

The Journey To Bethlehem

Is There Hope For Mary?

5th December 2021



Welcome

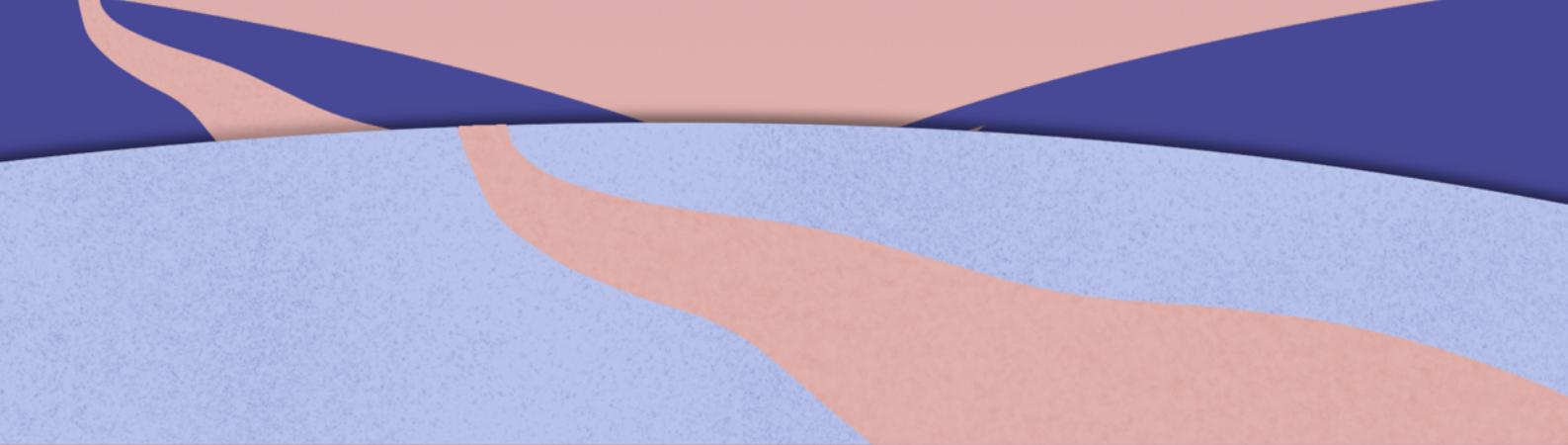
Welcome to **Church Together**.

No matter wherever you are, whatever you do, whoever you are, together we can grow as Church Together.

Our flexible Sunday worship patterns blend together on - line services, home deliveries and emailed copies of Church Together.

Today's service will be looking at: **Luke 1 v. 39 – 56**

The theme for today's service is: **Journey To Bethlehem – Is There Hope For Mary?**



Today's service that is set out in this edition of **Church Together** is looking at **Journey To Bethlehem – Is There Hope For Mary**. We will also be sharing in **Communion** today. We hope that you will be able to engage with what has been produced for our **Sunday Service** and that you would indeed **Continue To Journey With Us Throughout This Advent Season**

Call To Worship

Psalm 108 v. 1 – 5 NLT

My heart is confident in you, O God;
No wonder I can sing your praises!
Wake up, my soul!
Wake up, O harp and lyre!
I will waken the dawn with my song.
I will thank you, Lord, in front of all the
people.
I will sing your praises among the nations.
For your unfailing love is higher than the
heavens.
Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds.
Be exalted, O God, above the highest
heavens.
May your glory shine over all the earth.

We do the ordinary.
God does the extraordinary.



Opening Prayer

In this season of expectation

We prepare to welcome you Lord Jesus

Into the bustle of our lives

and the hard to find moments of solitude

We prepare to welcome you Lord Jesus

Into our homes and situations

along with friends and families

We prepare to welcome you Lord Jesus

Into our hearts, and those often hidden parts of our lives

We prepare to welcome you Lord Jesus

For beneath the surface of your story

is an inescapable fact

You entered this world

as vulnerable as any one of us

in order to nail that vulnerability to the cross.

