

SERVICE SHEET
20th December
4th Sunday of Advent

**1 My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God
my Saviour;
he has looked with favour
on his lowly servant.**

**2 From this day all generations will call me blessed;
the Almighty has done great things for me
and holy is his name.**

**3 He has mercy on those who fear him,
from generation to generation.**

4 He has shown strength with his arm and has scattered the proud in their conceit,

5 Casting down the mighty from their thrones and lifting up the lowly.

6 He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.

7 He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, to remember his promise of mercy,

8 The promise made to our ancestors, to Abraham and his children for ever.

Luke 1.46-55

**Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

Collect

God our redeemer,
who prepared the Blessed Virgin Mary
to be the mother of your Son:
grant that, as she looked for his coming as our saviour,
so we may be ready to greet him
when he comes again as our judge;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen

Old Testament Reading.

Isaiah 61.1-4, 8-end

The servant of the Lord said:

¹ The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; ² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; ³ to provide for those who mourn in Zion – to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory. ⁴ They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. ⁸ For I the LORD love justice, I hate robbery and

wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. ⁹ Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed. ¹⁰ I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. ¹¹ For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

Psalm 89.1-8

¹ I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, for ever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.

² I declare that your steadfast love is established for ever; your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.

³ You said, 'I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to my servant David:

⁴ "I will establish your descendants for ever, and build your throne for all generations."

⁵ Let the heavens praise your wonders, O LORD, your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones.

⁶ For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD? Who among the heavenly beings is like the LORD,

⁷ a God feared in the council of the holy ones, great and awesome above all that are around him?

⁸ O LORD God of hosts, who is as mighty as you, O LORD? Your faithfulness surrounds you.

**Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

Gospel Reading.

Luke 1.26-38

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' ²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

³⁰The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.'

³⁴Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' ³⁵The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God.' ³⁸Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.



Sermon

On the Sunday before Christmas we are getting in the mood for miracles, and the annunciation contains all the ingredients to satisfy this yearning. An angel appears as if out of nowhere, and a virgin learns that she will defy nature and bear a child. To add to the abundance of wonder, the angel alludes to another miracle: a woman well beyond childbearing years is in the sixth month of a pregnancy. There is much here to bring encouragement and affirmation if we're feeling like that miracles are well and truly the stuff of dreams, far off and unattainable, especially after a year when we have been so in need of them. The annunciation offers us a timely reminder that nothing is impossible with God.

On this fourth Sunday of Advent, as well as miracles, we also get to focus on Mary (not something us Protestants get to do that often). She stands at the centre of this story of the announcement of the incarnation by the angel Gabriel. What happens may be incredibly well known to us, but it is so rich in images and meaning that hopefully we can draw something fresh from it today.

In a few short verses we are given an array of emotions and pictures relating to Mary. She is described as favoured, perplexed, thoughtful, afraid, questioning, believing, submitting, accepting. It is no surprise, given this array, that artwork portraying the annunciation is incredibly diverse. In some Mary and Gabriel look like old friends, completely at home with each other. In others Mary is kneeling at the feet of a luminescent angel figure. In Henry Ossawa Tanner's nineteenth century painting the angel is represented as a bright column of light – a heavenly being bursting into our earthly realm at a specific time and place to meet Mary. Its power and its abstractedness remind us that we do not make our own salvation, nor do we have the capacity to fully imagine the ways of God.

As with the diversity of artistic interpretations of the annunciation, theologians differ in interpretation and have debated the nature of the encounter. They agree that Mary is elected by God to a particular purpose which she wholeheartedly accepts, but they argue about the character of Mary's response.

In response to Gabriel's announcement that she will bear the son of God, Mary says, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?'. Some theologians have questioned whether there is a hint of doubt 'surely that can't be right?' in Mary's words. Some suggest it is more a response of

puzzlement 'yes,... but how?'. Others question the nature of her participation in events. Is she a free and active player in events, making her own informed decision? Or do the words 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord' mean that she resigns herself to her fate as a passive participant in the work of God?

I think the best perspective on Mary's response is one that recognises the pitfalls of seeing Mary as either passive participant or autonomous decision maker in this encounter. The point is - she is neither. An understanding of Christian vocation helps us here. Yes - she responds actively, not passively, a willing partner in the miracle presented to her. Mary acts freely when she offers herself as a servant of the Lord. **But** the difference is: there is no decision to make. To embrace her identity as the Mother of God is the only choice that is true to her calling, because it is consistent with who she actually is. Her choice is to be her true self. And that, I think, tells us something important about vocation – being who God is calling us to be, is to be our own truth. There is no decision making in this, just acceptance.

