

## MARY'S SONG

**A FEW WEEKS AGO**, I preached on this passage from Luke, entitled 'The Magnificat', and promised to expand on it here in Open Space.

### 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.

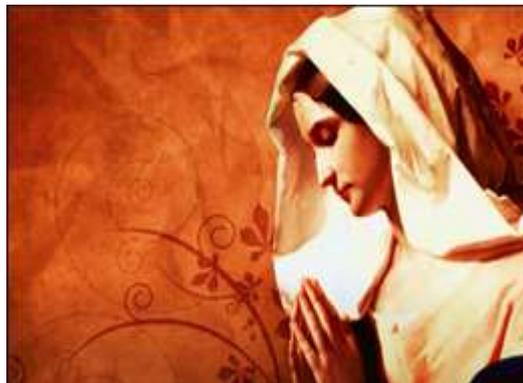
He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
according to the promise he made to  
our ancestors,

to Abraham and to his descendants  
forever." **LUKE 1:46-55**

GROWING UP, I didn't hear a single sermon about the song Luke attributes to the teenage girl who gave birth to Jesus. No one told me that Mary's song comprises the longest set of words spoken by a woman in the New Testament.

No one remarked on the astonishing fact that Mary sang her prophetic song on her cousin Elizabeth's doorstep, while Zechariah, the 'official' spokesperson of God, endured his divine silencing.

I didn't learn that the song is soaked in Jewish women's history, echoing the words and stories of Miriam, Hannah, Judith, and Deborah.



I wasn't told that the Magnificat is one of the Church's oldest Advent hymns, or that countless composers have set it to breath-taking music over the centuries.

I had no clue that the song's socio-economic and political implications are so subversive, its lyrics have been banned many times in modern history.

When the British ruled India, for example, the Magnificat was prohibited from being sung in churches.

During the 'Dirty War' in Argentina, after the mothers of disappeared children plastered the capital plaza with posters of the words of the Magnificat, the military junta banned all public displays of the song. Mary's version of hope, they decided, was too dangerous a thing for public consumption.

I AM grateful to know these things now, but I wish I had learned them earlier. I wish my first exposure to the Nativity story had been framed by Mary's fiery justice song, because her understanding of God's intentions and actions fundamentally change the story of 'the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.'

Therefore, I want to linger over Mary, the prophet. Mary, the voice of the down-trodden. Mary, the singer of the Magnificat, God's gorgeous justice song.

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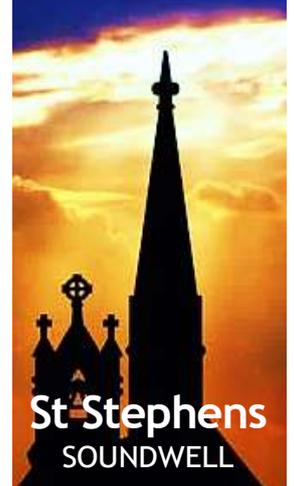
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## MARY'S SONG

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So, let's look at a few phrases from this epic and awesome song.

*'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.'*

Before the Magnificat points to anything else, it points to joy. Specifically, it reminds us that the appropriate response to God's complicated presence in our lives is joy.

Not fear. Not guilt. Not penance. Not obligation, but Joy. Indeed, deep and irresistible joy is at the heart of not just the entire Christmas story, but the whole life of Jesus.

But before The Annunciation to Mary, the angel tells Zechariah that 'joy and gladness' will mark his son, John the Baptist's, birth.

When Mary arrives at Elizabeth's house, Elizabeth's unborn baby 'leaps for joy.'

When an angel choir announces Jesus's arrival to the shepherds, they describe 'good news of great joy.'

Water was turned into wine; over 5000 people were fed from a packed lunch of bread and fish; sight was restored; many, many people healed; Jesus shared meals – gatherings round a shared table are usually times of joy right – with many, many people; He washed feet – subversive joy perhaps, particularly for us who's feet he metaphorically washes; the cross – the joy of forgiveness for us; the empty tomb – the joy of our risen Lord and saviour. And there is sooooo much more joy, that I have to reign myself in because of time and place, but let's get back to Mary.

WE miss something essential about the life of faith when we gloss over Mary's decision to rejoice in response to God. Consider the circumstances into which she sings her amazing words. She is a peasant girl living under brutal imperial rule. She's unmarried and pregnant in a culture that considers it appropriate to kill young women in her condition.

At this point in the story, it's not clear if her fiancé will stick by her.

In fact, it's possible that she has run away to her cousin's house precisely because she feels vulnerable and threatened in her own home town.