Our fears, our insecurities and our sins

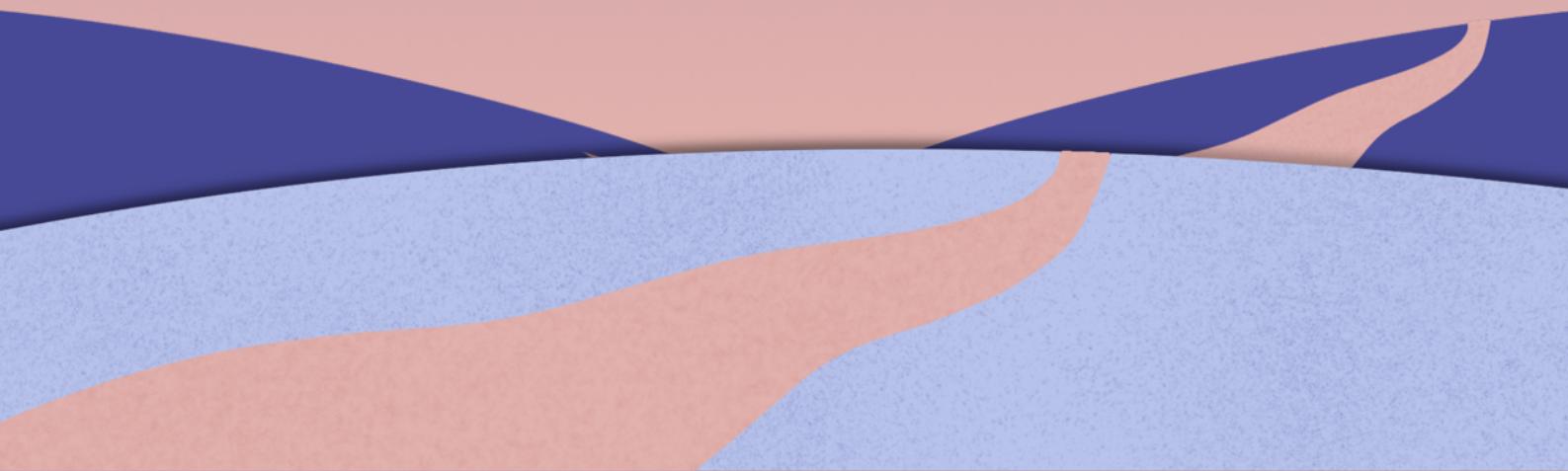
all that can separate us from God

exchanged by your Grace for Love.

We cannot comprehend the reasoning

only marvel that Salvation comes to us

through a baby born in a stable,
and reaches out to a world in need.
In this season of anticipation
We prepare to welcome you Lord Jesus
Amen



Song Suggestion

Be Still For The Presence Of The
Lord



A PRAYER FOR THE Second Sunday of Advent

Jesus, you came among us
with the irresistible power of a baby,
requiring both our hands
and captivating our whole hearts.

Help us to cast aside the sin
and brokenness that we cling to,
so we might be ready to hold you
when you come again.

Amen.

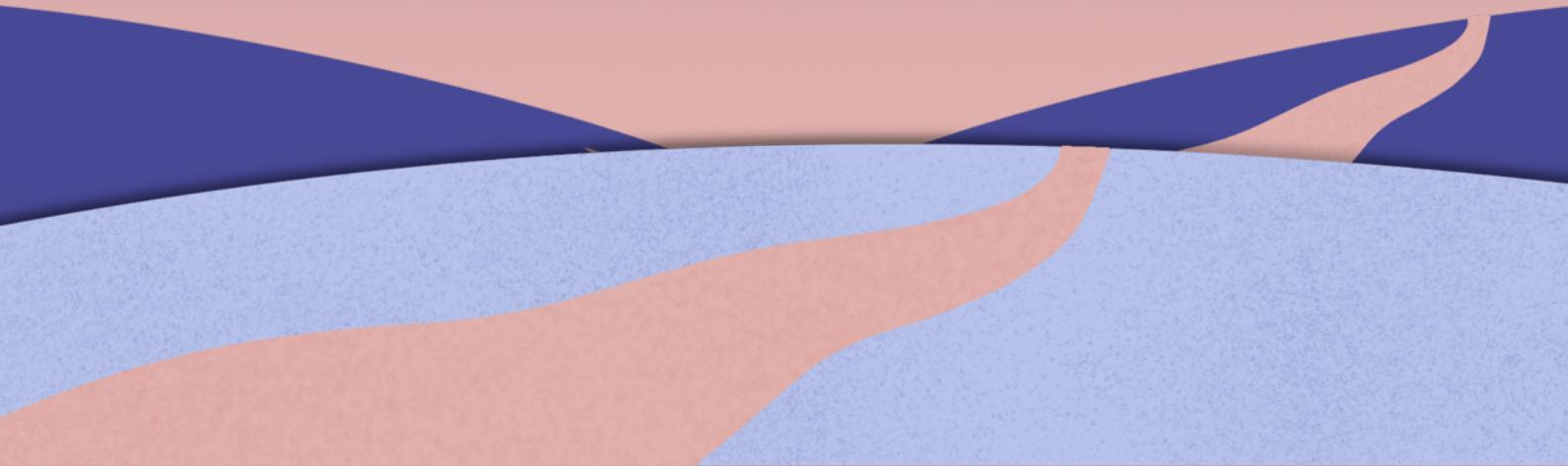


Advent Wreath

Prayer Week 2 - Peace

On this Second Sunday in Advent, we come and pray:
Heavenly Father, You are the God who gives peace. This second week of Advent causes us to remember that because of Jesus we can experience a Christmas free from turmoil and chaos. Regardless of our circumstances or our situations, you offer us peace that passes understanding.

