



## Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> December 4th Sunday of Advent

### *PREPARATION*

#### Welcome and Prayer

Leader We meet in the name of God:  
All **God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit: God is one.**

All The Lord be with you  
**and also with you.**

#### Hymn     **631 Tell out my Soul**

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!  
Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;  
Tender to me the promise of his word;  
In God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!  
Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;  
His mercy sure, from age to age the same;  
His holy name, the Lord, the mighty One.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!  
Powers and dominions lay their glory by;  
Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,  
The hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!  
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.  
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord  
To children's children and forever more!



#### Lighting of the Advent Wreaths – *Light a candle in your home*

Leader God our Father,  
the angel Gabriel told the Virgin Mary that she was to  
be the mother of your Son.  
Though Mary was afraid, she responded to your call  
with joy. Help us, whom you call to serve you,  
to share like her in your great work of bringing to our  
world your love and healing.  
We ask this through Jesus Christ, the light who is  
coming into the world. **Amen.**

**All            Lord Jesus, light of the world, blessed is Gabriel, who brought  
good news; blessed is Mary, your mother and ours.  
Bless your Church preparing for Christmas;  
and bless us your children, who long for your coming. Amen.**

Advent Reflection – Jenny Jones

Opening activity ~ Puppet sketch

Hi Scruff, you're looking very excited today.

**Yes, I had some great news, I'm going to be in the pre-school nativity play!**

Fantastic! What part are you going to play? A shepherd?

**No.**

A wise man? Joseph? An angel?

**No.**

Who then?

**The donkey!**

Oh, well you've certainly got the fur for it! So what do you have to do?

**It's a really important part! I have to carry Mary to Bethlehem, then I have to explain to the other animals in the stable who baby Jesus is so they'll share their manger with him. Then I have to run away really fast to escape from King Herod.**

Wow, I hadn't realised the donkey was so important. Is your costume ready?

**Not yet but I only need to make a pair of ears, that won't take long.**

No, but don't leave it to the last minute. Have you practised carrying Mary carefully so she won't fall off?

**Noooo, but if donkeys and horses can do it, it can't be that hard.**

Don't let them hear you say that! Well I hope you've at least learnt your lines. If you're telling everyone who Jesus is, that's a really important part of the play.

**Ooooh, I'm not very good at learning lines Beaky. I'm not sure if I still want to be the donkey.**

Oh Scruff, don't give up. It's a big responsibility but I know if you try your best you'll have lots of fun too.

**Oh.....could you help me learn my lines Beaky?**

Yes, of course.

**And could you help me make my donkey ears please?**

Yes, I'll try my best, my beak's very versatile.

**And .....can I practise carrying you?**

Ummmm.....I might just find my crash helmet first!

**Thanks Beaky.**

You're welcome Scruff. I'm looking forward to seeing the play!

**I'm looking forward to it too.**

## Confession

Leader Heavenly Father,  
you exalted the humble and meek:  
give us humble and contrite hearts.  
Lord, have mercy

**All Lord, have mercy.**

Leader Lord Jesus,  
you grew towards birth in the Virgin's womb:  
be planted also in our hearts and lives.  
Christ, have mercy

**All Christ, have mercy.**

Leader Holy Spirit,  
you overshadowed Mary,  
that she might become the God-bearer:  
fill us with your heavenly gifts  
Lord, have mercy.

**All Lord, have mercy**

## Absolution

Leader Almighty God,  
who in Jesus Christ has given us  
a kingdom that cannot be destroyed,  
forgive us our sins,  
open our eyes to God's truth,  
strengthen us to do God's will  
and give us the joy of his kingdom,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord

**All Amen.**

## Collect (prayer on this day)

Leader 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

**All Amen**

This time @home – Grahame Wall, St Peter's

## Song      **Draw me close to you**

Draw me close to you  
Never let me go  
I lay it all down again  
To hear you say that I'm your friend  
You are my desire  
No one else will do  
Cause nothing else can take your  
place

To feel the warmth of your embrace  
Help me find the way  
Bring me back to you

*You're all I want  
You're all I've ever needed  
You're all I want  
Help me know you are near*

## Bible readings

*2 Samuel 11.1-11,16 ~ Rosemary Titcombe, St Peter's*

<sup>1</sup>In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.