And yet this young girl sings of **JOY**. To me, her song demonstrates two things: her baseline trust in the goodness of God, and her imaginative capacity to frame her story as a story worth rejoicing over.

Against all odds, she dares to believe that what is happening to her is not horror, not tragedy, not random, not meaningless.

She doesn't succumb to the blistering narratives swirling around her – narratives of shame, scandal, and sinfulness.

Instead, she insists that her very body is infused with the presence and power of a God who acts decisively and generously in history. In her history. In her life.

**What would it be like to frame our own lives in this way?**

What would it be like to look for God in the most intimate details of our days? What would it be like to make joy our bedrock?

*'He has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed.'*

Do you ever imagine God looking at you? Regarding you? Gazing at you?

If yes, how would you characterise God's gaze? Are God's eyes on you frightening? Cold? Distracted? Judgmental? Or are they patient and tender, warm and inviting? I love that Mary finds the gaze of God not just bearable, but wonderful.

When God looks upon her, she is nourished and elevated. There is no hint of diminishment in her song; its words are busting at the seams with a confidence borne of being deeply loved. Mary doesn't simply tolerate God's eyes; she basks in them. She senses God's pleasure, and returns it.

Moreover, it's in Mary's lowliness that God favours her.

In her lowliness, not in spite of it. God's gaze accepts Mary's poverty, her simplicity, her lack of sophistication and scholarly knowledge – and favours her anyway, completely and exactly for who and what she is.

I fear that many of us never allow ourselves to lean into God's delight in this way. We never dare to entertain the possibility that God looks on us with favour, or that God's gaze lingers on us in love.

What would it be like to do so? The Church often describes Mary as docile and unassertive, but I would suggest that there's something remarkably bold and even brazen in these lines of the Magnificat.

Imagine the audacity of a young peasant girl, scandalously pregnant, peddling an angel story no one believes, living on the unremarkable outskirts of empire, to declare without shame or apology that she is favoured of God.

This is not the song of a spiritually timid human being. This is the song of a young woman on fire, a young woman passionately in love with a God who is passionately in love with her.

Are you on fire for God?

How might you allow Him to fan the flames, no matter if they are leaping or just smouldering?

*'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.'*

After Mary sings her joy and God's delight, she finds the keen, sharp edge of her prophetic voice, and bursts into an anthem of hope and justice for the world's poorest, most forgotten, most broken-hearted, and most oppressed people.

She describes a reality in which our sinful and unjust status quo is gorgeously reversed: the proud are scattered and the humble honoured.

The hungry are fed and the rich sent away.

The powerful are brought down, and the lowly are lifted up.

In short, Mary describes a world reordered and renewed – a world so beautifully characterised by love and justice, only the Christ she carries in her womb can birth it into being.

These lines, needless to say, are the lines that get Mary into trouble. These are the lines that have gotten the Magnificat banned at key moments in history.

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# Readings & Collects

## FOR SEPTEMBER 2021

FORTHOSE OF US who are not able to attend services or who wish to use the Sunday readings and Collect Prayer to worship at home, here they are:

### SUNDAY 05 SEPTEMBER 2021 14th Sunday after Trinity

Isaiah 35:4–7a; Psalm 146;

James 2:1–10, 14–17; Mark 7:24–end

MERCIFUL GOD, your Son came to save us and bore our sins on the cross: may we trust in your mercy and know your love, rejoicing in the righteousness that is ours through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### SUNDAY 12 SEPTEMBER 2021 15th Sunday after Trinity

Isaiah 50:4–9a; Psalm 116:1–8;

James 3:1–12; Mark 8:27–end

LORD GOD, defend your Church from all false teaching and give to your people knowledge of your truth, that we may enjoy eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### SUNDAY 19 SEPTEMBER 2021 16th Sunday after Trinity

Jeremiah 11:18–20; Psalm 54;

James 3:13–4:3,7–8a; Mark 9:30–37

LORD OF CREATION, whose glory is around and within us: open our eyes to your wonders, that we may serve you with reverence and know your peace at our live's end, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### SUNDAY 26 SEPTEMBER 2021 Harvest Celebration

Joel 2:21–27; Psalm 126;

1 Timothy 6:6–10; Luke 13:6–9

CREATOR GOD, you made the goodness of the land, the riches of the sea and the rhythm of the seasons; as we thank you for the harvest, may we cherish and respect this planet and its peoples, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### PLANT SALE SPRING 2022

WE will be requesting plants for the above next year. It's a long way ahead I know, but **now** is the time to take cuttings, sow biennials, save and dry seeds and later, split perennials. (I have spare pots if required).