That first Christmas, when you sent your Son, you sent the one who is called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. Even the angels cried out, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests'. The angels knew your purpose. They know the gifts of hope, peace, joy, and love that Christmas held. They recognized that the fullness of God was wrapped in the tiny flesh of an infant as you humbled yourself and dwelt among us. Emmanuel. God with us as the baby Jesus. That baby would grow to be the same God – man, Jesus, who would



again humble himself to face death on a cruel cross as payment for our sin. He would triumphantly defeat sin and death and hell in order to cancel our sin and reconcile us to you, Father.

You exalted Him and gave him a name above all names. We are able to have the fullness of peace in our hearts on Christmas day, and every day, because that same Jesus sits at your right hand in heaven and makes intercession for us. He loves us with a love that is unfathomable. Nothing can separate us from His love. He is good and his plans for us are good.

So, Heavenly Father, on this second Sunday of Advent, keep us in perfect peace as our mind is stayed on the truth of your powerful love. Thank you for your mighty, sovereign hand. Help us to trust fully in you and rest in the peace that you offer. It's in the precious name of Jesus we pray.

Amen

Song Suggestion

Love Divine, All Loves Excelling





The Mighty One has done
great things for me.
Holy is his name!

Luke 1:49

Communion

Today is a Sunday when we would normally share communion together. We come together today remembering the love and sacrifice that Jesus made on the Cross for our sins and for our forgiveness. We gather together here in Church or at home as the body of Christ in order to share the bread and the cup together. We are able do this by getting a small glass of red juice (fruit juice, squash etc.) and a small piece of bread and ‘sharing these elements’ at a time that is convenient to you.

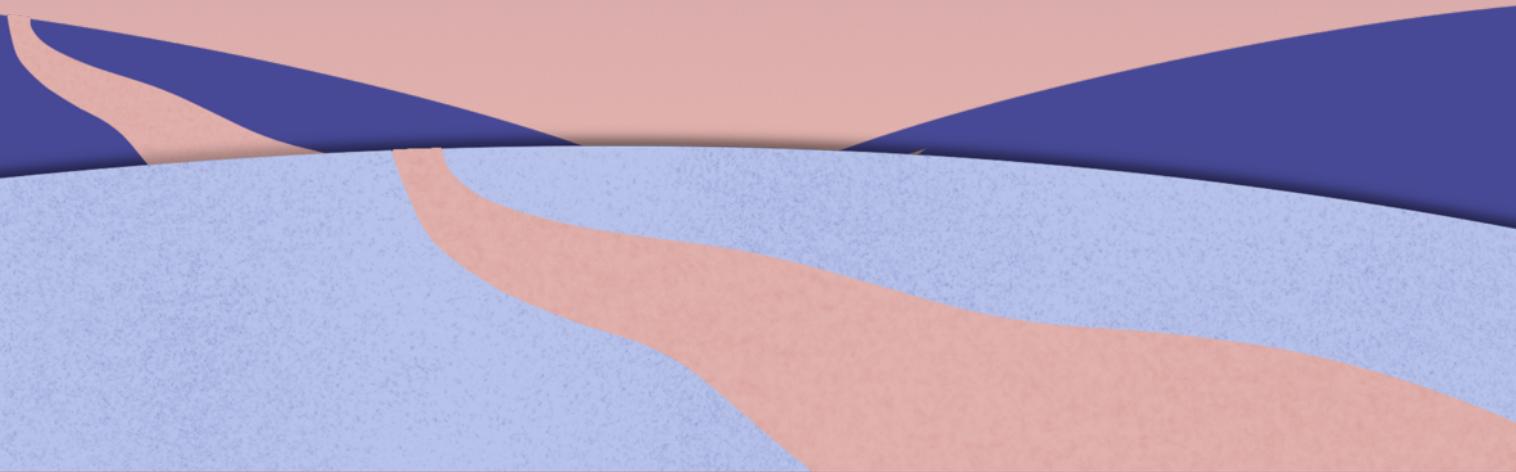
(Normally as a church we will do this during the service at about 11.30am.)

Our normal practice is to say these words:

For I received from the Lord what I pass on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, (you might like to pray at this point) he broke it and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ (this is the time to eat the bread). In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ (now is the time to drink the cup). For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

1 Corinthians 11 v. 22 – 26

If you would like to do this today with us, if you are at home, then please do so, and may the Lord’s richest blessings be with you today.



Bible

Reading

Luke 1 v. 39 – 56 NIV

Mary visits Elizabeth

39 At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, 40 where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 In a loud voice she exclaimed: 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! 43 But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 45 Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfil his promises to her!'

