



**DURHAM
CATHEDRAL**

THE SHRINE OF ST CUTHBERT

Praying Together

*during the week beginning Sunday 20 December
The Fourth Sunday of Advent*

During this time of great anxiety and uncertainty, we want to stay in touch with our regular worshippers and indeed with everyone who is associated with the Cathedral family. We are delighted that we have been able to reintroduce congregational worship here at the Cathedral. Durham Cathedral is also open for private prayer and quiet reflection.

If you'd like to come to the cathedral for worship and/or prayer, there are some important measures we'd like you to know about, to ensure the safety of members of the public and staff. You can find this information on our website: www.durhamcathedral.co.uk We will continue to live stream services as well so that, if you can't re-join us yet, you will still be able to engage with us online.

Gospel

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.

Thought for the Day

by the Reverend Canon Charlie Allen

I suspect that many of you gather this morning with a deep feeling of being unsettled in your hearts.

It's an experience that has been with us for some time as we have ridden the unpredictable waves of this pandemic – a sense of our lives being governed by events outside of our control, of plans needing to be changed and adapted again and again and again.

For many, this unsettled feeling really came home yesterday afternoon as news began to break of new restrictions over the Christmas period - restrictions to protect us all and keep us safe, yet measures that make so many carefully planned get togethers impossible. Once again we are unsettled, cast adrift, desperate to find some aspect of our lives that doesn't seem to be in permanent flux.

The passage we heard a few minutes ago from the second book of Samuel speaks deeply into this human need to be settled and to be able to plan ahead.

It begins with David enjoying the contented feeling of having a sense of permanence for the first time. He is settled in one place, and living in a rather nice house made, we are told, of the finest cedar from Lebanon. He feels in control of his life, and he is comfortable in it.

Yet he feels uncomfortable that God is still living in a tent, as a nomad – and he suggests that a permanent temple be built to house him so that God can be settled too. He tells all this to the prophet Nathan who thinks it's a great idea, until God speaks to him in a dream and explains that he doesn't want to be confined to a building, to a place, to be settled – he wants to be out there on the road, actively unsettled.

This is difficult for David to hear, and he has to do some rapid rethinking of his understanding of God. God, it seems, is not to be domesticated, to be comfortable or safe; God, he discovers, does not wish to be confined to a building or place. The spirit of God chooses to dwell in unexpected places and to challenge assumptions. And so we meet him again in our Gospel reading, and we hear of the indwelling of humanity by God in the person of Jesus.

There is Mary - ordinary, unremarkable, preparing for married life, preparing to settle down. And there is the Archangel Gabriel, bearing the most unsettling news of all – news to which Mary doesn't shy away, but to which she dares to respond with a 'yes'. Yes to the unexpected and seemingly impossible. Yes to aligning her will with God's will. Yes to the unknown.

And before long we hear her song – the Magnificat. Her song of all that is to come alive in the child she will bear. A song of a world turned upside down - of unjust social structures overthrown, of a world where the hungry are fed, the wealthy sacrifice, where the poor are cared for and the marginalised are marginalised no more; a song of a world in which leaders seek peace, in which all are valued; a song of a world in which roles are reversed as God's peaceable realm comes to earth "as it is in heaven". A song of a world unsettled, so that it can settle in a different order, a different pattern - so that it can dance to a different tune.

And there lies the hidden gift that can be found amidst the pain and anxiety of being unsettled – the gift of insight, of wisdom, of seeing life differently.

To be unsettled is to be jolted out of our everyday existence and to glimpse the world as it is. It is to raise our eyes from our busy lives to see our place within the whole of God's creation. To be unsettled is to feel a longing for those whom we love, to feel a pain in seeing others trapped in poverty or loneliness, to notice the impact our daily lives have on the earth and its ecosystems. To be unsettled is to learn to see afresh: with this comes life, and with this comes challenge.

Such was the experience of Mary as her 'yes' launched her into an unexpected adventure with God.

Such is our experience during these days of Advent as we wrestle with all that has been asked of us during this pandemic.

