

**Sunday December 18, 2022**

## **Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church**

### **Welcome & Prayer**

Welcome to church this morning. Seven days out from Christmas, we will be singing carols together and hearing from the Bible of the work of God's promised, chosen king. As God's people, our excitement around Christmas is the celebration of Jesus' birth and God's salvation. It is a time to rouse each other. It is a time to encourage each other. It is a time to call each other to turn our eyes to Bethlehem and praise God for the birth of his son. O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant O come ye, o come ye to Bethlehem O come and behold Him, born the King of Angels O come, let us adore Him Christ the Lord

**Let's Pray.** Heavenly Father, we come to you joyful and triumphant in the victory of Christ over the grave. Born as a babe in Bethlehem, crucified upon the cross at Calvary, risen in power and glory, now seated with you in the heavenly realms. We bring you praise, Lord God. We bring praise to your son, our saviour, Jesus Christ the Lord. We praise you, God in trinity - holy, righteous, wise, merciful, strong and kind. *Hail the Heaven-born Prince of Peace. Hail the Son of Righteousness. Light and life to all He brings. Risen with healing in His wings. Hark! the herald angels sing. Glory to the new-born King!*

Father, we thank you for your mercy to us. And that your son, born in a manger, took the penalty of our sin, and brought forgiveness. Grant to us this day, hearts that are ready to listen to your word, and praise you for your goodness. In Christ's name we pray. Amen

### **Song – O Come all ye Faithful** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t9P3zXXCTa0>

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Oh, come, all ye faithful,<br>Joyful and triumphant!<br>Oh, come ye, oh come ye to Bethlehem.<br>Come and behold him,<br>Born the King of angels; | 2. Sing Choirs of angels<br>Sing in exultation;<br>Sing all ye citizens of heaven above<br>Glory to God<br>Glory in the highest |
|--|---|

[Chorus]

Oh, come, let us adore him;  
Oh, come, let us adore him;  
Oh, come, let us adore him,  
Christ, the Lord.

3. Yea, Lord we greet thee  
Born that happy morning  
Jesus to thee be all glory given  
Son of the Father  
Now in flesh appearing

### **Bible Reading – Luke 1:1-25 (NIV)**

*Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled<sup>[a]</sup> among us, <sup>2</sup> just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. <sup>3</sup> With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup> so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. <sup>5</sup> In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. <sup>6</sup> Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. <sup>7</sup> But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old. <sup>8</sup> Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, <sup>9</sup> he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. <sup>10</sup> And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside. <sup>11</sup> Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup> When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. <sup>13</sup> But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer*

has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. <sup>14</sup> He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, <sup>15</sup> for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. <sup>16</sup> He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. <sup>17</sup> And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” Zechariah asked the angel, “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.” <sup>19</sup> The angel said to him, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. <sup>20</sup> And now you will be silent & not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time.” <sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. <sup>22</sup> When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak. <sup>23</sup> When his time of service was completed, he returned home. <sup>24</sup> After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. <sup>25</sup> “The Lord has done this for me,” she said. “In these days he has shown his favor & taken away my disgrace among the people.”

## Announcements 18/12/22

**Focus for December – Christmas.** Here are 5 tips for Christmas from Eternity magazine.

1. Pray for an opportunity to speak about Jesus
2. Prepare a question to get the conversation started like “do you ever go to Church at Christmas?”
3. Try not to be corny but natural about the way you talk about Christmas
4. Treat your conversations like tennis, lots of back and forth.
5. Use what you have got and do your best.

For the whole article go to <https://www.eternitynews.com.au/australia/how-to-invite-people-to-church-at-christmas/copylink/?location=article+start>

### Christmas Services

- Sat 24/12 Christmas Eve service – 6pm
- Sun 25/12 Christmas Day service – 8am (Swansea) and 9:30am (Charlestown)

**Studies in Discipleship:** In 2023 we are starting a weekly home group focussed on discipleship for Christians of any age. If you would like to know more please chat with Stephen Taylor or John and Miranda Harris.

### Kids Church over School Holidays (same as last week)

**School Holiday.** All our regular activities will go into recess until the NSW Public School Holidays end on Friday 27<sup>th</sup> January. Please take that time to rest and refresh – come to Church on a Sunday but please use the extra time to spend more time with the Lord.