Mary's song

46 And Mary said:

'My soul glorifies the Lord

47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,

48 for he has been mindful

of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,

49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me –
 holy is his name.

50 His mercy extends to those who fear him,
 from generation to generation.

51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
 he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

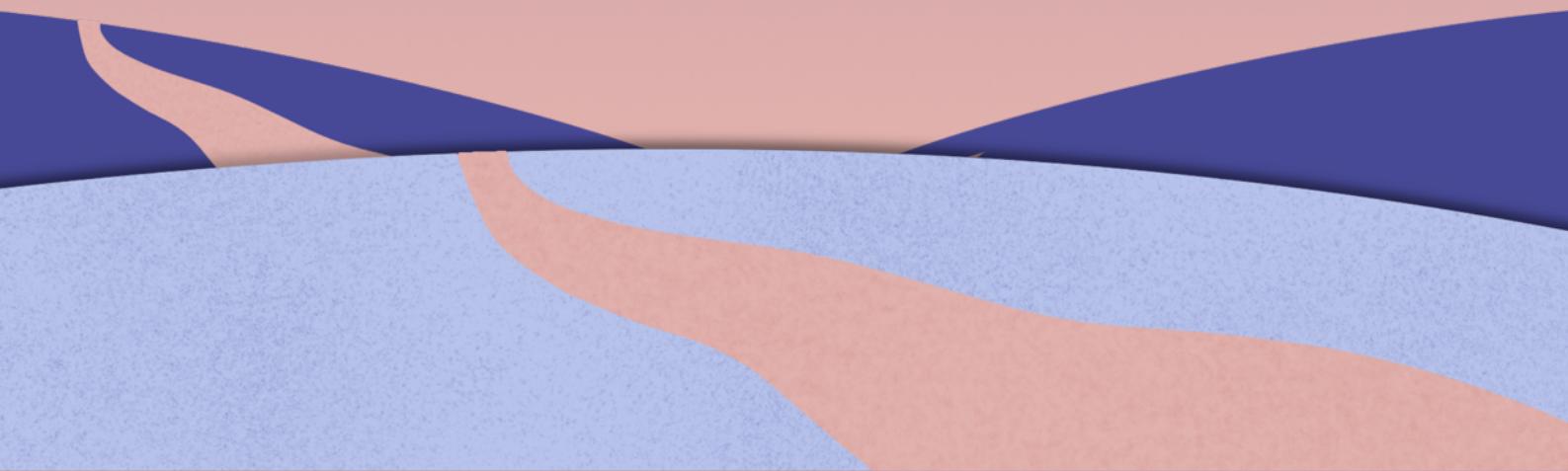
52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones
 but has lifted up the humble.

53 He has filled the hungry with good things
 but has sent the rich away empty.

54 He has helped his servant Israel,
 remembering to be merciful

55 to Abraham and his descendants for ever,
 just as he promised our ancestors.'

56 Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then
 returned home.



