



**The Benefice of
Harden, Wilsden, Cullingworth, Denholme
Sunday 20 December 2020
The Fourth Sunday of Advent**

Preparation

The Lord is here
His Spirit is with us.
Let us worship God.

The Greeting

The Lighting of the Fourth Advent Candle

People of God: prepare!
God, above all, maker of all, is one with us in Christ.
Maranatha! **Come, Lord Jesus!**

God, the mighty God,
bends down in love to earth.
Maranatha! **Come, Lord Jesus!**

God with us, God beside us,
comes soon to the world he has made.
Maranatha! **Come, Lord Jesus!**

We are God's children,
we seek the coming Christ.
Maranatha! **Come, Lord Jesus!**

Prayers of Penitence

'The axe is laid at the root of the trees:
every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down.'
But confident in God's mercy we confess our sins.

Confession

Lord Jesus, you came to gather the nations
into the peace of your kingdom.
Lord, have mercy: **Lord, have mercy.**

You come in word and sacrament
to strengthen us in holiness:
Christ, have mercy: **Christ, have mercy.**

You will come in glory
with salvation for your people:
Lord, have mercy: **Lord, have mercy.**

The Collect

Eternal God, as Mary waited for the birth of your Son,
so we wait for his coming in glory;
bring us through the birth pangs of this present age
to see, with her, our great salvation.
in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Readings

The First Reading: Romans 16: 25-end

Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory for ever! Amen.

Thanks be to God for the gift of His word

The Second Reading: Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He 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. He will reign over the house of Jacob for

ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.’ Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I am a virgin?’ The 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. And 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. For nothing will be impossible with God.’ Then 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.

Thanks be to God for the gift of His Word.

Reflection from Richard

On the fourth Sunday of Advent there will be millions of words spoken about Mary; and rightly so. She is very much the theme of our Gospel today and she is the main character in this part of the story. Without her “yes” there would be no Christmas and no salvation. Her role was absolutely vital.

And yet there is another important character here, too easily overlooked. Joseph is mentioned once, almost in passing, in the second line of the Gospel reading and yet his part was vital too.

Joseph is not mentioned much in the Bible, he gets a few lines in the birth narratives and genealogies. He is named only eight times in Matthew, seven times by Luke, twice in John and not at all by Mark.

There are countless paintings, frescos and sculptures of Mary, but there must be only a handful of Joseph. And yet his role was just as important and I feel for him so much each time I read the Christmas story.

I don’t know why, but I picture him as quite a large man, I imagine him as being quiet, shy, but with a warmth of heart and character. I’ve always felt that he quite enjoyed the solitude of his carpentry, the skill of creating and the chance for thinking quietly to himself as he laboured. I imagine that there were many people in Nazareth who had been very grateful for his skill and ability with wood. No doubt he had crafted objects or mended furniture that people used every day, probably without a second thought for Joseph once they had collected it from him.

But I know that God saw something in him, because he was an essential part of all this. I think that's why I imagine him as big and warm hearted, with a depth and deep ability for love. Surely that is what God saw and needed from Joseph.

As our Gospel begins, Mary and Joseph are engaged to be married. Doubtless Joseph thought about his coming marriage while he was working. I see him in my mind's eye as being a little nervous, especially about all the fuss of the marriage itself. He would be looking forward to settling down to a quiet life with the young Mary by his side, to building a home and a family together.

And then his entire life fell apart!

There was the news of the baby which no doubt set the tongues wagging all across the village. He would have felt eyes looking at him everywhere he went. He would feel judged by people who thought it was his and judged by people who thought it wasn't. His peace and quiet had been ripped from under his feet.

The vision of the angel setting out what God was doing must have been important for him, although not much of a comfort. And he set his quiet energy to the job in hand, looking after Mary and protecting her.

Then came the next blow with the news of the census and the need to travel to Bethlehem. I can feel my stomach tense as I imagine Joseph's worry about Mary's condition and the journey ahead. He would make it as comfortable as possible and he must have been conscious of every single mile.

With the journey done he must have thought the worst part was over, but then I feel his stress and strain as he searches for somewhere to stay. He must have been desperate to accept the offer of the stable!

I wonder how he prayed to God through those times? He was caring for the woman who was to give birth to God's Son, and yet God didn't seem to be caring for her. This most certainly hadn't been how Joseph had imagined his life with Mary would be.

And of course there was worse to come yet. The Shepherds and the Wise Men would be glimpses of the wonderful truth that Joseph was part of. But very soon

he would be travelling again, this time caring for Mary and her tiny baby as they fled for their lives to the strange land of Egypt.

