**Home Service Sheet for Sunday 6th October 2024**

**Call to Worship Psalm 131:1-3**

**O Lord, my heart is not lifted up;**

**my eyes are not raised too high;**

**I do not occupy myself with things**

**too great and too marvellous for me.**

**But I have calmed and quieted my soul,**

**like a weaned child with its mother;**

**like a weaned child is my soul within me.**

**O Israel, hope in the Lord**

**from this time forth and forevermore.**

**Prayer**

**O Lord, our God, how majestic is Your Name in all the Earth! How marvellous are the wonders You have created and how wise are Your words that You have given to us in Your Word! We are so small and simple compared with You, and yet You think of us and loved us so much that You sent Your only Son to die in our place. Help us to remember our place as we come before You today, and may we recall that we are fearfully and wonderfully made in Your very image. You alone are worthy of our praise and in You alone is salvation found. Hallelujah, amen.**

**Hymn Dear Lord and Father of Mankind by John Greenleaf Whittier**

[**https://youtu.be/b1MN3chW1Hk?si=VazAxWkcfHG-zvAf**](https://youtu.be/b1MN3chW1Hk?si=VazAxWkcfHG-zvAf)

**Dear Lord and Father of mankind, forgive our foolish ways;**

**Reclothe us in our rightful mind, in purer lives Thy service find,**

**In deeper reverence, praise; in deeper reverence, praise.**

**In simple trust like theirs who heard beside the Syrian sea**

**The gracious calling of the Lord, let us, like them, without a word**

**Rise up and follow Thee; rise up and follow Thee.**

**Drop thy still dews of quietness, till all our strivings cease;**

**Take from our souls the strain and stress, and let our ordered lives confess**

**The beauty of Thy peace; the beauty of Thy peace.**

**Breathe through the heats of our desire Thy coolness and thy balm;**

**Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire; speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,**

**O still, small voice of calm! O still, small voice of calm!**

**The Lord’s Prayer**

**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 that 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.**

**Bible Reading Luke 1:26-38**

**In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favoured one, the Lord is with you!” But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name 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 father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”**

**And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”**

**And the angel answered 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 called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.” And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.**

**Reflection**

**Last week heard how God, through the angel Gabriel, announced to Elizabeth and Zechariah that they would have a special son. Now, six months later that same messenger is sent to a young woman, Mary. Again, the God-given message was one about the coming birth of a special child. There are, however, a number of differences, which we will see as we study our reading today. Although John would indeed be a special prophet, greater than all the prophets who had come before him, he would be so much less than the child that would be born to Mary.**

**At the beginning of our reading, we are told that God sent the angel Gabriel to a town in the region of Galilee. From elsewhere in Scripture, we know that Galilee was looked down upon as something of a rural backwater. The people who came from this region were considered simple and uncultured, and yet this was God’s plan to use people from this very place to fulfil His plan of salvation. Mary is first introduced to us as a young woman who was engaged to a man named Joseph, from the family line of King David. We should note how Mary is described in verse 27, as a virgin. This is significant for two reasons. Firstly, we know that virgins don’t have children, or at least that is the case with every other pregnancy since God created the world. Secondly, this is a fulfilment of a prophecy that God spoke through the prophet Isaiah hundreds of years before (Isaiah 7:14). This child will be like no other child before or after, and His birth was foretold hundreds of years before.**

**In verse 28 we read about the angel greeting Mary with these words, “Greetings, O favoured one, the Lord is with you!” Mary would have been young at this time, possibly a young teenager, and so this greeting is unexpected and shocking. Mary’s response is noteworthy because she seems more troubled by the greeting than she was by the appearance of the angel to her. Usually when an angel appears to someone in the Bible they are terrified, but that is not what Luke notes about Mary here. She wants to know why this angel is speaking to her in the way that he is, describing her as favoured. There is fear, but it seems as though it is a fear of what is to come rather than a fear of the angel.**

**The angel is aware of her fear and concern and answers them in verse 30. Gabriel reassures Mary by telling her not to be afraid and explains that she is favoured because she had “found favour with God.” I believe that it is important for us to note what the passage does not say here. Luke does not tell us that she is favoured or blessed because of something that she has done. It is God’s favour, and He can and will extend it to whosoever He will. God’s favour is given graciously – freely and undeservedly and cannot be earned. God chose Mary not because of anything special about her, but simply for His own purposes.**

**The angel then tells Mary that she will not only have a child, but he will be highly significant and do great things. He will be called ‘Son of the Most High’, will be made king over all Israel and will reign forever. There are enough clues here to tell that this child will be unique in all human history. Unlike Zechariah, who we read about last week, Mary’s response is not to doubt the angel, but rather she is curious about how this will happen. Her response is faith filled, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” (v.34) Yet, ultimately she humbles herself and submits to the will of God.**

**Perhaps this example given by Mary is the most important thing for us to grasp today. We are not saying that we will or can be just like Mary, but we can point to her attitude and understanding of God and learn from that. Her final recorded words in our Bible passage today are so helpful, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” Mary recognised her place as a servant of God. She could submit to Him fully because she knew enough about Him to know that He is completely trustworthy.**

**We too can fully trust in the Lord because He has shown us what He is like in the life of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Scriptures tell us time and again that God always does what is right, and for this reason we know that He can be fully trusted. Note how Mary specifically prays, and I think prayer is the right word, that everything that happens to her will be in accordance with God’s Word. This certainly refers to the message that God had given to Gabriel, but it is also true of all that God has ever spoken, much of which is written down for us in the Bible.**

**We can therefore also come before the Lord our God with complete confidence, knowing that we can trust Him. We can say, following the example of Mary, that we are servants of God and we can fully submit to Him and to His Word. May our prayer today be that of Mary, “let it be to me accorded to Your Word!” Amen!**

**Prayer of intercession**

**Heavenly Father, we thank You for taking the simple things of life and servants that are humble in spirit, to be lifted up and used by You to Your praise and glory. We ask today that You would help us to follow the example of Mary, who walked humbly before You all the days of her life. We pray for all those people You have chosen and called to be Yours, that You would strengthen each one to bear faithful witness to You day by day and bring You praise and glory. May Your Church faithfully proclaim the good news You have given us in Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, that many more would enter into Your Kingdom. In Jesus’ Name we ask this, amen.**

**Prayer of Blessing**

**Gracious God, may You go with us today into all that we have ahead of us. May You do in us that which You will that will bring You glory and honour, now and forever, amen.**