Church Together

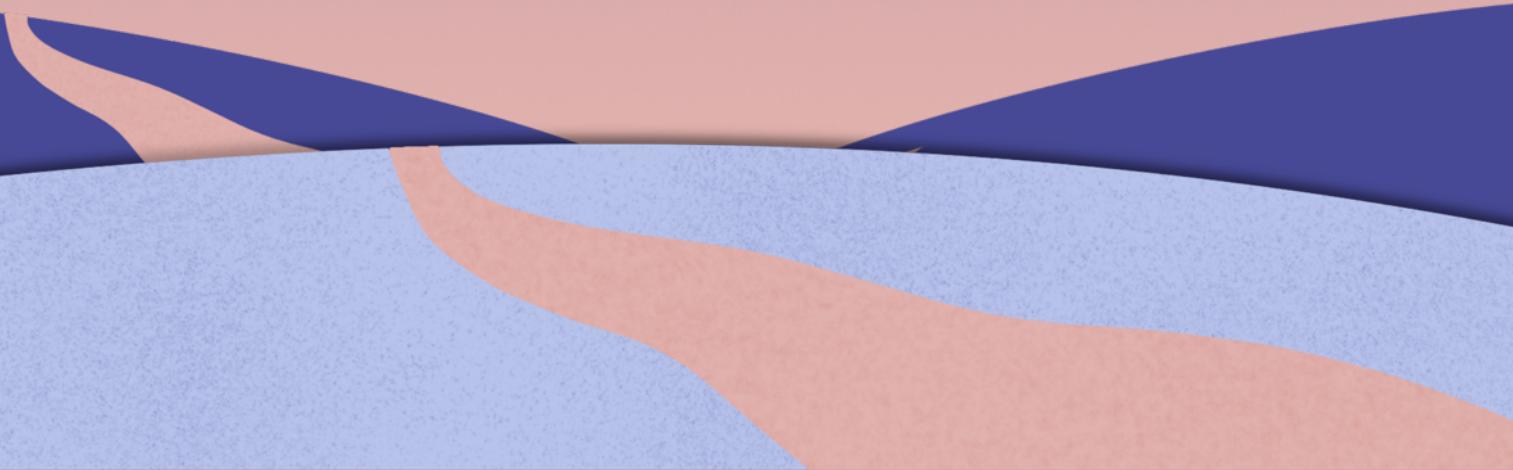
Thought

Can you tell when someone is in a good mood? What's the 'give – away' sign? Maybe you see the person smiling, or perhaps they have a little extra 'spring' in their step. Certainly, we have our little mannerisms that reflect our good moods. But what about when it's more than just a good mood? What about those times in life when you receive what seems like the best news of your whole life? What causes you to throw aside all inhibitions and celebrate wildly?

Far too often it seems as if such moments are few and far between, we all have occasional moments of pure joy in our lives; those times when all social graces are tossed aside so that the moment can be fully enjoyed and completely celebrated.

Maybe it comes in the telephone call to say that you had been promoted to the job you'd always longed for. Whatever the news may be, when we are on the receiving end of such announcements, we tend to do things we normally wouldn't do.

As we consider the passage from **Luke 1 v. 39 – 56**, we are told that in preparation for the arrival of the promised Messiah, Mary makes plans by visiting her relative Elizabeth. As Mary enters the house of Elizabeth, we are told that her own baby leaps within her and she is overcome



with the Holy Spirit. Elizabeth confirms to Mary that her pregnancy is of the Lord.

A song from her heart

In words that have echoes of the Old Testament scriptures that Mary would have heard many times, we are told that Mary breaks out into this spontaneous song, which is often called, 'The Magnificat'. It's the kind of spontaneous reaction that occurs in the most joyful moments of our lives, she opens her heart to God, and sings forth prophetic words.

Mary realises that she is not just '**going to have a baby**'! She is going to bear a son who is to fulfil all the promises of God to Israel. Her baby, the Messiah, the Christ, will bring justice and salvation. He will bring Hope, Love, Joy and Peace!

What Mary sings, what she expresses is far more than just a passing happiness at the good news of a pregnancy. Instead, Mary is expressing some of the greatest hopes and dreams of her people, the Israelite people, which will be fulfilled through the baby growing inside her. Can you imagine? Something that you have been waiting for and longing for your whole lifetime, and your ancestors before that, is about to happen! How can you help but be excited!

Mary's Magnificat tells us that the rich, the powerful, the arrogant, the oppressors and exploiters, the greedy and uncaring, will all be humbled and the poor and lowly will be '**filled with good things**'. They will be the recipients of God's blessings and kindness. What wonderful news for all the poor and oppressed people – not just in Mary's time,

but today, and in the future!

A pregnant Jewish girl from Nazareth, engaged to be married to a poor carpenter, what did Mary have to sing about? She sang about the Lord, what He did for her (**Luke 1 v. 46 – 49**), for all who fear Him (**Luke 1 v. 50 – 53**), and for His people Israel (**Luke 1 v. 54 – 55**). God gives power to the weak, thrones to the lowly, and food for the hungry; but the strong, the rich, and the mighty go away empty.

What Mary sings about is Hope, it's hope that comes to all people when Jesus becomes part of their lives. It's a hope that all of us can experience when we allow Jesus to dwell in us and it's a hope that Mary experienced for herself as well.

But this song that Mary sings is more than just excitement; it's more even than just simple happiness. Because happiness is often fleeting. When Mary returns home, life settles back into its usual routine and new challenges begin to emerge.

Just imagine that you get a few months into that brand new dream job, only to discover that the new boss is a 'slave – driver' and you have less and less time to spend with family. Just like that, the feelings of happiness that were once so prevalent are now gone completely. Probably more often than we would like to think, we are reminded that happiness can sometimes be empty and fleeting.

But joy is something greater. Joy is more than just a good feeling, it's more lasting. Joy is the fulfilment of our greatest dreams, and a knowledge of peace that sustains us at all times and in every place; even in the midst of life's ups and downs, joy is still present.

The reason that this kind of joy is unique is because real joy only comes

through faith in God. Real joy is only possible because of God's work in the world which is precisely why when we encounter Mary and Elizabeth in this passage from **Luke 1 v. 39 – 56** they are so completely joyful.

It seems rather odd that we could call Mary and Elizabeth's celebration completely joyful when Mary's song is about people being pulled away from their thrones or being sent away without any food (**Luke 1 v. 52, 53**). But this is all about how God is at work in the world, turning oppressive power structures upside down and establishing his reign of peace and justice, just as God has always promised.

