

'Jesus and Mary', December 20<sup>th</sup>, Fourth Sunday of Advent.  
Carols and Lessons.

Luke 1:26-38 primarily.

God of the prophets, speak to us now your servants are listening.  
May your Spirit be afresh at work within us. Draw us closer to Jesus  
now. And may respond willingly to all your are saying. Amen.

Raniero Cantalamessa is the preacher to the Papal Household. He  
once wrote: "In the tales of Medieval battles, there always comes  
a moment when the orderly ranks of archers and cavalry, and all  
the rest, are broken and the fighting concentrates around the king.  
That is when the final outcome of the battle will be decided. For us  
today – the battle today is taking place around *the* King; it is the  
Person of Jesus Christ himself that is the real point of issue." Who  
is Jesus?

**Saviour, Messiah, Son of God.**

When God chooses Mary as the means when God himself wants to  
come into the world in the manger of Bethlehem, this is not an  
idyllic family affair. It is instead the beginning of a complete  
reversal, a new ordering of all things on this earth<sup>1</sup>

When the angel speaks to Mary, there are three claims about  
Jesus.

The angel said to Mary (and later to Joseph) – you are to call him  
Jesus. The name Jesus means 'Saviour'.

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<sup>1</sup> Bonhoeffer, D. (2010). [\*God is in the Manger: Reflections on Advent and Christmas\*](#). (J. Riess, Ed., O. C. Dean Jr., Trans.) (First edition, p. 42). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

Secondly he is Messiah. He is the long awaited King, from the line of David. The angel said Mary's son would be given the 'throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, his kingdom will never end.'

Thirdly, he is Son of God. The Angel said, when Mary asked how could she have a child. He said that the "holy one to be born will be called the Son of God." Jesus birth would be truly unique Mary is told. She is a virgin she says. A normal conception was impossible. She is told it will be possible as the Holy Spirit will come on her. The incarnation – Jesus fully human – born in the normal way; fully God – conceived by the Holy Spirit.

Christians around the globe, as they prepare to celebrate Christmas, believe in Jesus as Saviour, Messiah, and Son of God. To be a Christian is to be a follower of Christ. All followers of Jesus – are as John 1 reminded us – are children of God. And if we belong to Christ, the Holy Spirit lives within each of us. There is much more that unites us than divides us, this time of year reminds us.

### **Mary. Chosen!**

When the angel visits Mary. You could say she has no credentials compared Zechariah and Elisabeth – whose story we hear first in Luke's opening words. Zechariah is a priest. He serves at the temple. Mary comes from the village of Nazareth in Gallilee. An obscure village far away from the capital. Remember what years later Nathanael said when Philip told him about Jesus of Nazareth – Nazareth – can any good come from there? Mary's family line is not shared. At a time when people were put in places according to their significance in society, there is no likelihood at all, that a Caesar, a King like Herod, or a person of influence, would ever think of such a person, let alone visit such a nobody in their eyes. And yet God says you are highly favoured. God chooses her. God's subversive behavior – he turns the way the world is, upside down –

which is what he will keep on doing in the coming chapters, in fact you could say through his Son's entire ministry. When Jesus is born, the fanfare is in the sky – but only to shepherds, not to the rich and powerful.

As someone said: “ On Christmas Night the words of Micah 5 came true. The greatest king the world would ever see, came at last for the people who had cried out for him for centuries. But not in triumph at the head of a mighty army, banners in the wind, shields held high. The Son of God, the Messiah, the Saviour, the New Adam, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, He came into the world, a helpless baby, born in a stable cave, and laid in a manger.” (Anderson, Maddox, Graphic Bible). And his followers later arrested and accused – they are described, as they follow in Jesus footsteps as “people turning the world upside down.”

### **Attitudes.**

Mary, she shows attitudes for us to follow.

The Lord is with her. V28. The Lord is within her (v35). The Lord is over her – v38.