**Giving (if room).** Would you like to give regularly to the work of the church so that our ministries can be sustained or even grow? If so the easiest way is by setting up a direct debit from your bank account. You just decide you much you would like to give on a weekly basis and then organise that amount to go to our Church each week. If you would like help to set it up then please speak to Letitia. Otherwise, the Church Bank details are Charlestown Eastlakes Presbyterian BSB 062-829 Account 10194850

**TEAR Fund.** During the Christmas services we will have a retiring offering for the work of TEAR Fund. As a Church we believe that Christmas is a great time to think about those less fortunate than ourselves. TEAR Fund is a practical expression of a Christians love for the poor. Please support it as you are able.

**CHUCH CAMP.** 3-5<sup>th</sup> March 2023. Early bird ends TODAY!

## Carol – Christ the King of Christmas

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3UknJaPSL0>

1. Let the Christmas tree remind you  
Of the one who trust the lord

Who walks the path of godliness  
 And loves to her Gods word  
 Raided as you grow up that's just  
 How you will be  
 Standing tall for Jesus like a Christmas tree

Chorus: Let your love show, let your faith grow  
 Then everyone will knooooow  
 Christ the king of Christmas

2. We'll let the fairy lights remind you  
 Of that bright shining star  
 Spotted by the Wiseman  
 Who travelled from a far  
 They get Jesus saw there treasures  
 And they worshiped in that night  
 Let your worship shining Jesus like fairy lights

Chorus

3. We'll let the candy cane remind you  
 Of God's amazing grace  
 Red the blood of Jesus as he suffered in our place  
 White full of forgiveness one as Jesus rose again  
 You can tell you friend the gospel with a candy cane

Chorus

4. Well When all the gifts at Christmas time  
 Fill your heart with praise to God for all his goodness  
 Shown in all so many ways that every day and in everyway  
 All big completely his  
 Give your life to Jesus at Christmas gift

Chorus

## Bible Reading – Luke 1:26-56

<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." <sup>29</sup> Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, <sup>33</sup> and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." <sup>34</sup> "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" <sup>35</sup> The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. <sup>36</sup> Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. <sup>37</sup> For no word from God will ever fail." <sup>38</sup> "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your

word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her. <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 fulfill his promises to her!" <sup>46</sup> And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord <sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, <sup>48</sup> for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, <sup>49</sup> for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name. <sup>50</sup> His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. <sup>51</sup> He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. <sup>52</sup> He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. <sup>53</sup> He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. <sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful <sup>55</sup> to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors." <sup>56</sup> Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

## Pastoral Prayer

Heavenly Father, We thank you we can come to you in prayer in full assurance of your love for us. That you love us, in spite of our sin. That you loved us before the world was made. That you loved us, by sending your son to earth, born in a manger, God come as man, to bear our sins. Thank you that you allow us to speak to you in prayer. The Lord of creation, who flung the stars into space, who commands the rain and the wind, who sustains all of creation, delight for us to draw near to you in prayer.

Father, we pray that our nation, Australia. So consumed by material possessions, a country of great wealth and prosperity, yet so lost, and without knowledge of you. We pray for the work of your Spirit, to soften the hearts that are hard and draw people to Jesus. We pray that the gospel message would be proclaimed by your church and by your people, for the glory of our saviour and King.

We pray particularly for the Presbyterian church at Wee Waa. Thank you for their faithful gospel ministry in the local community. We pray that they would be able to connect with others in the lead up to Christmas and bring light and hope to those who are lost. We pray for comfort and peace for those who have been affected by recent floods, and for recovery for farmers whose properties have been impacted. Father, here in Charlestown, we pray that you would use us in connecting with our own community. Grant to us, hearts of compassion, and feet fitted with the readiness of the gospel of peace. May we have good conversations about the birth of Jesus. We also pray for those in our community for whom Christmas is a difficult time. For those who are lonely, for those who have lost loved ones, for those who are suffering – we ask for your peace, we ask for your kindness. Help us to be generous to those in need.

Father we also pray, that your word, the sword of the Spirit, would be active in our own lives. Help us to listen well at church, and to speak to each other after church, of the challenges and encouragement we receive from scripture. Help us to be disciplined in reading the Bible at home during the week. May we set aside time to read and pray every day. Give us energy when we are too tired. Convict us, when we are too lazy. May your word to us, be sweet, like honey. May we look for it, like silver. May we search for it, like treasure. We pray that the mum and dads in our church will find time to read the Bible with their families. We pray that our pastors, Steve and Jon, will humble themselves before your word, and be taught by it, as they teach us.

And we continue to pray for the impact of COVID 19 here in Australia and around the world. We pray for good medical care and recovery for those who are suffering from the virus. We pray for equitable access to vaccines for 3rd world countries. We pray for wisdom for rulers and governments in their decision making.