And that is why these women are full of joy. This is a celebration of God. It's about a God who is at work beating down the bullies and blessing the outcasts. It's about a God who has taken the initiative to turn the fortunes of the poor, hungry, enslaved, and miserable upside down. If that's not a reason for Mary to have hope and to be able to celebrate, I don't know what is! For Mary and for us during this Advent season; if that's not a source of pure joy and hope, then there is none!

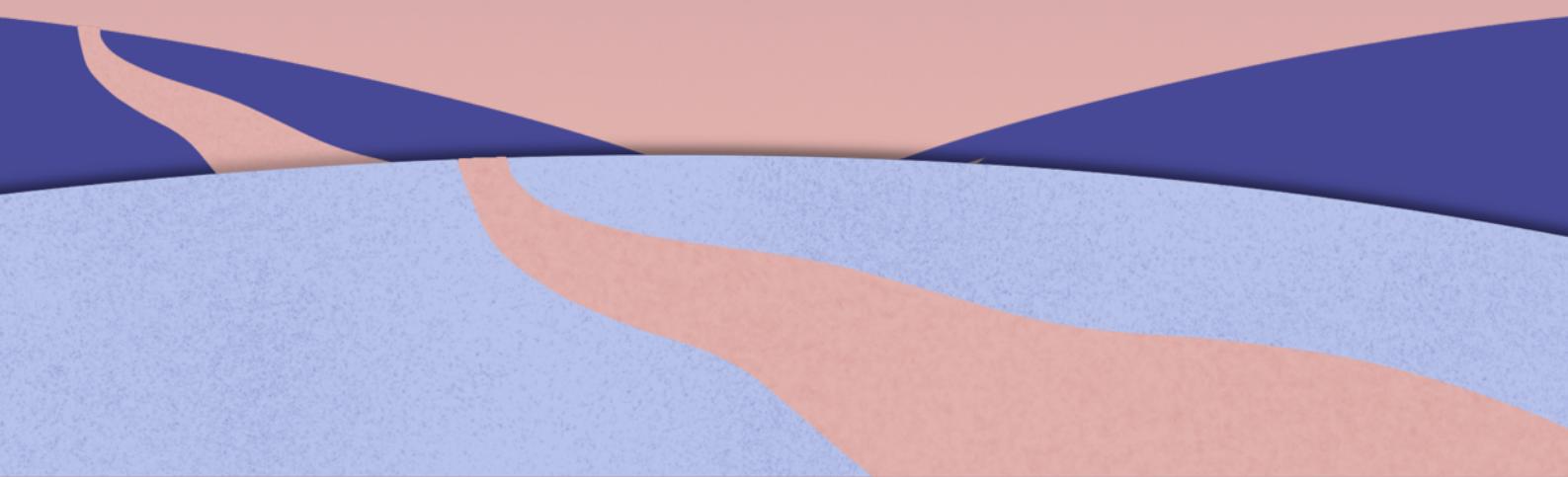
Mary wasn't angry or bitter about what was going on in her life when she visited Elizabeth, far from it. Mary is simply watching God's plans and promises unfold right before her eyes. And even though Jesus, the Saviour, hasn't been born yet, she already knows how he is going to turn the world upside down. It's the most wonderful, exciting news of her life, news that was full of hope and joy for the future. She was full of joy and hope like she had never experienced before – the kind of joy and hope that can only be expressed completely with singing, and

dancing, and laughing, and celebrating in the most exuberant manner possible.

In our service this morning, we have journeyed one step closer to Bethlehem. We've looked at the thought of: Is there hope for Mary? We've taken a brief snap - shoot into the lives of Mary and her cousin Elizabeth and what have we seen. We've seen a moment when they both realise that the God they have so faithfully loved and followed is really beginning to start changing the world for the better as he has always promised he would. They can't contain their joy and the hope that this brings. And theirs is a celebration of hope and joy which should continue even today now that God's work in Christ has already begun.

So, what does this mean for you and me? Maybe it means that as we watch God's work unfold in this world, we too should be celebrating in the same way that Mary and Elizabeth did so many years ago. God's gift of joy and hope is offered to each of us, even today, right here and now. As Jesus is busy making this world a better place, it should be a constant source of joy and hope for each of us. And we should never stop celebrating the God who makes all things right!

In preparing to journey with God to Bethlehem, we need to acknowledge who God is . . . The journey to Bethlehem has truly begun...