How he must have longed in those days of his quiet life that he had dreamed of in Nazareth! This is not at all how he had imagined it would be.

And this is not how we imagined it would be either! This is not the Christmas we would have planned. There will be things that we will be missing, frustrations, sadness, surprises, unexpected joys, exasperation, despair, times when we, like Joseph can only think how different this is from how we expected it would be.

And yet, in the midst of all the chaos, stress and surprise, God comes among us. This year, more than ever in our lifetime, the real message of Christmas, that God comes right into the messiness and disorder of our lives, shines bright and clear.

Notice Joseph in the Christmas story when you hear it in the days ahead. He knows what it is like to have a Christmas that is very different from how you planned. And pray that like Joseph you have the eyes to see the love of God even in the unexpected and to carry the message of hope to those who need it.

Affirmation of Faith

Holy, holy, holy

Is the Lord God almighty,

Who was, and is, and is to come

We believe in God the Father

Who created all things:

For by his will they were created

And have their being

We believe in God the Son,

Who was slain:

For with his blood,

He purchased us for God,

From every tribe and language

From every people and nation.

We believe in God the Holy Spirit:

The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come!"

Even so come, Lord Jesus! Amen

See what love the Father has given us,
that we should be called the children of God.

You are my sons and daughters,
this day I have begotten you.

See what love the Father has given us.

As many as received him,
to them he gave power to become the children of God.

See what love the Father has given us.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

**See what love the Father has given us,
that we should be called the children of God.**

Prayers of Intercession from Beverly Hurst

Lord, as we approach Christmas and the birth of Jesus, let us take some time to think about our family and friends. To consider in particular this year, how we respond to the Christmas story, it's message of joy and hope for us all, particularly in these times of the pandemic when there is so much suffering and fear amongst people. Let us examine our hearts about how we celebrate the birth of Jesus, to do it safely and not to do things that could spread the disease, especially as the vaccination programme has started now and so hopefully in a few months some sense of normality will return.

We ask this in Jesus name. **Amen.**

We pray, Lord for your guidance and support.

We know you are with us wherever we go:
you are our God and the Rock of our salvation.

You come to us each day and always.

Lord open our eyes to your presence,

open our hearts to your love,

open our minds to your indwelling;

through Jesus Christ our Lord,

who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Lord, we give thanks for our church and for the peace and tranquillity found here. We pray for all who spread the Good News, who go out and about engaging with people. We give thanks for all the ways we engage with God, for the services in church, for our zoom services, the newsletters and telephone calls, enabling us all to keep together, support each other and worship together. We give thanks for all those with talents that have allowed us to continue our worship in these challenging times.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our Prayer.**

We pray for all those in their various callings, that they may be sensitive to the needs of others and to the world around them. We remember all those many people who have lost their jobs throughout this past year due to the pandemic and the impact that loss of income will have on themselves and their families. We pray that they may have a peaceful Christmas and be able to manage what must be difficult and upsetting times. We pray for the work of Inn Churches and all those organisations helping people who are homeless or who are struggling to support themselves and their families.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our Prayer.**

Lord, we pray for our homes and families and we pray for all who will spend this Christmas alone. We give thanks for all those people who help and support people in their communities and thank them for giving of their time and generosity of spirit. We also pray for all those caught in war and violence around the world, may governments and those in authority find ways to bring peace.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our Prayer.**

Lord you are our strength and salvation: you alone can make us whole, you alone give life that is eternal. We pray for all who are sick or in trouble, for those recovering from surgery or illness, and for all those who care for them. May they soon be fully recovered and back with their families.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our Prayer.**

We pray for all who have faithfully served you and are now in the fullness of your glory. We pray for loved ones departed. We remember especially Irene Varley who died at home this week and Shirley Helliwell who died peacefully in

the Care Home she had lived in for a number of years. May they, and all who have died, now rejoice in the fullness of your presence and your glory.
Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen**

The Lord's Prayer

Closing Praise

Blessed are you, God of all glory, through your Son the Christ.

His name is Jesus,
because he saves his people from their sins.

He will be called Emmanuel:

God is with us. Alleluia.

Let us praise the Lord, the God of Israel:
he has come to his people and set them free.

So, all beings in heaven and earth will fall at his feet,
and proclaim to the glory of God:

Jesus Christ is Lord!

Blessing

May God himself, the God of peace make you perfect and holy,
and keep you safe and blameless, in spirit soul and body
for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

Sending Out

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord:
in the name of Christ. Amen.