<sup>2</sup>One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, <sup>3</sup>and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "Isn't this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" <sup>4</sup>Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (She had purified herself from her uncleanness.) Then she went back home. <sup>5</sup>The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, "I am pregnant."

<sup>6</sup>So David sent this word to Joab: "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent him to David. <sup>7</sup>When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going. <sup>8</sup>Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. <sup>9</sup>But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master's servants and did not go down to his house.

<sup>10</sup>When David was told, "Uriah did not go home," he asked him, "Haven't you just come from a distance? Why didn't you go home?"

<sup>11</sup>Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my master Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open fields. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and lie with my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!"

<sup>16</sup>So while Joab had the city under siege, he put Uriah at a place where he knew the strongest defenders were.

*Luke 1.26-38 ~ Sue Harvey, St Peter's*

<sup>26</sup>In the sixth month, 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 favoured! 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 favour with God. <sup>31</sup>You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name 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 the house of Jacob 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 upon 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 barren is in her sixth month. <sup>37</sup>For nothing is impossible with God."

<sup>38</sup>"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

Sermon Geoff Pugh

### **'Duties and Joy: Celebrating Christmas'**

Good Morning to all

Let us pray – *may the dutiful righteousness and joy of the love of God be found in my words to you now, and in your listening and understanding of them, as we conclude our Advent sermon series. Amen*

My Sermon Title this morning is – **Duties and Joys: Celebrating Christmas**

Only five days to go before we celebrate the joy of Christ's birth. As in our Holy Communion at St Peters today, food and drink may be an important part of your celebrations. For some perhaps a fine meal with company, for others simply in raising a glass, although on their own yet always with God.

Sometimes, in a meal, there can be a dissonance, a contrast of flavours, which can be surprising and yet add to its overall enjoyment. For the traditional turkey meal, think perhaps of the gentle smoothness of the bread sauce contrasted with the sharp, almost bitter flavour of the cranberry sauce.

And so it is with the two readings we heard today. Why are they put together in this last Sunday of Advent in Christmas week? What on earth (or in heaven!) can the connection be between them? What is the connection between the sharp flavour of David's very dubious behaviour (to put it mildly) to take possession of Bathsheba, wife of Uriah, with the

gently wonderful story of the annunciation, wherein the virgin Mary (1: 34) gently accepts God's will for her to carry to birth her forthcoming baby Jesus, the Son of God (1:35)?

Like some Christmas mystery game, let's find out more, before later on looking at the joy of celebrating Christmas. I am proposing that there are two important things common to those readings, all under the Will of God. First, dutiful behaviours, and second, a specific connection of ancestry.

What is meant by dutiful is when we, as individuals, accept some form of obligation or responsibility to others, in a moral sense; recognising inside ourselves what is right, or wrong, and that it is required of us. For today I am going to assume we all have our own understanding of what is the 'Will of God' in our lives, even as we try to exercise our own individual preferences or wilfulness, without writing a theological treatise or a further sermon on that matter!

So in the Samuel reading, we note the dutifulness of Uriah, who is being set up by David to fall in battle so that he, King David, could take the lady Bathsheba, who he fancied from afar, as his. We note how Uriah wouldn't accept David's offer to leave the coming battlefield and visit and sleep with his wife before the fighting. Why not? Because of his dutifulness to his military comrades, and to military traditions. This was such a devious offer made by King David, as he didn't want to get caught out as the responsible one if possibly making Bathsheba pregnant when he took her to his bed. All a bit like something out of a poor TV soap opera story line. Uriah was killed through David's plotting, despite his dutifulness, and King David did take Bathsheba as one of his wives subsequently. God was not pleased with him, and they lost their first son, undoubtedly as God's will, but then, most importantly having repented, David went on to have other children, one of whom became King Solomon, perhaps the greatest of the Old Testament Jewish Kings and Rulers in both God's eyes and the Israelite writers of the Old Testament. But I will come back to this later. So now let's look out for dutifulness in our reading we heard from Luke. It doesn't really need me to spell this out. In Luke's story, the young girl Mary from Nazareth, a virgin and betrothed to Joseph, is faced with the enormity of a visit from the angel Gabriel (no less!) and an explanation of what was going to be her role, to give a virgin birth to a baby who would be the saviour of the world, Jesus, the son of God, who would rule for evermore (vv31-33) . The whole of Gods plan, His will for our world! It is impossible for us to comprehend the enormity of how this might have felt for Mary, yet see how she accepted this, in such a dutiful and graceful manner (v38) 'I am the Lords servant' she says. 'May it be to me as you have said'