The annunciation also teaches us to expect the unexpected – that miracles aren't in the least bit predictable - something hopeful for all of us the week before Christmas. One of the many things I love about this story is that the tendency to think that those leading unassuming lives in out of the way places are excluded from extraordinary things is proved completely false by Mary's surprise visitor. Living in a remote village far from the busy religious centre of Jerusalem, Mary had no hint that she was destined for a very special role. The extraordinary thing about Mary is precisely ordinariness. The selection of Mary to be the mother of Jesus is an occasion to spur all of us to open ourselves up to the unexpected and unimaginable. To believe miracles can happen anywhere and to anyone.

The angel Gabriel responds to Mary's puzzlement by reminding her that being incapable of conceiving a child as a virgin is not the end of the story because "nothing will be impossible with God." That God can accomplish such wondrous aims is underlined by the news that her relative Elizabeth had conceived a child at an advanced age.

"For nothing will be impossible with God", says Gabriel - Seven words to give us all support, comfort, and courage when we find ourselves facing overwhelming challenges, or unexpected experiences. God makes miracles through us.

Mary's assignment from God is an honour met with struggle. In her day, an unmarried woman expecting a child was cause for disgrace. Nonetheless, her neighbour's prospective disdain does not hinder Mary's willingness to proceed according to God's wish. Her response to the annunciation is exemplary: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Mary comprehends that her life, and not only hers, but the whole world's, is about to be rearranged. Perhaps Mary's words deliver God's Christmas wish, that followers of Christ will believe that nothing is impossible with God, and invite the Holy Spirit to work miracles through them.

FOR YOUR PRAYERS

ST JOHN

Pat Crowe, Jo Hearn, Ann Kinson, Allan Law

Those who have died

Eileen Fletcher

FOR YOUR PRAYERS

ST MICHAEL

Those newly in need of prayer

Tim Wellings, Robert McAllester-Jones, David Edge, Martin Dewes, Chris Clayton,

Those in continuing special need of prayer:

Sam Bassett, Mark Berry, Elizabeth Chapman, Dorothy Clayton, Jo Cobb, Dottie Collins, Alison Cox-Toplis, Chris Dickerson, Sonia Doidge, Colin Eastwood, Joseph Harrington, Robert Harris, James Knight, Matthew and Emmeline and their parents, Ruth and Andrew Martel, Marielouise Oliver, Arthur Palin, Nick Rutter, Anthony Staples aged 6, John Tipper, Sheila Vaughan, Judith Watson, Renee Wellings, Peter and Anne Whatson, Felicity Woodfield, Jamie, Gary and Denise, Julian & Wendy,

Those who have died

Margaret Harris, Bill Hill, & Samuel Lamburn

Post Communion Prayer

Heavenly Father,
who chose the Blessed Virgin Mary
to be the mother of the promised saviour:
fill us your servants with your grace,
that in all things we may embrace your holy will
and with her rejoice in your salvation;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

CHURCH NOTICES

CHRISTMAS SERVICES

It may be that many people will wish to attend church this year. For this reason, it would be helpful if regular members of St Michael's congregation could limit themselves to one service over Christmas Eve and Christmas Day ie. either 9pm Christmas Eve, Midnight Mass, 8.00am Holy Communion or 10.00 Christmas Communion.

<https://www.stmichaelmaryjohn.org.uk/christmas-services-2020.html>

Christmas Services **at St. Michael's**

Advent 4 Sunday 20th December

8.00am Holy Communion

10.00am Holy Communion

6.00pm Carol Service on Zoom

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84473780555?pwd=WmRCdWM5VU84eGZDK0RQdIEExRFRpUT09>

Christmas Eve 24th December

3.00pm—6.00pm

Open Church and Distribution of Christingles

The church will be fully decorated for Christmas and there will be a one way path past the tree and the crib ending with a Christingle given to each family to take away

9.00pm Christmas Eve Service

11.15pm Midnight Service

Christmas Day 25th December

8.00am BCP Holy Communion

10.00am Holy Communion

Christmas Services **at St. John's**

Advent 4 Sunday 20th December

4.00pm— 5.00pm

Open Church and Distribution of Christingles.

