

Week St Mary Methodist Church – Sunday 20 December



It has been a busy week of witness with carol singing around the village and the Stratton Young Farmers Carol Service. On this Sunday evening there will be a Candlelit carol concert at the Chapel at 6.30; we can't all sing as a congregation but there will be a wide variety of musical items. We are limited with numbers but if you want to come please enquire on 341317, there are likely to be a few last minute cancellations. There will also be another new worship video which will be available on our Chapel website www.weekstmarymethodist.org.uk and facebook page www.facebook.com/ChapelWSM

Today is the fourth Sunday in Advent, when we focus on Mary the mother of Jesus, and our service sheet reflects that.

PRAYER

Lord, as we approach the time when we celebrate Christ's birth, let us think of Mary, heavily pregnant, journeying to Bethlehem, finding no room, and having to stay and give birth to Jesus in a stable. It was, no doubt, not the circumstances in which she hoped to give birth. Lord, as we journey towards Christmas we are also in circumstances which we would not have envisaged a year ago. We may be

forgoing normal family gatherings, we may be caring for or grieving someone who has had Covid, we may be in financial difficulties, and we may long for our usual Christmas worship and singing carols together. But one thing hasn't changed – the historic events we celebrate at Christmas. And we can all, this Christmas, give you thanks for the gift of your Son Jesus. **Amen**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

READING FOR TODAY Luke 1:26-38 (NIV)

The birth of Jesus foretold

²⁶In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.'

²⁹Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. ³¹You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³²He 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, ³³and he will reign over Jacob's descendants for ever; his kingdom will never end.'

³⁴'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?'

³⁵The 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. ³⁶Even 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. ³⁷For no word from God will ever fail.'

³⁸'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May your word to me be fulfilled.' Then the angel left her.

REFLECTION

For Luke, in his Gospel, Jesus is the Messiah (that old title for the King in Jerusalem and for the better one who would come and put things right). But the Messiah Jesus is also the God-given saviour of the world, not just of Israel. He is born in humble surroundings, in an obscure part of the Roman Empire, and will spend his ministry among the poor and marginalised. That's why the visitors to the baby in Luke are shepherds – shepherds lived their lives out in the fields, apart from normal society. Here Luke tells the story of the announcement (the annunciation) to the poor, ordinary, young, unmarried teenager Mary. The messenger spells out that the baby will be great; that he will be called, 'the Son of the Most High God'; that he will be given David's throne; and that he will reign over Israel for ever, ie that Jesus is the Messiah. Mary is confused. She points out that she is a virgin. Remember that in that Jewish culture virginity was not a condition to be prized or praised, but was something to be lost as soon as possible by getting married and having children. Gabriel replies that this baby is God's responsibility (v35) and reinforces the point that nothing is impossible with God by citing the pregnancy of Mary's older, barren, cousin.

What Mary doesn't do is question the messenger and say 'why me?' I think most of us would have. Perhaps she was too terrified to ask the question, but on the face of it she simply accepts that God has chosen her for this vital task. Then in a verse which has been the text of countless sermons, Mary offers herself to God to use as God sees fit. Everything connected with the birth of Jesus is God's work, the story insists. The emphasis is not on Mary, nor on how she conceived or gave birth, but on the child she bore and the place of that child in God's purposes. We could reflect on whether we offer our services to God in the same unconditional way.

PRAYER FOR OTHERS

We pray, this Christmas, for everyone who will not be seeing their families as they usually would, everyone who will be lonely, everyone who is ill or suffering mentally, everyone is facing poverty and financial hardship, and everyone who is bereaved.

We pray, this Christmas for everyone involved in preparing and administering the covid vaccine, and for everyone who is responsible for encouraging vaccine take-up. Above all, we pray that the vaccine will be distributed fairly throughout the world.

We pray, this Christmas, for those closer to home, those dependent on food banks, those who are homeless, those whose work situation is uncertain, those in isolation, and those in our local hospitals.

HYMN H&P 87, StF 187

The angel Gabriel from heaven came,
His wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame
"All hail" said he "thou lowly maiden Mary,
Most highly favoured lady,"
Gloria!

"For known a blessed mother thou shalt be,
All generations laud and honour thee,

Thy Son shall be Immanuel, by seers foretold;
Most highly favoured lady,"
Gloria!

Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head,
"To me be as it pleaseth God," she said,
"My soul shall laud and magnify his holy
name."
Most highly favoured lady.
Gloria!

Of her, Immanuel, the Christ was born
In Bethlehem, all on a Christmas morn,
And Christian folk throughout the world will
ever say,
"Most highly favoured lady,"
Gloria!

(Sabine Baring-Gould)

THE GRACE

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of
God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be
with you now and ever more. Amen