

Sunday 22nd December 2024: The Fourth Sunday in Advent
For use by the Central Norfolk Circuit at 10.30 am or some other suitable time.



Theme for today is “Tell out my soul! The greatness of the Lord”

Our call to worship:

“Come thou long expected Jesus.” Come to us Lord, where we are, however we are feeling, whatever is going on in our lives. As you come to us, Lord Jesus, help us to reach out to you and to receive from you.

Hymn: Stf 175 Light of the world, you stepped down into darkness

Prayers

As Mary sang, may our souls glorify you, oh Lord; may our spirits rejoice in you.

We celebrate all the great things you have done throughout time but we also remember the simple things that you do for each of us personally.

We thank you for the friends who encourage us, the unexpected phone call, the beauty of the natural world. We thank you that you reach out to us whatever we might be doing and however we might be feeling. You stand watching, waiting, ready to intervene at just the right time and in just the right way.

We thank you, Mighty God, for all you have done for us and continue to do for us. Amen.

Introduction:

I remember from when our girls were young that we used to count down to Christmas by the number of “sleeps” to go. Today, we have just three sleeps left before the big day and for children across the world the anticipation is reaching fever pitch. Micah reminds us in his prophecy of the hope of the coming king, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews reminds his readers that there is a new hope and joy and peace in Christ, the promised Messiah and we read in the gospel message about Mary visiting Elizabeth. The expectation and anticipation are building.

Hymn: StF 186 H&P 86 Tell out my soul, the greatness of the Lord!

Bible readings: Micah 5: 2-5 Hebrews 10: 5-10 and Luke 1: 39-45

A message from a Circuit Friend

On this, the fourth Sunday of Advent, and the Sunday before Christmas, traditionally, our thoughts turn to Mary, the young girl, chosen by God, to bear His Son, Jesus.

Being told that you are pregnant, after bouts of morning sickness, gives a reason for the discomfort and the knowledge that it will eventually come to an end. It then becomes a time of looking forward and preparation.

Being told that you will become pregnant, as Elizabeth was, after too many years of barrenness, especially when your husband has been struck dumb, seemingly from the shock, still means a time of preparation, even if the looking forward is more of trepidation than excitement.

Being told that you will become pregnant, when all the rules of chastity in courtship have been observed, must be a shock, tinged with a sense of fear and wonder. Being told that your child will be the Son of the Most High God, and then being able to say ‘yes’, is probably beyond our powers of understanding. Then the first steps of preparation must be in explaining to family and friends what has happened, and what will happen, possibly beyond their powers of understanding!

But God had prepared the way. Mary left home after her encounter with the angel, to stay with her cousin, Elizabeth, who, old as she was, was now into her last three months of waiting. Immediately, the child in Elizabeth’s womb moved. Maybe it was the first time that Elizabeth had felt such a strong movement after all the little fluttering’s she had experienced, maybe it was that she recognised it as a response to Mary’s greeting. Whatever the reason, it was important enough to tell of it in the future, and to acknowledge that Mary’s baby was God’s son, and that Mary was truly blessed.

And Mary’s response was to praise God, recognising herself as a servant, doing as God had asked, and trusting that this special child would be the one that was longed for, hoped for, and who would make all the difference in the world.

From Pippa Cook one of our Local Preachers.

- Reflect for a moment on how Mary must have felt.
- Think of Joseph,
- The most amazing birth in the history of humankind is about to happen, can you imagine what it must have been like for Mary, Joseph and their families?

Hymn: StF 208 H&P 109 Let earth and heaven combine

Prayers of Intercession

Spend a moment thinking about the season. Perhaps this is a joyful time for you but, perhaps, it brings up hard memories and other challenges. As you reflect on these things, offer them to God.

God of love, we recall how Elizabeth and Mary supported one another. We thank you for the support that we have received from other people and pray that we might see opportunities to help and support others. Then, for those things that we can't do, we place those people and situations into your caring hands.

God of love, we recall how you came to a forgotten backwater and bring to mind those in our society who are forgotten or marginalized. We pray that governments and individuals will be alert to those needs and will take action. Help us not to turn blind eyes on those in need.

God of love, we recall that Mary recognized how you were blessing her even though things would not have been easy. We reach out to receive your blessings for ourselves but also remember those who are not in a place to do that for themselves. Send your blessings Lord. Amen

Offer to God your offertory for the week, and say the Lord's Prayer...

Hymn: StF 204 H&P 107 In the bleak midwinter

Closing blessing –

The Lord will stand and feed his flock, and they will live secure in his strength; for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth and he shall be the one of peace. (based on Micah 5 vv 4-5)

May we receive all that God has for us and go forth in his peace. Amen