Tithes, Gifts & Offerings



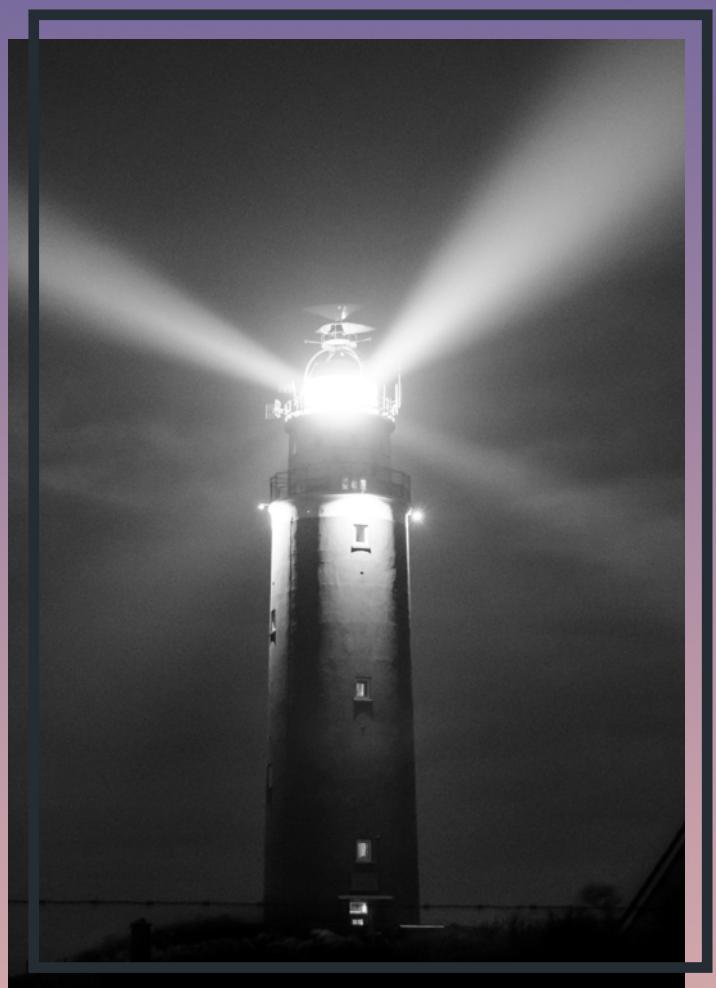
No matter wherever you are, whatever you do, whoever you are, together we can grow as Church Together here at Salendine Nook.

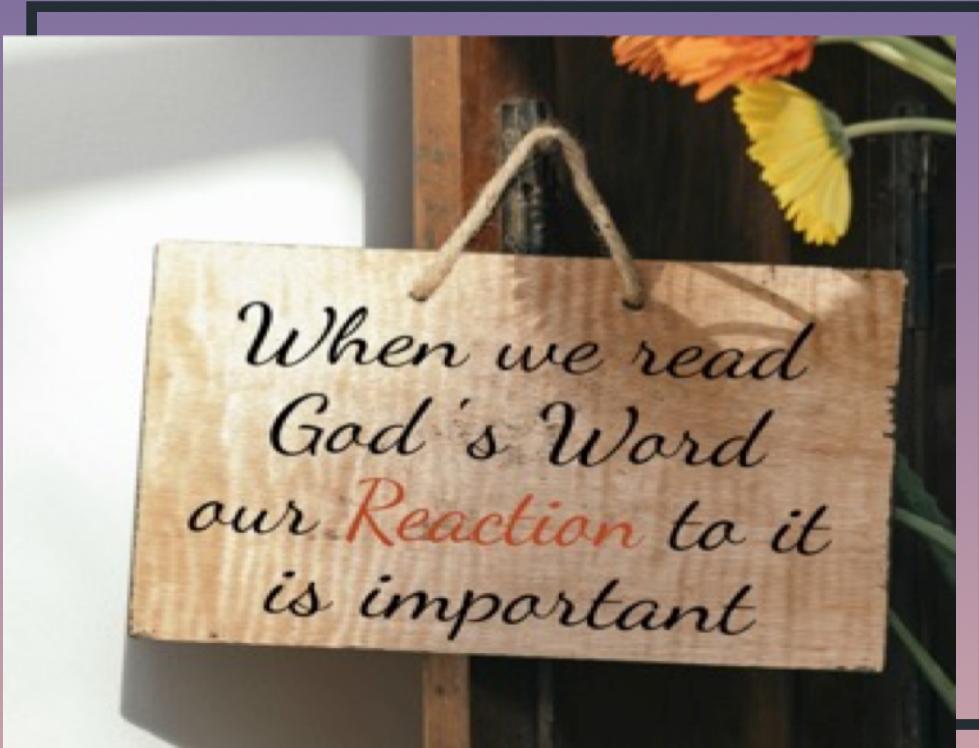
Now that we find ourselves once again holding services in Church, we are able to give of our finances to the work of the Lord when we are in church.

If you feel that you are able to, then please keep on giving with a cheerful and grateful heart, praising God for all that he has given to you and share in the finances of the church.

