

Worship at Home for December 20 2020

You may choose to read right through this document, stopping for your own reflection at any time, or only read the prayers or the scripture or reflection. You might read with family or friends, or alone. Links will take you to music that may enhance your experience as you move through the worship, but you might choose to visit them later, or not at all. Feel free to share this with anyone who might be interested.

If you'd like to comment or have a question, please call or email me directly:
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In the Spirit

Rev. Joanne

Centering Prayer

Holy One, let your love and light seep into our beings and our spaces.
Help us to turn to you, open to receive and open to worship.
Amen

Opening Music: "Mary, Did You Know?" - Pentatonix
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifCWN5pJGIE>

Opening Prayer

Loving God, the days are few before we celebrate once again
your coming to us in a tiny and innocent child.
We wait – sometimes expectantly, sometimes joyfully,
sometimes with anxiety for what the future holds.
Help us to be like Mary – placing herself in your care,
confident that you have a plan that includes us,
rejoicing despite uncertainty and the unfamiliar.
We pray in the name of the One who is coming, has come,
and will always be with us.
Amen

Scripture Luke 1:47-55 *The Inclusive Bible*

Mary said:
"My soul proclaims your greatness, O God,
and my spirit rejoices in you, my Saviour.
For you have looked with favor
upon your lowly servant,
and from this day forward
all generations will call me blessed.
For you, the Almighty, have done great things for me,

and holy is your Name.
Your mercy reaches from age to age
for those who fear you.
You have shown strength with your arm;
you have scattered the proud in their conceit;
you have deposed the mighty from their thrones,
and raised the lowly to high places.
You have filled the hungry with good things,
while you have sent the rich away empty.
You have come to the aid of Israel your servant,
mindful of your mercy -
the promise he made to our ancestors -
to Sarah and Abraham
and their descendants forever.”

Reflection

Mary’s song, often called *The Magnificat* is astonishing and unique. It is one of the oldest Advent hymns we know, and has been set to haunting and beautiful music countless times through the centuries. It is a song of joy, a proclamation of praise with echoes of her biblical fore-mothers like Miriam, Hannah, Judith, and Deborah. It is prophetic, and justice-oriented. It has been banned in some places at some times because of its strong words of justice and imagery of the powerful cast down and the lowly raised up.

It is the longest set of words spoken by any woman in the New Testament.

Mary sings this song almost on her cousin Elizabeth’s doorstep, where she has arrived after being visited by the angel Gabriel and told what is to happen in her life. Perhaps she ran to Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah, fearing that Joseph would reject her now that she is pregnant, needing the counsel of a wise older relative - one who Mary has been told has also been touched by God and is bearing a son. Elizabeth’s baby leaps for joy at hearing Mary – the bearer of God – speak. And then Mary sings.

She sings joy because she has new life in her; she sings joy because she trusts completely in God. She sings despite her precarious position of being very young, and pregnant, and not yet wed to her betrothed. She sings with God’s loving gaze upon her, with God’s love and justice in her heart. She declares that God has, is and will turn our lives upside down, bringing justice to the oppressed and sending the rich and the powerful away empty.

Despite our own struggles or troubles, are we able to sing to God, and about God, with love and joy in our hearts? What can we ‘declare’ about God in our own lives?

One aspect of this song that has always intrigued me is Mary's ability to stand firm in her faith. She is young, perhaps without much life experience herself, and yet she knows the stories of her people's relationship with God, knows the voices of the prophets. She becomes prophetic herself, speaking out words of God's actions in the past, the present and the future.

I wonder if I have that much conviction, that much knowledge, that much faith that God will work through me to bring love and justice – salvation – into the world. Perhaps that pondering is just exactly why we need to keep hearing Mary's song – the song of a simple yet remarkable young woman. Any of us can be chosen to bear God's love; any of us may bring God's justice to birth. Even the lowly, the pondering, the seeking can be held in God's loving gaze and be chosen for God's work in the world.

Are you ready to share your own divine story? Are you willing to let God's love and justice be brought to life through you? Are you ready to proclaim the goodness of God?

May the Spirit accompany our wonderings, our preparations and our waiting in this Advent time.
Amen

Music: "My Soul Cries Out"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iyqOsuQoJRo>

Prayers of the People

God of love, today we give thanks for all the ways we know love in our lives.

We thank you for the love between partners – romantic, steadfast, exciting, enduring.

We thank you for the gentle love between parents and children
that can also be fierce and protective.

We thank you, Source of Love, for the love between friends and companions,
comforting, constant, with the freedom to share laughter and tears.

We thank you, God of all, for the love we share with our animal companions –
feathered, scaly or furry – and your gift of being able to relate to them
and welcome them into our lives.

We thank you, God, for your love – shown in your gift of Jesus,
lavished on us in the gifts of your creation,
and shared when we seek to follow your way of justice, hope and peace.

We know, compassionate God, that not everyone experiences love in the same way.

Sometimes we can feel lonely and unloved.

Sometimes individuals seem unable to share love in any form.

Sometimes cruelty seems more common than affection.

And so we lift our prayers to you, Holy One –
for all those who have ever felt distant from you and unloved by you,
that they find a path to connection and wholeness.
We pray for vulnerable women and children – and sometimes men –
stuck in abusive relationships and unsafe homes,
that they find a path to safety and security.

We pray for those who need your healing love because
they are ill in body mind or spirit, because they are tired and stressed.
We pray for those who need your peaceful love:
front line health care workers still wading into and through the storm of this pandemic,
order packers and parcel delivery folk providing us with what we need or desire,
families stressed by imposed distances and by imposed proximity.

Open us, God, to experience the gift of your Love that is always about to be born into
our lives, into hearts and into our community.
We pray in the name of Jesus – holy babe, prophetic teacher,
the one who is perfectly embodies your love. Amen

Closing music: “The Virgin Mary Had a Baby Boy”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kOiwABmhcU>

Blessing

May the God of love, who sang the universe into being, accompany you this day.
May Jesus – God’s love song to the world – fill you with hope,
and may the Spirit continue to sing God’s love into your heart.
Amen

“Love will Keep Us Strong” Pat Mayberry
https://www.dropbox.com/sh/22rel0ur54xtjx7/AADqubLquDG_06yJwKN8_17ha?dl=0&preview=Love+Will+Keep+Us+Strong.mov