We pray that the global church would trust in your sovereign hand, and know the words of the prophet Habakkuk, *"Though the fig tree does not blossom and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Saviour."* In the name of your Son, we pray. Amen

## Bible Reading – Luke 1:57-80 (NIV)

<sup>57</sup> When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. <sup>58</sup> Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy. <sup>59</sup> On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, <sup>60</sup> but his mother spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John." <sup>61</sup> They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name." <sup>62</sup> Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. <sup>63</sup> He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John." <sup>64</sup> Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. <sup>65</sup> All the neighbors were filled with awe & throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him. <sup>67</sup> His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: <sup>68</sup> "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. <sup>69</sup> He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David" <sup>70</sup> (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), <sup>71</sup> salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us— <sup>72</sup> to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant, <sup>73</sup> the oath he swore to our father Abraham: <sup>74</sup> to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear <sup>75</sup> in holiness & righteousness before him all our days. <sup>76</sup> And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, <sup>77</sup> to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, <sup>78</sup> because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven <sup>79</sup> to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace." <sup>80</sup> And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel.

## Carol – How still the starry night

[How Still The Starry Night // Emu Music - YouTube](#)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How still the starry night above<br/>How still the earth below<br/>How small the greatest gift of love<br/>The world has ever known<br/>The fullness of the deity<br/>A borrowed manger fills<br/>The God of all eternity<br/>Beneath the Beth'hem hills</li> <li>2. How still He lies in Mary's arms<br/>The long-expected Christ<br/>His voice the raging sea will calm<br/>The dead He'll raise to life!<br/>A ring of thorns will crown Him<br/>Our suff'ring Servant King</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. How still the heart today that bows<br/>Before our Prince of Peace<br/>What joy to lay our burdens down<br/>Each one at Jesus' feet!<br/>So let us all adore Him<br/>And gladly do His will<br/>Receive the Christ who came to us<br/>How quietly, how still</li> </ol> |
|---|---|

The Saviour of the world is born  
To save us from our sin

## Sermon – Mary’s Christmas! - Stephen T

In an effort to avoid a potential clash between the England soccer team playing in the world cup final and the traditional English Christmas Carols service, a few weeks ago the Church of England wrote to all its ministers advising them to reschedule their Christmas carol services.

Slide 2

The guidance to clergy, under the heading “Making the most of the World Cup final”, warns them that with the final due to kick off at 3pm, it “could still be possible if you choose the time carefully ... but what if there are penalties?! It may be best to avoid that day altogether and host a carol service on Saturday 17 instead.” But it adds: “Despite this clash of dates, football and faith don’t have to be at odds with one another.

No, they don’t but for the Church of England football seems to be more important than worship. Singing modern soccer songs are more attractive than singing Christmas carols. Now we can laugh at the English but if Australia was in the world cup final and it was on at the same time as Church, there would be plenty of us that would choose goals over God. Jesus over Jesus! But because we are not that good at soccer it is not a problem for us. Instead, we might have a few bleary-eyed soccer supporters who watched last night’s 3<sup>rd</sup> vs 4<sup>th</sup> before coming to Church today.

Slide 3

But today we are being reminded of something far more important than sport. We are coming to a real turning point in history. The time that BC (before Christ) became AD (after Christ). It is a story we know well (or at least we think we know well) but it is a revolutionary story, a radical story, a story that has changed the world as well as changed our world.

Slide 4

### 1. About a Baby (verses 26-37)

<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> The angel went to her and said, ... “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. <sup>31</sup> You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High”.

This is one of the most breathtaking moments in the history of the world. Think about it for a second. God is stepping into history in a way that he has never, ever done before nor since. In the past God has sent prophets and angels to tell us what he is like. He has empowered kings and judges to lead his people. He has sent priests and Levites to show us how to worship him properly. But now he is becoming one of us. He is sending us His Son.

Slide 5

But notice who is going to bring this son into the world? A virgin named Mary engaged to a man called Joseph. Mary? Who on earth is she to take this most important role? Well, you have to say she is an ordinary girl from a most ordinary town Nazareth. According to Roman law the minimum age for girls to be engaged and married was twelve. That’s right, twelve. For boys, who develop slower, it was fourteen. And so at that time girls were engaged around twelve or thirteen and married after the engagement was over. The reason they did this it was to guarantee their virginity. So as soon as they had reached puberty they would be engaged and then soon marry.