Christmas Day 25th December

9.00am Holy Communion

CAROLS AND READINGS IN THE CHURCHYARD 22 DECEMBER

We will be holding a service of traditional carols and short readings in St Michael's Churchyard at **6 pm on Tuesday 22 December**. This is for the congregation and immediate family and friends and does not appear on the website or in the United Benefice Christmas card. You don't have to book in advance but please keep to the Government guidelines for outdoor spaces. At the time of writing this is Tier 3 and allows you to meet in outdoor public places in your 'support bubble' or in a 'group of up to 6 from outside your support bubble, including children of all ages'. There will be plenty of room to keep these groups well separated. We have arranged this service for you to sing traditional carols and Christmas hymns together, so please come along.

NO CHRISTMAS CARDS

Because of Covid-19 restrictions it will not be possible this year for anyone to bring Christmas cards to church to hand out or be collected by other members of the congregation.

You might like to donate any money you save on cards to the church or a charity. *Simon Baker, Rector*

CHRISTMAS FOOD DONATIONS

Lichfield Foodbank is **now collecting for Christmas hampers**. If you wish to donate, please check the item will be in date till after Christmas.

WORSHIP BY ZOOM

Our regular zoom worship is on the first and third Sundays of each month.

Next regular services

Sunday 20th December 6.00pm

Sunday 3rd January 2021 6.00pm

You can join the service from 5.45pm. The service will last about 40mins. **If you have not had a link by Friday at 11am please contact the office** office@stmichaelmaryjohn.org.uk

CHRISTMAS CHARITY COLLECTION @ St MICHAEL'S

Christmas Eve Christingle

Open Church

Donations for the Children Society, white envelopes and a collection plate will be available in church.

Brenda Liptrot

CHURCHES TOGETHER CHRISTMAS DAY CELEBRATION Due to the current circumstances, it will not be possible to host a Christmas Day lunch at Wade St Church. Instead chilled meals and /or a Christmas stocking will be delivered to people's homes. If you could help with deliveries between 12:15 and 2:15, or if you could telephone an allocated guest between 4pm and 7pm on Christmas Day for about 15minutes, please contact me and I can give you more information and I can pass on your details. Thank you.

Brenda Liptrot 01543251863

MAGAZINE SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 2021 will be £8.50 payable by cheque to "P.C.C. of St, Michael and St. Mary". This will not be collected in the normal way by your deliverer. Please post it directly to me. Details are in the December and January magazine. Thank you for your cooperation Barbara Homewood Tel 255909

ST MICHAEL'S CHURCHYARD CHRISTMAS TRAIL PUZZLE!

A fun, half hour outdoor Christmas activity suitable for age 4/5 plus.

This is available to explore until Christmas. It consists of four A4 stations which you need to find. They introduce and tell the Christmas story through QR codes, revealing video story clues which give you the password for the final instalment. All stations are in the area around the turning circle at front of church. It requires a QR code reader/app on a tablet/phone with mobile data, and a pencil and paper to note the clues! Have fun, enjoy the reason for the season - and please observe social distancing and all Govt guidance!

CHURCHES TOGETHER www.stmichaelmaryjohn.org.uk/churches-together.html

THE FOODBANK is always happy to receive gifts of

- Tinned meat and fish
- Tinned fruit and vegetables, soup and beans
- Rice pudding and custard
- Instant coffee, tea, sugar, long life milk and fruit juice
- Packets of cereals, biscuits and snacks
- Pasta, rice and pasta sauce
- Jam

Items should be **at least 3 months in date** or the Foodbank is not allowed to issue them.

Maggie and David_01543 255308

PARISH DIARY

Sunday 20th December

8:00am	Holy Communion	St Michael's
10am	Holy Communion	St Michael's
10am	Holy Communion	St John's
2:00pm	Distribution of Christingles	St John's
6:00pm	Carol Service on Zoom	Zoom

Monday 21st December

8:15am	Morning Prayer	Zoom
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Tuesday 22nd December

8:15am	Morning Prayer	Zoom
6:00pm	Outdoor Carols & Readings	St Michael's Churchyard

Wednesday 23rd December

8:15am	Morning Prayer	Zoom
6:00pm	Choir Rehearsal	St Michael's

Thursday 24th December

8:15am	Morning Prayer	Zoom
2:00pm	Distribution of Christingles	St Michael's
9:00pm	Christmas Eve Service	St Michael's
11:15pm	Midnight Mass	St Michael's

Friday 25th December

8:00am	Holy Communion BCP	St Michael's
9:00am	Holy Communion	St John's
10:00am	Holy Communion	St Michael's

Saturday 26th December

Sunday 27th December

8:00am	Holy Communion	St Michael's
10am	Holy Communion	St Michael's
10am	Holy Communion	St John's