We follow Jesus with this triple alliance.

The angel said – **the Lord is with you!**

Matthew's Gospel began with the Angel's words to Joseph that the baby is to be called Emmanuel. The last words of Matthew's Gospel – Jesus says I am with you always. Through the circumstances we face, through this past year of Corona, as many of us enter new levels of restrictions, through the past 5 years since All Saints was founded, no matter how hard times have been or are, we do not need to fear or let anxiety control us, the King is with you and with us, and nothing is impossible with God... He is with us.

**The Holy Spirit within you**, the angel told Mary.

As the Holy Spirit came upon Mary, to bring within her a physical birth, years later Jesus reminds us, that the Holy Spirit comes upon each of us to bring about a spiritual birth, to be born again. In these past weeks of our Life Groups focusing on the themes of Talking Jesus, do not forget the challenge of prayer – it is the Lord’s work within someone, that creates spiritual birth. We invite someone. The response is in His hands. The Holy Spirit within us.

Finally **the King over you**.

You are called – each of you – to be the Lord’s servant. We have heard the words of many faithful servants of the Lord through the scriptures we read today. We are called to be servants who are strong, courageous and trusting.

Do you like surprises?

I remember when I was 21, I know that may be hard to imagine, at university in England, and my friends said I needed to go visit the Roman Catholic chaplain’s parsonage, as a guy called Andy needed to have a chat with me... and when I walked in – lights went on and **Surprise!!!!** – loads of my friends there, celebrating my birthday... Never imagined it.

But think of Mary – young Mary – she has seen Angel Gabriel and she alone has heard the wonderful news – “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.” And her response to that surprise - “I am the Lord’s Servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said.” (Luke 1:35-38). What a surprise and what an amazing response.

To quote Nicky Gumbel: 'in the greatest most decisive act of faith in history, she offered herself to God as a clean page on which he could write what he wanted. Her response is a model to us: I am the Lord's Servant. A different bible translation puts it in a fresh way for us: "I am the Lord's servant, and I am willing to accept whatever He wants."

As we seek to follow. We are encouraged. The Lord with us. The Holy Spirit is within us. We place the King over us.

**Christmas is about surprises...**

I wonder looking back. What surprises do we remember these past 5 years or the years you have been part of All Saints? These words of Mary possibly were shared when Luke met her. Memories he wrote down as Paul was locked down in Caesarea for 2 years. Memories that were still vivid of the surprises her life, through the Lord's working. What surprises do we remember at what God has been doing among us, through us, around us? Surprises at how even when we didn't see it, he was working. Surprises at how the Lord was already ahead of us and had provided or prepared.

**To close.**

The scriptures in such a service remind us, of the journey of how the Lord brought his Son into our world. It is important, as we celebrate 5 years – to remember how the Lord has brought us to this place. Thankful for how he has made it possible. For the resources he has provided. How our planting came out of provision and growth in the mother church – Holy Trinity. We are thankful for God's faithfulness over the years – and in this particular year of great challenge when Corona has placed great demands this wonderful church community. We have confidence, God will continue to be faithful in our futures as individuals and as a church. He has not led us so far, to abandon us. He longs us to

grow further as a healthy vibrant church, growing in numbers and in spiritual depth and discipleship, a church that is helping in the transformation of Amersfoort through being part of God's kingdom purposes. The God as revealed in our scriptures is still the God of today and the God of our tomorrow.

Shall we finish in prayer.

We thank you Lord God,  
For all the benefits you have given us in your Son Jesus Christ, our most merciful Redeemer, Friend and Brother and for all the pain and insults he has borne for us. We thank you he is Saviour, Messiah, Son of God. We thank you that he is with us, your Spirit is in us and you are King over us.  
We pray Lord, help us to focus upon the real battles that matter and unite around Jesus.  
We want to say like Mary, I am the Lord's servant, and I am willing to accept whatever he wants." Amen.