Song Suggestion

Joy To The World, The Lord Has
Come!

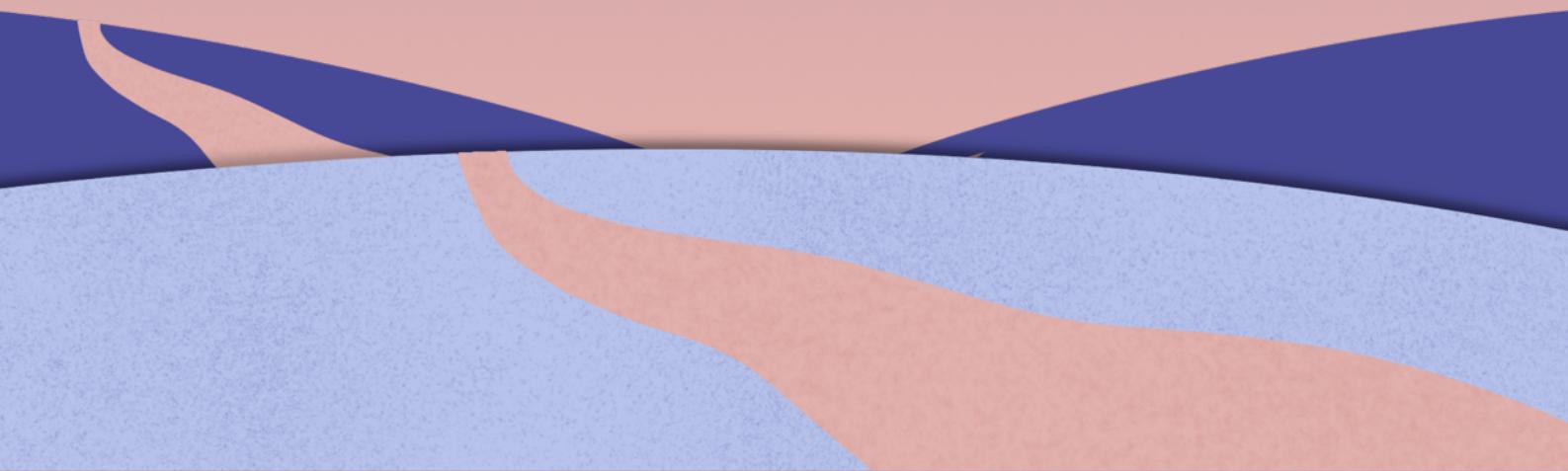




When we read
God's Word
our **Reaction** to it
is important

Faith Journey & Where God Is With Us

Faith Pictures is six sessions long, each one building on the last to help Christians to see where God has been present in their lives, how they can talk about that confidently, and how God is active in the world around us and wants us to join in with Him. The sessions are: **Opening the Conversation, The Power of the Ordinary, Traveller's Tales, Talking Pictures, Companions on the Journey, Hidden Opportunities.** As a Home Group at the Church Manse, we have been looking at these areas and learning and sharing together—how better to share our faith with others. This morning **Elizabeth Plum** is going to share with us, something of her own Faith Journey and where she is with God now.



Prayers of Intercession

God of Hope be with us on our Advent journey, be with us in our gathering and in our travelling together, be with us in our worship and in our praying together, be with us on this Advent journey of hope.

Lord in this season when every heart should be happy and light, many are struggling with the heaviness of life, with burdens that steal their joy. Fill us, we pray, with your light instead of our darkness, help us clear the way in our hearts and minds to concentrate on the true meaning of Christ's coming and not on the worldly things, which so often block out our thoughts and worship of you.

Loving Lord, we live in disturbing days across the world; a world filled with doubt and conflict, inequality and justice. Make this time of waiting we pray, the time of a new awakening of thought, consideration, endeavour and action, by all leaders and all nations, to bring about health, peace, freedom and understanding.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for all those we know and love, those who are unwell and

those who need comfort and strength. In the stillness of our hearts we lift them up to you this day.

Loving Lord Jesus, we pray you surround all those who mourn, with your continuing compassion.

We pray for our government – all governments and those in authority; help them we pray as they all struggle to seek to do what is right and fair in these difficult times.

We pray for all those in our fellowship who work especially in Education and the Health Service. May they know your loving presence in these days, as they seek to serve others around them.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of hope, who brought love into this world, be the love that dwells between us.

God of hope, that brought peace into this world, be the peace that dwells between us.

God of hope, that brought joy into this world, be the joy that dwells between us.

God of hope, the rock we stand upon, be the centre, the focus of our lives

Always, and particularly this Advent time.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Amen

Song Suggestion

As With Gladness, Men Of Old



Blessing

May the God who gives us peace
Make us holy in every way
And keep our whole being—
Spirit, soul and body—
Free from every fault
At the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ
Amen