Now there is yet more to this story than simply the dutifulness of Mary herself and its immediate consequences.

Let's look at her betrothed, Joseph, and his dutifulness. Did he reject Mary, once she told him of her pregnancy? Clearly not, he was understanding and dutiful, to her, and to God, and stayed with her. Could she have travelled to Bethlehem in her late stages of pregnancy without the support of Joseph? Clearly not, as a dutiful, caring and loving husband. In fact, would she have travelled to Bethlehem, as foretold for the birth of the Messiah, for any good reason on her own account? No, because it was the family home-town not of her, from Nazareth, but of Joseph who needed to be at his home town for the necessary Roman required civil registration of citizens.

So this leads me to the second and direct connection between our two readings today. Later in the gospel of Luke, he writes a genealogy of Joseph, (3:23, 37), which directly connects through Joseph's father, Jacob, back to King Solomon and thence to Adam. This is also reflected albeit in a slightly different way, in the Gospel of St Matthew (1:1-16). And that connection could not have been made without David taking Bathsheba as his wife, and thence her becoming the mother of King Solomon.

So here is an example of God's will which is so often enabled, or disabled, through our human actions. God was certainly not pleased with David's actions over Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:27) and he was punished and forgiven subsequently – but nevertheless the result of his very dubious personal actions did result in the family line for Jesus through to Adam.

So there we have our connections between these apparently very different readings concerning the birth of Jesus – dutifulness, in the biblical accounts about Mary and King David under God's Will; and the direct descent from God as foretold in our Old Testament Bibles through Joseph.

Finally I want to turn to our forthcoming celebrations on Friday.

The important reading today as we look ahead to Christmas is that story of Mary, who gave birth not just to a child, but to Jesus, in form both human and divine, the son of God and our Saviour for salvation from our sins, our regressions from God. This is the biggest possible event that we humans can celebrate, dutifully indeed but really with unbounded joy. As we come to the end of this long Covid-19 year – many of us will be unable to be together with our families as is customary on Christmas Day. Perhaps we will be on our own; perhaps we will be fortunate to be with a spouse or partner or just for some maybe with very limited numbers of family and friends, under the latest government guidance.

When celebrating Christmas Day, and we will all celebrate, our focus will always be to share love, and it is within the love of God to us that we will be sharing our love. This is both our duty and joy. So whether celebrating



with others, in person or using technology like Zoom, or on your own, being dutiful in helping with hospitality preparations, perhaps helping elsewhere with making meals for the homeless or giving lifts to church for friends, or working and servicing our NHS hospitals, do indeed celebrate on this very special day the uniqueness of this occasion in our annual calendars, if only by raising a glass, and breaking some bread – not clashing but complimenting in flavours! Here's to next Friday, when we celebrate with joy the birth of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour!

Let us pray;

*Heavenly Father*

*May we all find joy in being able to celebrate the duties of Christmas in our hearts and minds in this last week ahead and especially on Friday, and may our joy be sustained and remain with us throughout whatever the forthcoming year holds for us. For Jesus Christ's sake. Amen*

### Hymn     **Rejoice with us this Christmas**

Rejoice with us this Christmas,  
The Son of God has come.  
We've found the Saviour, Jesus,  
Given for everyone. (repeat)

*We're gonna shout out – to the  
heavens,  
We're gonna reach out – to the skies.  
We're gonna jump up – everybody!  
Lift the name of Jesus high.*

Sing out the Christmas story,  
Sing out this joyful song.

