

# Joy, justice and Jesus

15 December (Advent 3)

## INTRODUCING TODAY'S THEME

Today is called **Joy Sunday** when we remember Mary, the Mum of Jesus and happy or joyful she was to be chosen to be the mother of Jesus.

**I wonder what makes you happy or joyful?**

Is it when you are chosen to do something important, like Mary was ...?

Is it when you get to help someone and it makes you feel good inside ...?

Is it when you've been hoping for something good to happen – and it does!

God is the one who brings joy to our hearts ... joy makes us want to sing and dance and tell others how good God is to us.

## BIBLE READINGS

Lord, open our hearts and minds

**that we may hear your word with joy.**

[Luke 1:39-55](#)

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfil his promises to her!'

And Mary said:

'My soul glorifies the Lord

and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,

for he has been mindful

of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,

for the Mighty One has done great things for me –

holy is his name.

His mercy extends to those who fear him,

from generation to generation.

He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;

he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

He has brought down rulers from their thrones

but has lifted up the humble.

He has filled the hungry with good things  
but has sent the rich away empty.  
He has helped his servant Israel,  
remembering to be merciful  
to Abraham and his descendants for ever,  
just as he promised our ancestors.'

[Philippians 4:4-7](#)

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice!

Let your gentleness be evident to all.

The Lord is near.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

For the word of God in Scripture,  
for the word of God among us,  
for the word of God within us,  
**thanks be to God.**

**MESSAGE** [Joy, justice and Jesus](#)

So much of our lives is guided by routine and habit.

We tend to eat the same breakfast every day, we listen to the same radio show, we visit the same shops. Nothing much seems to change.

And nothing much seems to change in the world. There always seem to be wars and rumours of wars. There are politicians making grand statements but not doing much to help those who are really struggling. The cost of renting or buying a house only ever seems to increase.

But then in the midst of all this routine, sometimes unexpected things happen. Surprising and even extraordinary things ... like events in Syria this week where a hated tyrant was overthrown almost overnight and a 50 year reign of oppression ended.



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In the Advent story that Luke tells, God breaks unexpectedly into the routine of two women, Elizabeth and Mary.

Mary is told by an angel that she will have a child to be named Jesus who will be conceived in a mysterious way – through God's Holy Spirit overshadowing Mary.



Following this encounter, I suspect that Mary was desperate to talk to someone who would listen and believe her extraordinary story.

At the suggestion of the angel she travels to see her relative Elizabeth who is also unexpectedly pregnant.

In today's reading, these two strong women meet each other.

Two ordinary woman.

Two women with extraordinary tales to share.

Both have reason to be anxious, but instead both are filled with joy at what God is doing through them.

When finally Mary makes it to Elizabeth's house after a long lonely journey, both Elizabeth and the baby in her womb are filled with joy.

"Mary, you are blessed!

You are blessed because you believed the promise of God to you about your child. And you are blessed that you bear the child of my Lord, that is, you bear God's child."

This prophetic insight that Elizabeth offers to Mary is an insight that we still struggle to get our heads around. It's no wonder that Mary stayed with Elizabeth another three months. I'm sure that they had much to talk about and Mary had much to learn about life, pregnancy, babies and the extraordinary ways of God.

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In Luke's account, Mary then launches into her song that we call the Magnificat, the opening word the song in its Latin translation.

The words that tumble out of Mary's mouth they are full of praise and thanks to God. Mary's spirit rejoices in God's saving work and her soul magnifies God's ways. Future generations will indeed consider me blessed by God, who has done great things for me.

Mary sees past her ordinary, humble village life.

She sees past the shame and innuendo of being an unwed mother.

She sees past the pain and grief that her son Jesus will bring into her life.

Instead, she sees blessing, that God is doing something amazing through her and through her son, Jesus.



She wants to share her joy with everyone who will listen, joy that comes from being in the centre of God's will, joy that is a gift from God's Spirit.

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So I wonder what God has done for you in this last year that your soul wants to magnify God's name for?

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*What has God done that makes you want to praise God?  
Where have you found unexpected joy this past year?*

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Let's take a few minutes to share with one another ...

According to Mary's song, God has not only done great things for her personally, God has also performed mighty deeds in the world.

God has scattered the proud,  
brought rulers down from their thrones  
and sent the rich away empty.

God has also lifted up the humble,  
filled the hungry with good things  
and shown mercy to Abraham's descendants.