Please help us make this a successful event. **Gill Mayo**

## MARY'S SONG

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These are the lines we Christians feel a perpetual need to either tame or ignore because we find them so deeply threatening to the lives we prefer to live. And yet...

And yet there are moments when I am drawn like a starving person to the world Mary describes. Can you envision it, even just for a moment?

A world without hoarding?  
A world without scarcity? A world in which our economic disparities don't get in the way of our fundamental kinship as human beings?

A world in which the poor receive truly good things: not leftovers, not hand-me-downs, not miserly scraps that insult their dignity, but good things? A world in which our own cluttered, bloated fullness is mercifully taken away from us, so that in newfound emptiness, we find room for all that is truly life-giving?

A world in which we are finally and permanently delivered from the tyranny of our stuff?

Isn't that a world worth singing about? Even if it costs us before it fulfils us?

The thing is, Mary's song forever dismantles the self-protective walls we erect between our faith being just about our personal relationship with God and God's insistence on justice for all he has created.

We can't choose the first only and call it Christianity. To love the helpless infant who comes to us on Christmas Day is to love the one who grows up to raise valleys and level mountains, to liberate the oppressed and dethrone the arrogant.

Imagine Jesus in his cradle, the Magnificat a lullaby Mary pours into his ears each night until his heart burns for justice as fiercely as hers does. This is the One we call God.

To love this God is to yearn for a re-ordered world with the same passion and urgency Mary voices in her justice song.

Read the song again and notice that Mary describes these divine reversals as if they have already happened:

*'He has brought down.' 'He has filled.'*  
*'He has sent.'*

Prophets almost never get their verb tenses straight, because part of their gift is being able to see the world as God sees it – not divided into things that are already over and things that have not happened yet, but as an eternally unfolding mystery that surprises everyone, maybe even God.

What would it be like to mix up our tenses as prophets routinely do? To live into the topsy-turvy, upside down world Mary foresees? To live as if that world is already here?

The Messiah is at your doorstep, Mary sings across time. There is no unjust system, oppressive hierarchy, or arrogant leadership structure the Messiah will not upend. No promise the Christ will fail to keep. No broken, exploited life God will not save. What if we lived into these promises – insisted on these promises – in our day-to-day lives right now?

The Magnificat is a song of 'too much hope'. Of course it is, because 'too much hope' is precisely what we are called upon to cultivate.

Can you do it? Can you find your voice and share it with a world more desperately in need than ever?

What does your Magnificat sound like this year?

How is God magnified through your unique perspective and vision?

What stories of divine favour do you have to tell?

What glorious reversals do you see heading our way?

What words will you choose to describe the Good News about the Messiah you carry? **Don't wait.**

**Sing it. Sing it now. Lisa**

## Harvest Appeal

**AS USUAL**, we will give any gifts of food, brought to Church for Harvest Service on Sunday 26th September at 10am, to the Sisters to distribute among those in need in our city.

**The items they need are:**

**Tins:** meat, fish, vegetables, soups, baked beans, spaghetti hoops, custard, rice pudding and fruit.

**Ambient:** rice, pasta, tea bags, cereals, coffee, biscuits and UHT milk.

**Extras** that our customer love: pot noodles, crisps and snack bars.

**Toiletries:** ALL toiletries, male and/or female sets or individual items.

If you prefer to give a financial donation as your gift at Harvest for those who have so very little and are struggling to feed their families, then please bring these financial gifts, to the Harvest Service or in the weeks before that. *Please do not put it in with the general collection.* We will collect up all that is given, and donate it to both **The Sisters of the Church** and **Harvest for the Hungry**. Both of these are charities who feed the poorest of the poor; in our city and across Europe.

Thank you! **Lisa** x

## SEPTEMBER CYCLE OF PRAYER BEGINNING SUNDAY OF EACH WEEK

05 Pensioners Group	Ruby Harrison, Carolyn Hawkins Nicole Hayward, James Head Stella Hoare, Mike and Jayne Hudd	Eastleigh Close Eastleigh Road Elmore
12 Knit & Natter	Cherilyn Hughes, Jean and Barry Hulbert Neil, Carey, Marin & Eliza Humphrey	Fairford Close Fairlyn Drive Florence Road
19 Men's Group & Ladies Group	Sue and Martin Humphrey, Roger Hurkett Roccus, Rozina, Adan & Jerome Inayat Lou Jefferies, Jan Johns, June Jones	Frys Hill Gilpin Close Gladstone Court
26 Deerhurst Care & Nursing Home	Anadita Kumar, Anita Leakey Kristine, Ian, Emily & Jack Lockwood Mike Long, Gerald Marshall, Gill Mayo	Gladstone Drive Gladstone Street Gloucester Road

