

This short act of worship has been produced by Revd Dan Haylett for you to use at home or wherever you are and if you are unable to worship in a church building. We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

**Opening Prayer**

“Come thou long expected Jesus.”

Come to us Lord, where we are; come to renew and restore our hope in you.

As you come to us, Lord Jesus, help us to reach out to you and to receive from you. Amen.

**Hymn Come Thou Long Expected Jesus (Singing the Faith 169)**

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here

[**www.youtube.com/watch?v=WBGx\_4PxO3g**](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WBGx_4PxO3g)

Come, thou long-expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.

Israel’s strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a king,
born to reign in us for ever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.

By thine own eternal Spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all-sufficient merit
raise us to thy glorious throne.

 Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

**Let us pray together**

Advent God,

You are always coming to us in many ways: surprising us and delighting us as you draw near.

You are always upholding and guiding, always ready to love and forgive.

In anticipation of Christ’s coming, we prepare our hearts ready to welcome our King. We offer our love and lift our hearts to the dawning of new hope into our world. In the name of Christ. **Amen.**

**Today’s Reading from the Old Testament: Micah 5:2-5a:**

 But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
    who are one of the little clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
    one who is to rule in Israel,
whose origin is from of old,
    from ancient days.
**3**Therefore he shall give them up until the time
    when she who is in labour has brought forth;
then the rest of his kindred shall return
    to the people of Israel.
**4**And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord,
    in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.
And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great
    to the ends of the earth;
**5**and he shall be the one of peace.

**Today’s Gospel Reading: Luke 1:39-55:**

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, **40**where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. **41**When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit **42**and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. **43**And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? **44**For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. **45**And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

**46**And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord,
**47**    and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
**48**for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.
    Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
**49**for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
    and holy is his name.
**50**His mercy is for those who fear him
    from generation to generation.
**51**He has shown strength with his arm;
    he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
**52**He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
    and lifted up the lowly;
**53**he has filled the hungry with good things,
    and sent the rich away empty.
**54**He has helped his servant Israel,
    in remembrance of his mercy,
**55**according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
    to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

**Time to Reflect**

Roll up! Roll up! Come and take your place in the festival of the Kingdom: where surprising things happen and surprising people are encountered. Come to the festival of the incarnation: God’s great mix-up carnival is about to begin!

The two readings represent a wild subversive message to the powers that be through their claims, memories and songs. The incarnation isn’t just a theological truth to be studied, but needs to be felt, experienced and enjoyed in all its glorious carnival-like nature.

The coming of the Messiah had been anticipated for so long, and Micah’s prophecy written in the 1st part of the 8th Century BC shows us how vivid the dream of David’s replacement was. David, the great King, had been dead for three centuries by the time these words come to Micah; but after all that time it is still the vision and hope of the David-like Messiah that is in view. It was natural to think that the Messiah would be like David, and so would be born in the same place: cue the homage to “little” Bethlehem – otherwise a nowhere place. Out of this little town will emerge a new centre of world peace; a new empire of the Spirit. The memories of David lived on in the hope of Micah’s here and now as the prophet pictures a lasting peace with real justice.

Outside of the religious and cultural “high” places, Micah imagines the festival of God’s kingdom coming to raise up the lowly and humble through the leader of a true shepherd.

But it is not just the venue that matters for this carnival. Mary and Elizabeth express their joy, amazement, puzzlement and wonder in their laughter and singing. We read in Luke the absurd vision of these two unlikely people offering a prophetic response to what God was doing. It wasn’t the High Priest or the leaders who were able to announce the coming of redemption to Israel, and it wasn’t in the authorised liturgies or sacrificial system, but is heard in these two women who would have been expected to be silent, passive recipients.

Mary’s song is a joyful, subversive protest, expressing amazement that the world was being turned on its head in and through her. This is incarnation at its most obvious (the word incarnation comes from the Latin word *carn* meaning flesh – and it’s the same root of the word carnival). In this carnival the powerful are made fools of and the lowly are put at the centre in the coming of this Child.

At the heart of the carnival, Mary proclaims the fact of the Incarnation is already in train, happening here and now. The future has already been set into motion in God’s choosing of Mary and in her prophet-like response. This child, born in a nowhere place, represents the faithfulness of God’s promises and ushers in the festival of love, peace and joy that Jesus brings.

The festival is about to begin, and Mary reminds us in her subversive song, is already happening. Our hopes are to be realised in the Coming One; God’s Kingdom is coming in. Let the celebration begin!

**A time of prayer**

In these days of Advent, keep us focused on you loving God.

In our praying and waiting, may we not be distracted by that which does not matter, or by our own sense of what is needed and what is important.

We join with all who are waiting, watching and working for a better world: for those who are waiting for results of tests or for decisions from those in power.

We join with all who are waiting for something new: for those who are moving or expecting a child or entering into new phases of life.

We join with all who are desperate for reassurance and for God’s promises to be real for them.

Come to us, Lord Jesus, to set the world right as it is meant to be, that all may enter into your joy, love and peace.

Amen.

**The Lord’s Prayer**

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.**

**Hymn Joy to the World (Singing the Faith 330)**

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZhgpb97y7Q>

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!

Let earth receive her King;

let every heart prepare him room,

and heaven and nature sing,

and heaven and nature sing,

and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.

Joy to the world, the Saviour reigns!

Let all their songs employ;

while fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains

repeat the sounding joy,

repeat the sounding joy,

repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

He rules the world with truth and grace,

and makes the nations prove

the glories of his righteousness

and wonders of his love,

and wonders of his love,

and wonders, wonders of his love.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748*)*

**A prayer of blessing**

Christ the Sun of Righteousness shine upon you and prepare your hearts and souls to meet him when he comes in glory;

and the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be yours, now and always. **Amen.**

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