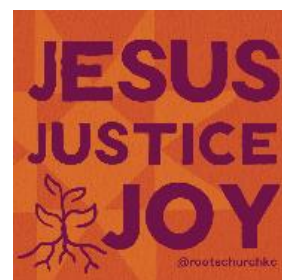
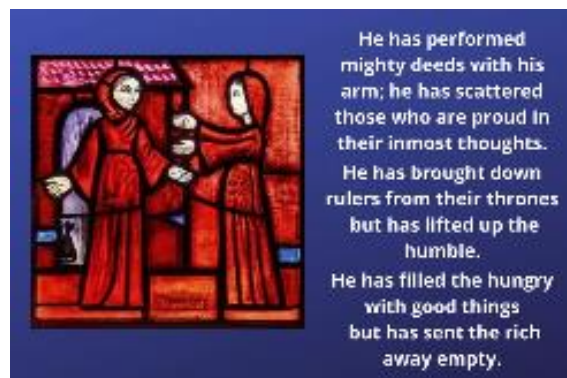
This is Mary speaking as a prophet seeing how the world will be when God's ways are followed. She sings as if this has already happened, when in reality Rome still rules the known world and life is hard for peasant folk like her.

What Mary sings about is God's justice coming into the world and what this will look like. It will be a great reversal where the strong and powerful are overthrown and the humble and hungry lifted up.

It echoes Jesus' teaching that the first will be last and the last will be first. It speaks of what God will do through Mary's son Jesus!

It's subversive.

In the halls of power such talk is treason or revolution that is likely to see you arrested or killed. But it speaks of God's ways becoming reality even when we look at a world and think such outcomes are impossible.



And it fills Mary's heart with joy.

So we see three ideas coming together in an unusual and unexpected way – justice, joy and Jesus.

Advocating for justice is so often a struggle with little progress seen. But Mary's prophetic words pull back the curtain to show that God's way and God's will is for justice. And this outrageous vision for justice brings joy. And the figure around whom these ideas of justice and joy swirl is the yet to be born Jesus.

When we stand back and hear the words of Mary's song in the cold light of day and compare them with how the world usually works, they may sound presumptuous or hollow ... when have we seen God act in such a decisive way?

Well, just this last week in Syria actually! A hated tyrant in Bashar al-Assad has been toppled, political prisoners freed from captivity, and the people of Syria having new hope for a better future.



The first message that Jesus preaches in Luke's Gospel is at his hometown of Nazareth, when he reads from the scroll of Isaiah and claims that his mission or purpose is to bring God's favour to the poor, to free captives, and to let the oppressed go free. It's a similar message to Mary's message about justice and reversal and hope.



In this Gospel of Luke, then, a big part of the good news of Jesus is how God's justice will come into the world in practical ways – welcoming people, whatever their situation in life, and helping them to live full and peaceful lives.

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Turning briefly to the Philippians reading, Paul writes that we need not be anxious or fearful, but rather should rejoice because God is near.

And we are invited to pray, to bring all our requests and fears before God who will bring peace to our hearts and keep our minds focused on Jesus and his ways.

So we are offered two different ways to find joy and peace in our lives – Paul focuses on prayer while Mary focuses on action.

Both matter. Both are important.



Like Paul, we need to trust in God's power to change hearts and minds.  
And trust that God has good things in store for those who love him.

But we also need to have courage, like Mary, and live out our faith courageously in the world, not trying to resolve every problem but doing what we can where we find ourselves and using the resources we have in our hands.

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Even as Mary thinks about what God will do in the world and gives voice to it, hope and joy overflow in the words of this teenage nobody from the tiny rural village of Nazareth.

God is acting. God is doing something. It involves mercy and compassion, but it's strongly centred on justice and making the world a better place.

The song we are going to sing now captures Mary's heartbeat and vision. It brings me goosebumps whenever I hear it.

**HYMN**      Canticle of the turning

My soul cries out with a joyful shout  
that the God of my heart is great,  
and my spirit sings of the wondrous things  
that you bring to the ones who wait.  
You fixed your sight on your servant's plight,  
and my weakness you did not spurn,  
so from east to west shall my name be blest.  
Could the world be about to turn?

*My heart shall sing of the day you bring.*

*Let the fires of your justice burn.*

*Wipe away all tears, for the dawn draws near,  
and the world is about to turn!*

Though I am small, my God, my all,  
you work great things in me,  
and your mercy will last from the depths  
of the past to the end of the age to be.  
Your very name puts the proud to shame,  
and to those who would for you yearn,  
you will show your might, put the strong to flight,  
for the world is about to turn.

*Refrain*

From the halls of power to the fortress tower,  
not a stone will be left on stone.

Let the king beware for your justice tears  
ev'ry tyrant from his throne.

The hungry poor shall weep no more,  
for the food they can never earn;  
there are tables spread, ev'ry mouth be fed,  
for the world is about to turn.

*Refrain*

Though the nations rage from age to age,  
we remember who holds us fast;  
God's mercy must deliver us  
from the conqueror's crushing grasp.  
This saving word that our forebears heard  
is the promise which holds us bound,  
'til the spear and rod can be crushed by God,  
who is turning the world around.

*Refrain*

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