**SUNDAY Community Worship Service at 10am**

**WEDNESDAY Service of Holy Communion at 10am.**

*Sunday 8am BCP Holy Communion resumes in September on 1st and 3rd Sundays.*

## DIARY

### SEPTEMBER

04 Saturday	09.30pm	Baptism Preparation in Church
09 Thursday	07.30pm	Bishop Viv licensing Lisa as Vicar in Church followed by refreshments in the Church Hall
14 Tuesday	1.30-3.30pm	Knit & Natter in the Church hall
16 Thursday	10-11.45am	See & Know (new time) then weekly
	2-4pm	Ladies Group (new time) then fortnightly
17 Friday	06.30pm	Friday Night Live in Church followed by refreshments (not 100% confirmed yet, but let's assume)
24 Friday	02.00pm	Pensioner's Group in the Church Hall
26 Sunday	10.00am	Celebration of Harvest Service in Church
30 Thursday	07.30pm	Men's Group in the Church room access via Church

### OCTOBER

01- Friday	7-9pm	Outburst Youth Church in Church Hall- then monthly on 1st Friday of each month
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UKME (Bristol)

## Connections group

THE last year has seen issues of race and ethnicity in many discussions within the Church and in society. From our own experience we know that being a BAME Christian in times like these can be isolating and challenging without the support of others to join us on this journey. Discussions in the recent Transforming Church workshops highlighted a need for ethnic minority Christians within the diocese to connect with each other.

With that in mind, we would like to provide an opportunity for UKME Christians within the diocese to meet online Monday 13th Sept from 7-8pm on Zoom.

We see this as an opportunity to create a safe space where we can gather together with others from the community and discuss the potential of setting up a group going forward.

Please pass this on to friends and/or members of your congregation who may be interested in such a group.

You can register to attend at this link: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/ukme-bristol-connections-group-registration-165748597517>

We look forward to welcoming you!

Anjali & Mary (Revd Anjali Kanagaratnam & Revd Mary Hotchkiss)

## Christmas Cards & Calendars

SINCE everyone seemed to love having Church Christmas Cards and Calendars last year, we thought we would do the same again this year!

We will keep the design of last year's Christmas Card for those of you that liked it, and add a new version for this year. We will use all new images for the Calendar for 2022.

So, with that in mind I thought we would have a **Photo Competition**.

If you have old or new photos of any aspect of Church you would like to offer to be included in the making of these items, then we will be delighted to receive them. *The prize will be twofold: the accolade of your photo being in print AND some-thing chocolatey!!*

Please let me have your contributions by Sunday 19th September. This can be digital photos or physical photos – just email me with digital images or phone me if you need help with that. Please pop hard copies of photos, with your name on, through my door or let me have them in Church – they will be returned to you as soon as possible. The winners will be announced in due course.

Thank you, **Lisa.**

Email: [lisawigmore66@gmail.com](mailto:lisawigmore66@gmail.com)

## FROM THE REGISTERS

### Baptisms SINCE JULY

● August 08: **Grace Johnson** and her mummy, Katie Smith. *Please hold Barry, both daddy and husband, and all the family & Grace's Godparents in your prayers.*

### Funerals SINCE JUNE

● July 13: **Diane Elizabeth Pullin** (74). The celebration of Diane's life was held at Haycombe Crematorium, Bath. *Please hold her husband, Roger, and children Liesl, Heidi, Michelle and Hayley, and stepsons Ian and Shaun, together with her 9 grandchildren and 5 great grandchildren in your prayers.* As well as her family, Diane will be greatly missed by the very many people whose lives she touched, so please also remember them in your prayers.

● August 05: **Steve West** (50). The celebration of Pete's life was held at Westerleigh Crematorium. *Please hold his children, Oscar, Harvey and Louie; his wife Sandra, Mum & Dad, Heather and Adrian, brother Paul, and sister Claire, as well as their families and the wider family in your prayers.* As well as his family, Steve will be greatly missed by the very many people whose lives he touched, so please also remember them in your prayers.

## Dial-a-SERMON

Listen to this week's Sermon on your phone:

**0117 456 2090**

(Cost is the same as a local call)

OR

## Click-a-SERMON

Visit our website and use the audio link to listen on-line

<http://saintstephensoundwell.org>

## SAINT STEPHENS SOUNDWELL



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