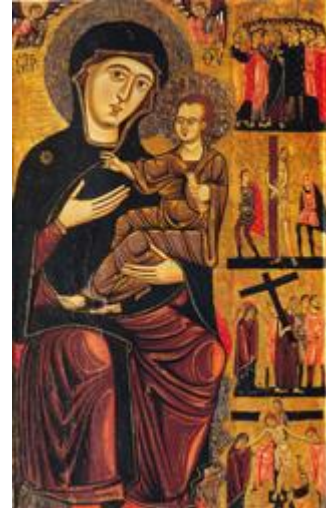




ST NINIAN'S UNITING CHURCH
WEDNESDAY WORDS
25 December 2024
Scripture Luke 1:39-55



Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, your birth at Bethlehem draws us to kneel in wonder at heaven touching earth. Accept our heartfelt praise as we worship you, our Saviour and our eternal God. Amen.

Thanks & praise prayer points

- Thanks you Jesus for coming to earth as a baby, living among us, dying for our sins, and giving us the promise of eternal life.
- For beautiful music and special Christmas music that stirs our hearts and reminds us of you.
- For family, friends and neighbours who bring love and joy into our lives, especially those whose quiet and at times overlooked support makes our life journey easier.
- For those who need to work today to keep our country and community safe or to care for others.
- For all those who lead worship today, helping us to worship you and give thanks for your birth.

Forgiveness prayer points

- For not giving rejoicing in your love at all times.
- For periods of anger or frustration with others, that lingers and causes corrosion in relationships.
- For not thanking others who love and care for me.

Words of Grace

Friends, Christ has come into the world to take away our sin. God has given us Jesus Christ, who forgives us our sins, and the Holy Spirit, who walks with us always. Let us bless the Lord God always. Amen.

Reading: Luke 1:39-55

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry,

"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.
And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?
For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy.
And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant. Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name;
indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.
He has come to the aid his child Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Reflection

This week's reading takes us back in time to before the birth of Jesus, with the beautiful passage often called the Magnificat. Before we turn to Mary's words, it is worth pausing and reflecting on her journey to visit Elizabeth.

Mary travelled from Nazareth to the village of Ein Karem near Jerusalem, nearly 140 kilometres. An extraordinary journey – done while pregnant, without the benefits of a car or public transport, Mary walking or traveling on a mule. It is easy to assume Mary and Elizabeth were close friends. In reality, given the distance it is quite possibly they have never met. And they were of quite different ages. But both were experiencing extraordinary things.

Elizabeth was also pregnant, shortly to become mother to John the Baptist. Her pregnancy – like Mary's – was unexpected. We are told Elizabeth was 'very old' (Luke 1:4) and this was her first pregnancy, at a time when she thought pregnancy was no longer possible. While many commentators talk about Mary going to get support and friendship from Elizabeth, it is just as likely that Mary knew Elizabeth needed support and friendship.

Mary's trip demonstrates the call of community. Sometimes, our physical presence is the best gift we can give another person. We may not know what welcome we will receive, or how the conversation will go. But just being with someone, reaching out to them, is a gift. There may be rich conversation, or quiet stillness, both of which can make a person feel valued and loved.

Reflecting also on Mary's journey to Elizabeth, it is highly unlikely that Mary travelled this distance alone. Pragmatically the most likely explanation is that Joseph travelled with Mary, or at least organised for his betrothed to make this journey with an escort. It is worth pausing to recall all of those who help us in our own journey, especially those who work quietly in ways which we sometimes overlook. They may be family, friends, neighbours or part of our church community, not occupying the central or most visible role, but nonetheless enabling us on our journey through life.

Mary's song (the Magnificat) is both a hymn of praise to God and, like much of the Gospel of Luke, revolutionary in its themes. Here a young, peasant woman proclaims God's power. Generations will call Mary blessed not because of who she is, but because of what she represents – someone with apparently nothing to offer whom God uses to transform the world.

Luke's Gospel generally points to a new world, where the current social order is disrupted or upended. Mary sings of the new world that God oversees, where the poor of spirit have the Kingdom of Heaven and the gentle inherit the earth. In this new world the hungry will be filled, and those who mourn will be comforted. Verses 51-53 emphasise this theme of Luke, with Mary highlighting who Jesus is for – the humble, the poor and powerless, the sick and lonely, the weak and the nobodies.

In Mary we see a humble servant of God, who has a deep faith, and a strong belief in the sovereignty and righteousness of God. With Mary there were no request for signs or demands. Rather she has a simple, profound faith, underpinned by practical action. And she worships Jesus in the womb, and then follows him all the way to the Cross. This passage from Luke is a reminder of our own call to follow and serve the newborn and risen Christ.

Intercessory Prayers

We give you thanks Lord God for coming to earth as a baby child in Jesus Christ.

On this Christmas Day we pray for those we have loved and are no longer with us, giving thanks for the memories and joy they brought to our lives. Comfort those who have lost loved ones this past year and grieve.

We pray for our family and friends, that they may be safe and healthy this Christmas time and in the year ahead. We pray for those alone this Christmas, due to distance or estrangement, that they may feel your love.

We give thanks for those in our community to work to make the world a different and better place, shaped to be like your Kingdom. We particularly remember those who work quietly and can be overlooked, but without whom nothing would happen.

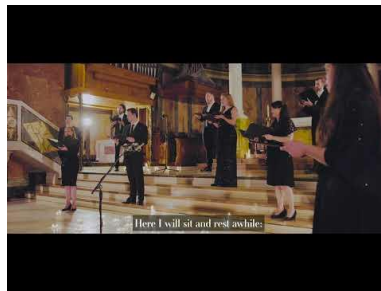
We pray for all those who must work today, providing care services for others in hospitals, nursing homes, or in ambulances, and those in the military, police and custodial services ensuring law and order. We give thanks for their dedication and commitment to duty, and ask you keep them safe and that they may have time with their family and friends to relax in days ahead.

We pray for the world, that there may be peace where there is conflict; food where there is famine; and hope where there is despair. Upend this world Lord, and bring you new kingdom soon.

Amen

Song: Jesus Christ the Apple Tree

Today's song is an absolute favourite carol of mine, which I only heard for the first time a couple of years ago. The lyrics are rich in meaning and worth reading a few times.



[Jesus Christ the Apple Tree by Elizabeth Poston, sung by Ensemble Altera \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

The tree of life my soul hath seen,
Laden with fruit and always green;
The trees of nature fruitless be,
Compared with Christ the Apple Tree.

His beauty doth all things excel,
By faith I know but ne'er can tell
The glory which I now can see,
In Jesus Christ the Appletree.

For happiness I long have sought,
And pleasure dearly I have bought;
I missed of all but now I see
'Tis found in Christ the Appletree.

I'm weary with my former toil -
Here I will sit and rest awhile,
Under the shadow I will be,
Of Jesus Christ the Appletree.

With great delight I'll make my stay,
There's none shall fright my soul away;
Among the sons of men I see
There's none like Christ the Appletree.

I'll sit and eat this fruit divine,
It cheers my heart like spirit'al wine;
And now this fruit is sweet to me,
That grows on Christ the Appletree.

This fruit doth make my soul to thrive,
It keeps my dying faith alive;
Which makes my soul in haste to be
With Jesus Christ the Appletree.