For love has come from glory,  
Given for everyone. (repeat)

*We are gonna shout out....*

Rejoice with us this Christmas,  
The Son of God has come.  
We've found the Saviour, Jesus,  
Given for everyone.

Sing out the Christmas story,  
Sing out this joyful song.  
For love has come from glory,  
Given for everyone.

### Creed

Let us declare our faith in God.

**We believe in God the Father, from whom every family  
in heaven and on earth is named.**

**We believe in God the Son, who lives in our hearts through faith,  
and fills us with his love.**

**We believe in God the Holy Spirit, who strengthens us  
with power from on high.**

**We believe in one God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.**

**Amen**



## Prayers ~ Nicola Cadet de Fontenay, St Peter's

The Father made our salvation known to Mary by the message of an angel. Filled with confidence let us pray Through the angel Gabriel you brought a message of peace and joy to Mary, give the world the peace and joy of salvation. We pray for our world where restrictions have highlighted the suffering of those who face oppression we ask for your freedom and comfort. We ask for your peace as we anticipate the future of change with Biden's presidency and Brexit

Lord hear us

**Lord graciously hear us**

By the consent of Mary and the power of the Holy Spirit, your Word came to dwell among us. Open our hearts to receive Christ, as Mary the Virgin received him. We pray for each other worshipping together but also apart help us to prepare to celebrate your coming and find ways to share joy with each other and in our community

Lord hear us

**Lord graciously hear us**

You look with compassion on the lowly and fill the hungry with good things. Encourage the downhearted, help all those in need and comfort those near to death. We pray for the bereaved especially the family and friends of Chris Davies, Enid Houghton, and Margaret Pain. We pray for those who are sick Eileen and Peter Bliss, Enid Hardman, John Hunter, Catherine McCormack, Olive Park, Joy Storkey and Barbara Thirst

Lord hear us

**Lord graciously hear us**

We draw our prayers to a close with the words our Saviour taught us

### The Lord's Prayer

**All    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.  
         Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.  
         For the Kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever.  
         Amen**

### Notices     (See Notes & News)

### Hymn     **God rest ye merry gentlemen**

God rest ye merry gentlemen

Let nothing you dismay

For Jesus Christ our Saviour

Was born on Christmas Day

To save us all from Satan's power

When we were gone astray

*O tidings of comfort and joy*

*Comfort and joy*

*O tidings of comfort and joy*



From God our Heavenly Father  
A blessed Angel came;  
And unto certain shepherds  
Brought tidings of the same,  
How that in Bethlehem was born  
The Son of God by Name.

*O tidings of comfort and joy,  
Comfort and joy  
O tidings of comfort and joy*

The shepherds at those tidings  
Rejoiced much in mind,  
And left their flocks a-feeding  
In tempest, storm and wind,  
And went to Bethlehem straightway  
The Son of God to find.

*O tidings of comfort and joy,  
Comfort and joy  
O tidings of comfort and joy*

But when to Bethlehem they came,  
Whereat this infant lay,  
They found Him in a manger,  
Where oxen feed on hay;  
His Mother Mary kneeling down,  
Unto the Lord did pray.

*O tidings of comfort and joy,  
Comfort and joy  
O tidings of comfort and joy*

Now to the Lord sing praises,  
All you within this place,  
And with true love and brotherhood  
Each other now embrace;  
This holy tide of Christmas  
All other doth efface.

*O tidings of comfort and joy,  
Comfort and joy  
O tidings of comfort and joy*

### Blessing

Leader Christ the Sun of Righteousness shine upon you,  
scatter the darkness from before your path,  
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 with you now and for evermore.

**All Amen.**

### Dismissal

Leader With love and compassion,  
**come, Lord Jesus.**  
With judgement and mercy,  
**come, Lord Jesus.**  
In power and glory,  
**come, Lord Jesus.**  
In wisdom and truth,  
**come, Lord Jesus.**

As we await our coming Saviour,  
go in peace to love and serve the Lord.  
**In the name of Christ. Amen.**

