

AN ACT OF SPIRITUAL COMMUNION 19th December 2021
4th Sunday of Advent

To prepare ourselves for our worship, we reflect on the day and on our relationships.

- *What good things have come from God today?*
- *Where have I fallen short?*
- *What will I try to do differently in future?*

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen

1 In the bleak mid-winter
Frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron,
Water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow,
Snow on snow,
In the bleak mid-winter,
Long ago.

2 Our God, heaven cannot hold him
Nor earth sustain;
heaven and earth shall flee away
When he comes to reign:
In the bleak mid-winter
A stable place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty
Jesus Christ.

3 Angels and archangels
May have gathered there,
Cherubim and seraphim
Thronged the air –
But only his mother
In her maiden bliss
Worshipped the beloved with a kiss.

4 What can I give him
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wise man
I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give him –
Give my heart.

Christina Rossetti (1830-1894) Public Domain

Let us now call to mind our sins and ask the Lord to help us live by his values.

Lord Jesus, you bring pardon and peace to sinners.

Lord have mercy **Lord have mercy**

You bring light to those who walk in darkness and in the shadow of death.

Christ have mercy **Christ have mercy**

You guide our feet into the way of peace.

Lord have mercy **Lord have mercy**

May the God of love and power forgive us and free us from our sins, heal and strengthen us by God's Spirit, and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord.

Amen.

The Collect (special prayer for today)

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**

READINGS

Micah 5:2-5a

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labour has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel.

And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace.

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 leapt 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 leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'

And Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness 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. 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 thoughts 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 helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'

REFLECTION

George Orwell's *1984* is a dystopian novel published in June 1949. The author had seen, at age 45, both World Wars, the rise of fascism in Italy, the rise of Hitler in Germany; the invention of aircraft, television, antibiotics, along with atomic power, guided missiles, and napalm. And the novel set in the year 1984 portrays a world in which most of the population have become victims of perpetual war, omnipresent government surveillance and propaganda. It was a stark and frightening presentiment of life in the late 20th century.

Indeed, 1984 is a year to remember. For me, September that year brought the birth of my son, a joyful time, but the scenes on the TV of the Ethiopian famine broke my heart as I was feeding a healthy baby. He not only had a better future than the children on the screen, he actually **had** a future. Then in December, in response to the famine in the horn of Africa, the record '*Do they know it's Christmas?*' was released. Even for those who were becoming immune to the images on the news, the obscenity of celebrating Christmas by huge expenditure on food and drink and so on, while millions in the third world lack the basic necessities for keeping themselves alive was really brought home by the accompanying pictures of starving people. It raised some 8 million pounds for famine relief.

Certainly, the birth of the redeemer brings us great joy in knowing that God loves us. But Jesus' mother, Mary, reminded us when she sang the song we call the Magnificat, that it is also about social justice: '[God] has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.'

Surely one of the most potent messages of Christmas is to work tirelessly to right the world's injustices.

George Orwell wrote "If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face—for ever." To avoid this, we need to be as subversive as Mary and Elizabeth, two marginalised, pregnant women – one young, poor, and unmarried, and the other beyond

childbearing age who met in the hill country of Judea to celebrate (or possibly commiserate about) their miraculous pregnancies. Here, two marginalised and pregnant women carry the future and proclaim the Messiah.

Mary's song, the Magnificat, gives voice to this subversive incarnation that she and Elizabeth embody. This young, unmarried, pregnant woman; a thoroughly marginal person in her culture proclaims one of the most important prophetic words in scripture. The image is extraordinary, even comical; young, pregnant Mary gives voice to a song for the ages, a song that invites us beyond our realistic expectations. And her song announces the larger implications of the upside-down world that God has inaugurated: 'He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their thoughts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent empty away.'" Mary proclaims the topsy-turvy future of God.

In 1989 the song 'Do they know it's Christmas?' was released again, and again it became the Christmas number one, with sales of the single exceeding a million copies. The proceeds of the record again went towards famine relief.

And here we are at the end of 2021, and people are still starving. Two thousand years after Mary's song, we still have not learnt. We still have not succeeded in turning the world upside down. There are the same pictures on our screens as there were back in 1984, this time in Afghanistan. What have we done? What have we learnt?

And the problem is not even so far away. At least 688 people died homeless in England and Wales in 2020; in one of the world's leading democracies and the seventh richest nation on earth. We may not be an oppressed nation, but when record numbers of homeless people are dying, average age 43, we cannot deny that we are in some respects an oppressive nation. We can buy the occasional record, donate to charities, contribute to the food bank and that is good and must continue. In his love for us, God held nothing back when he gave his Son for our salvation. And Christmas holds our feet to the fire; we need to do more to right those injustices that still exist after 2000 years. We are called to give, to serve and to love without holding back. To get down and dirty with the marginalized, the oppressed, the poor and the hungry. To turn the world upside down as Mary sang and Jesus taught us. Amen

In humility and love, let us pray together to God our Maker and Redeemer.

We pray for the time when there will be peace upon the whole earth. We pray for the work of all peacemakers, for the United Nations and all peacekeeping forces. We ask your blessing upon all who are caught up in unrest and war at this time.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We give thanks for the Blessed Virgin Mary, for welcoming Jesus into her life. May we know your presence in our homes and seek to bring in your kingdom through our actions. We pray for all families who are going through difficult times and who are struggling.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all those who are oppressed or marginalised, for the poor, the hungry and the forgotten. We ask your blessing on all who work to relieve their plight, and we ask for your strength to play our part in bringing about your upside down kingdom.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We give thanks for all who care for the ill and the infirm. We ask your blessing upon the work of all medical and care staff as they face the continuing pressures of Covid 19. We remember all who are ill or who have been injured in accidents or through acts of violence. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all our loved ones departed from us, who are now in the fullness of your kingdom. We rejoice in the fellowship of the Virgin Mary and all your saints.

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

Prayers adapted from David Adam

Gathering together all our prayers, we say the prayer that Jesus gave us

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.**

**And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen**

We give thanks for the saving death and resurrection of Jesus and ask him to be with us now

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits you have given me, for all the pains and insults you have borne for me. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, I ask you to come spiritually into my heart. O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother, may I know you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen

1 O come, all ye faithful,
joyful and triumphant
O come ye, o come ye to Bethlehem
come and behold him
born the King of Angels.

*O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
Christ the Lord.*

2 God of God, Light of Light;
lo, he abhors not the virgin's womb;
very God, begotten not created;

O come, let us adore him...

3 Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,
sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!
Glory to God in the highest:

O come, let us adore him...

4 Yea, Lord, we greet thee,
born this happy morning:
Jesus, to thee be all glory given;
word of the Father, now in flesh appearing;

O come, let us adore him...

*Translated from the Latin (18th century)
by Frederick Oakely (1802-1880) CCLI Licence 2370586*

We pray God's blessing on each other

May the Lord bless you with a noble and generous heart.

May he keep you joyful in his service.

And may the peace of Christ reign in your hearts and in your homes this Christmas

... and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be with you and remain with you, and those whom you love and pray for, this day and for evermore. **Amen**