Slide 6

So Mary is probably younger than most of us here today. She was young, female & poor all attributes that we would think would make her unsuitable by God for any major task but God chose Mary for one of the most important acts of obedience ever demanded of anyone. <sup>31</sup> You will conceive and give birth to a son &



you are to call him Jesus.<sup>32</sup> He will be great & will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David<sup>33</sup> & he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

#### Slide 7

This Jesus will be called the Son of the Most High. Mary's son then is also God's son. He will not be Joseph who is her fiancé's son. According to verse 35, *"The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."* There will not be a sexual union between a God and a woman, God Himself will implant a child inside Mary's womb.

Now this is the point that most people will say, "Alright, alright. Enough is enough." This is a fairy tale. This cannot be true. But in recent years humans have developed the technology to create test tube babies. Birth is no longer dependent upon sex. In fact for many farmers sex is a really bad way of impregnating their most expensive fillies or cattle. So a virgin birth can easily be done today. The question is, *why?* Why would God want to impregnate Mary?

#### Slide 8

Because he wants to change the world. He wants to deal decisively with the world's biggest problems death, and sin and Satan. And to do that the one in the womb must be perfect from conception. King David says in Psalm 51, *"Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."* There is such a thing as Original Sin. Ever since the fall in Genesis 3 not only has every person sinned but sin has been passed on to every person.

Except Jesus. He is the Son of God. Sin will not be passed onto him from his father. Because he is God's Son. And he will be given the throne of David. So he is the long awaited King. The promised Messiah. The one who will reign over God's Kingdom for ever and ever.

#### Slide 9

So if we are talking about God changing the world this a game changer, don't you think? This is the one that the OT continually was pointing toward. This is the one who will have the power to rule and change the world. And rule and change my world and yours.

#### Slide 10

The question is did it happen? Or is it a fairy tale? Do you know in 2006, it was revealed that British Insurance had been providing coverage to three Scottish nuns who were concerned about the costs of raising a future messiah during the second coming of Jesus. They were paying yearly premiums of £100 to cover them in the event of a virgin birth. Having said that you can also get insurance for being bitten by a werewolf and being abducted by an alien so I don't think virgin birth insurance proves anything!

#### Slide 11

But earlier on in Luke 1 we read *"With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning..."*<sup>4</sup> *so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught".* Luke is writing history. He has checked and rechecked his sources.

#### Slide 12

And as the angel said "Nothing is impossible with God." If God created life in the first place. If he made the world and the stars and the sun. If he keeps just the right amount of oxygen in the air, if he ensures we are at just the right distance from the sun, then nothing is impossible for him.

#### Slide 13

Now let me point out that Mary's initial reaction is to not to believe the angel. Look at what she says in verse 34 *"How will this be, since I am a virgin?"* It is beyond her comprehension what the angel is saying. Mary's initial response is to be troubled, frightened and uncertain. But as someone once said to me "Your initial reaction to something does not have to determine your ultimate response". Or we could say it like this: I can't always control my reaction but my response is my responsibility.

#### Slide 14

Let's step back for a second here. God wants to change the world, isn't that good to hear? And he will do it by entering into it as a man. He is not watching us from a distance. He will spend nine months inside Mary's womb. He will be delivered the way all children of that day and age were delivered. He will feel pain, loneliness, rejection, death. Because God wants to change the world. Because God wants to change our world. So firstly a baby & then second

Slide 15

## 2. Believes (verses 38-45)

Once Mary pulls herself together what is her ultimate response? <sup>38</sup> *"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled."* Mary believes. Mary trusts. Mary says to the angel, I am God's servant.

Wait a second Mary what is Joseph going to say about you having a baby? "It doesn't matter. May your word to me be fulfilled". Mary what about Joseph's parents they might have you stoned. "It doesn't matter. May your word to me be fulfilled". Mary, won't your own parents going to flip out? "It doesn't matter. May your word to me be fulfilled".

Slide 16

In this way Mary's reaction contrasts that of Zechariah who earlier on in Luke 1 asked for a sign and got a sign, he won't be able to speak for 9 months. But in the words of Christin Ditchfield, *"Mary didn't demand a sign, some sort of proof or additional confirmation. She voiced no complaint at the total disruption of her life. She knew now that things would not turn out the way she had planned at all. But in her heart there was no resistance, no rebellion. Just a sweet, simple surrender- surrender to the will of God."*

Slide 17

But her belief doesn't stop there. She moved quickly. Mary wastes no time in doing what she needs to do next. Check out verse 39: *"At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea."* Now why did she do that?