And yet, despite the pain of not being able to gather with loved ones, despite the anxiety of not being able to plan as we wish, despite being unsettled more than we ever could have imagined, in a few days' time Christmas will still happen – it is not cancelled. In the hush of night Emmanuel, God with us, will creep in beside us – and hope will be born again. Amen.

A Form of Intercession for the Blessed Virgin Mary

As we pray to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
we say with Mary:

Lord, have mercy on those who fear you.

Holy is your name.

Your prophet of old foretold a day when a virgin would conceive
and bear a son who would be called God-with-us.

Help us to look forward to your deliverance
and to seek the fullness of your kingdom.

Lord, have mercy on those who fear you.

Holy is your name.

Your angel declared to Mary that she was to be
the mother of the Saviour.

Help every Christian person to be open to your word
and obedient to your will.

Lord, have mercy on those who fear you.

Holy is your name.

Mary rejoiced with Elizabeth and sang your praise,
'My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord.'

Help us to live joyful lives that sing your praise.

Lord, have mercy on those who fear you.

Holy is your name.

Mary bore a son of David's line,
a king whose reign would never end.

Bless all the nations of the world with Christ's gift of peace.

Lord, have mercy on those who fear you.

Holy is your name.

The child Jesus grew in wisdom and stature
in the home of Mary and Joseph.
Strengthen our homes and families,
and keep under your protection all those whom we love.

Lord, have mercy on those who fear you.

Holy is your name.

At the foot of the cross of Christ stood his mother,
and from the cross she received his lifeless body in her arms.
Give comfort and healing to all who suffer
and all who watch the suffering of those they love.

Lord, have mercy on those who fear you.

Holy is your name.

The apostle John saw a vision of a woman in heaven,
robed with the sun.
Bring us with all those who have died in the faith of Christ
to share the joy of heaven with Mary and all the saints.

Lord, have mercy on those who fear you.

Holy is your name.

Almighty and everlasting God,
your handmaid Mary magnified your name
and rejoiced in your saving love:
trusting in that same love,
we ask all these our prayers
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Hymn

For Mary, Mother of the Lord
God's holy name be praised,
Who first the Son of God adored
As on her child she gazed.

The angel Gabriel brought the word
She should Christ's mother be;
Our Lady, handmaid of the Lord,
Made answer willingly.

The heavenly call she thus obeyed,
And so God's will was done;
The second Eve love's answer made
Which our redemption won.

She gave her body for God's shrine,
Her heart to piercing pain,
And knew the cost of love divine
When Jesus Christ was slain.

Dear Mary, from your lowliness
And home in Galilee,
There comes a joy and holiness
To every family.

Hail, Mary, you are full of grace,
Above all women blest;
Blest in your Son, whom your embrace
In birth and death confessed.

J R Peacey

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Calendar of Holy Days

Monday 21 December	O Oriens
Tuesday 22 December	O Rex Gentium
Wednesday 23 December	O Emmanuel
Thursday 24 December	Christmas Eve

Almighty God, you make us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of your Son Jesus Christ:
grant that, as we joyfully receive him as our redeemer,
so we may with sure confidence behold him
when he shall come to be our judge;
who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

FRIDAY 25 DECEMBER CHRISTMAS DAY

Almighty God, you have given us your only-begotten Son
to take our nature upon him
and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin:
grant that we, who have been born again
and made your children by adoption and grace,
may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Saturday 26 December Stephen, Deacon, First Martyr

Gracious Father, who gave the first martyr Stephen
grace to pray for those who took up stones against him:
grant that in all our sufferings for the truth
we may learn to love even our enemies
and to seek forgiveness for those who desire our hurt,
looking up to heaven to him who was crucified for us,
Jesus Christ, our mediator and advocate,
who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

A Prayer for use during the Coronavirus outbreak

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy
in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

A Prayer for the Blessed Virgin Mary:

Lord Jesus,
give to us the gift of pure worship –
that ability which Mary had
of attributing to you your truth worth,
your full value, your inestimable greatness.
Teach us to be reverent,
yet teach us how to express the love
that burns within our hearts
as we think of your goodness towards us –
that you have come to be our light in the darkness,
our hope in despair,
our strength in weakness,
our shelter in the storm –
our eternal Saviour.
Amen.

The next issue of *Praying Together*
will be published on Monday 28 December