptures, soaked themselves in the Psalms and prophetic writings which spoke of mercy, hope, joy and love and God coming to the rescue at last.

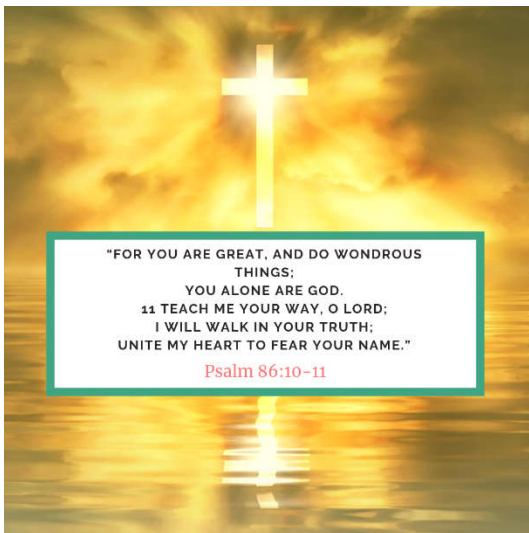


The Song of Mary which we had as our Psalm today is the continuation of our reading from Luke. When my grandchildren are very happy, they sometimes burst into song. Its usually something they have made up on the spot but also reflects what they have been listening to lately. This is exactly what Mary did. Her song is her own, but it also reflects on scripture especially the Song of Hannah from 1 Samuel.



She starts with praise and identifies herself with the lowly but do notice that she is talking in the present tense, this is not something which will happen eventually but what has already begun. More than predictions, the Magnificat praises God for the goodness of God's nature and the redemption that Israel and the church have experienced. It makes clear the pattern of God's activity. Every line echoes other scriptures.

Notice that she rightly says that God is our saviour. We often refer to Jesus as our saviour but in fact the whole Godhead is our saviour. All that Jesus does during his life on earth to effect salvation - calling for repentance, forgiving sinners, healing the sick, casting out demons, eating with outcasts and dying a redemptive death, he does according to purpose and intent. He himself said *"Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does."*



The whole basis of our trust, hope, peace, joy, and love should be clear: God is our saviour.

Underneath everything that both Elizabeth and Mary said is a celebration of God and his love. God has taken the initiative - God the Lord, the saviour, the powerful one, the Holy one, the faithful one. God is the ultimate reason to celebrate. God is unconditional love.