Did she want to confirm what the angel had told her to strengthen her faith? Did she want to go to rejoice with Elizabeth? Did she want to get away from Nazareth, where her pregnancy was harder to explain? Did she know she'd be able to talk of this experience more freely with Elizabeth? Did she seek a mentor, someone who would understand and guide her on how to respond with faith? Well the passage doesn't say.

Slide 18

But her act of faith in believing the angel's word and going to Elizabeth meant that as she arrived at Elizabeth's house, even though the baby inside of her is not even a baby bump, John the Baptist inside Elizabeth's womb jumps with joy at being in the presence of the Son of the Most High God. That's interesting. A baby in a womb is a real entity! And Elizabeth feels privileged at being with the mother of my Lord. *My Lord!* And she says to Mary, *"Blessed is she who **has believed** that the Lord would fulfil his promises to her!"*

Slide 19

The Blessed Virgin Mary. Now there are words you don't often hear in a Presbyterian Church. The Blessed Virgin Mary. Mary is blessed not because she is better than anyone else. More holy than anyone else. More pure than anyone else. Notice her life is not described at all by Luke and yet earlier on in Luke 1 we hear that he calls Elizabeth and Zechariah upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and blameless.

So Mary is blessed not because of something within her but because of the someone within her. She has the Saviour of the World within her. What a blessing & she has believed what the Lord has said to her. That is why she is blessed. It is due to her relationship with Jesus & her relationship with God's word. She has faith. She trusts. She believes. That's why she is blessed.

Slide 20



Do you know that later on in Luke's gospel in Luke 11:27-28 we read "As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out, 'Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.'" Jesus is rather blunt with his answer: "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."

Do you know the blessings that were available to Mary are also available to us but it is not through Mary. It is through hearing the word of God. It is through believing the word of God. It is in trusting the word of God. The God who wants to change the world through Jesus, who has changed Mary's world through Jesus can change our world through Jesus. In our grasp is God's incredible source of blessings for you and me. It is not primarily found in money, or career, or status or relationships but in Jesus. And obeying his word.

So what about you? Are you ready to believe? And after you believe, will you obey? Are you willing to say today *"Whatever you want...I will do it, Lord. Whatever you need...please take it, Lord. Wherever you lead...I'll follow, Lord"*.

Today are you going to look at God and say, "Lord it seems impossible you asking me to forgive my friends after all that they've done to me. But in your strength I will do it." "Lord, I don't seem to have the money to be able to give it away to the poor and to the Church but in your strength you make the impossible possible so make me more generous". "God, I don't believe You could heal my marriage. Not after what happened, there's no way . . . it's not possible but with you all things are possible" "God, there is no way You could heal this person I love. The doctors said, 'there's no hope . . . go home and prepare for the end.' But This morning I will put my trust in you."

Slide 21

### **3. Baby, belief and blessing (verses 46-56)**

For Mary is so thankful for the blessings that God has given her, she bursts into song. And Luke's gospel transforms into a musical. Here she sings, in a few verses Zechariah will sing and after the birth of Jesus the angels will sing. They all can't stop praising God. And what better way to do that than through song? So Mary said: *"My soul glorifies the Lord <sup>47</sup>and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,"*

There is something deep within her, within her soul, within her spirit that is filled with joy. A deep, deep joy. Yes she is still a young, poor peasant girl, in a place far, far away. But God has been mindful of her humble state. God cares about her and her world. God has blessed her. The Mighty one has done great things for her.

The song that Mary sings is in two parts. Verses 46 to 50 are about herself. What a holy God has done for a humble peasant girl. How God has stepped into her world in an amazing way. An extraordinary way. But the second half of the song, verses 51 to 55 is about how what is happening within Mary's life is a small scale picture of a much bigger plan. For at the same time that God is working in Mary he is actually working in Israel & He is changing the world.

For the mighty one who has done great things for her has also according to verse 52 performed mighty deeds with his arm for his nation. And the one who was merciful to Mary has also remembered to be merciful to Israel. And as she can rejoice in God her saviour. So this child within her is destined to be the Saviour of the world.

You see God is going to change Mary's world through the work of this baby Jesus who will become her Saviour. And as Mary responds in faith, as she follows God's word. And as she humbles herself God will use his servant to help change the whole world. Not just her world but God's world.

Slide 22

But there is a key idea here throughout both the verses of this song because they both start with humility and end with God's mercy. Mary says I don't deserve what God is giving me. Here I am just a teenage girl

and yet God has remembered my humble state. And what God has done for me he will do for others. Because according to verse 52 he brings down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.

#### Slide 23

Friends if we want to be part of this game changing event, we need to humble ourselves. I think a good working definition of humility is this. Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself ... less. So when you praise God in your life, you take the magnifying lens off of yourself and all your own problems and put it onto Him and his solutions.

#### Slide 24

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century writer, G.K. Chesterton, once quipped, "Angels can fly because they take themselves lightly." Mary takes herself lightly, because she magnifies the Lord at work in her life and her world. And because of that, God uses her in a mighty way.

#### Slide 25

For this song of praise is actually a hymn of reversal, a song with a revolutionary edge. God is going to turn his world upside down. He has scattered those who are proud. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. The powerful lose their power and the powerless are lifted up.

"He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty." Once again there is this reversal. The rich are used to eating well but they will end up with nothing while the poor will eat what they want from the rich man's table. And God will remember the smallest of all nations, Israel. He won't forget that tiny, insecure nation. But he will keep his promises to Abraham, to Moses, to David.

It may not seem like it at the moment but God is always on the side of the humble, the hurting, the helpless and the hungry. God doesn't help those who help themselves; He helps those who are helpless. Look at the closing lines of her song in verses 54-55: "*He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever.*" I love the picture behind the word for "helped." It means "to take hold of, to embrace and hug, to support and help." That's how God treats us when we're helpless.

#### Slide 26

So friends the idea in this passage is not that we need to get with the strength. We don't need to align ourselves with the rich, the powerful, the successful. We need to humble ourselves. We need to realise that we are broken, helpless, desperate people who are going to trust God no matter what he says. Who will obey his word no matter how crazy it seems. Who will follow this Jesus, even if it means taking up the cross and following him to death.

#### Slide 27

You know that's what Mary does. Writer, Phillip Yancey says "*Often a work of God comes with two edges, great joy & great pain, and in that matter of fact response, Mary embraced both.*" Which meant she carried this baby 9 months, even on a long arduous trip to Bethlehem. It meant escaping in the middle of the night to save him from Herod's sword. It meant accepting that he wouldn't always be a carpenter. It meant seeing him rejected by her own town and nation. And it meant being there when he died on the cross.

#### Slide 28

If this was the way that God was going to change the world, if this was the way that God was going to change her world, she must humbly trust him. And that was what she was willing to do. And that is what we must also do. When Hudson Taylor felt the call from God to go to China as these people had never heard about Jesus. He organised his supporters, prayed for where he was going and went out by ship. But when he arrived no money had been sent for him. And over the coming days, weeks, years he had no income and nothing to live on.

But each day he prayed to the one who sent him out. He read the Scriptures where God promised to look after the birds and the flowers of the field. He prayed the Lord's Prayer asking for his daily bread. And each

day God kept his promise. So much so that when Taylor started up his own mission organisation, he called it a faith mission. Any missionary could go to any mission field, no matter what level of support they had. Because if God has called them, God would provide for them.

Slide 29

Friends you and I are on a faith mission. God wants to change our world and through us he wants to change the whole world. And to do that we need to humbly trust our God like Hudson Taylor did. We need to glorify the Lord like Mary did. And we need to realise that we won't change the world but Jesus will. For God changes the world not through the great, the powerful, the mighty, the beautiful. He changes it through humble servants, like you and me who are willing to completely trust in God's humble Saviour, Jesus.

## Song – Once in Royal David's city

[once in royal davids city - YouTube](#)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>1. Once in royal David's city<br/>           Stood a lowly cattle shed<br/>           There a mother laid her baby<br/>           In a manger for His bed<br/>           Mary was that mother mild<br/>           Jesus Christ her little child</p>                        | <p>3. And our eyes at last shall see Him<br/>           Through His own redeeming love<br/>           For that child, so dear and gentle<br/>           Is our Lord in heaven above<br/>           And He leads His children along<br/>           To the place where He is gone</p> |
| <p>2. He came down to earth from heaven<br/>           Who is God and Lord of all<br/>           And His shelter was a stable<br/>           And His cradle was a stall<br/>           With the poor, oppressed and wholly<br/>           Lived on earth our Saviour holy</p> |   |

**Closing.** Mary sang, “My soul magnifies the Lord” or “My soul glorifies the Lord.” As we go from here today, as we celebrate Christmas, let us remember in all things to glorify God, to make our lives a testimony to his love and grace and peace. Amen