



The Church's prayer for Sunday 15th August

Almighty God,
who looked upon the lowliness of the Blessed Virgin Mary
and chose her to be the mother of your only Son:
grant that we who are redeemed by his blood
may share with her in the glory of your eternal kingdom;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Bible readings and reflection for Sunday 15th August

A reading from Isaiah 61:10-end

¹⁰ I delight greatly in the LORD;
my soul rejoices in my God.
For he has clothed me with garments of salvation
and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness,
as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
¹¹ For as the soil makes the sprout come up
and a garden causes seeds to grow,
so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness
and praise spring up before all nations.

A gospel reading from Luke 1:46-55

⁴⁶ And Mary said:
"My soul glorifies the Lord
⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
⁴⁸ for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.
⁵⁰ His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.
⁵¹ He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.
⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful



⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors.”

A reflection from Revd David Lewis

I was talking to a person who had had a hugely pleasant surprise. She felt as though she had not done well at school, gaining two A levels when her classmates were all gaining at least three – with the highest grades. Many years later she decided to work for another A Level and gained an A*- a totally unexpected and heart-warming result. She felt over the moon.

Jesus’ mother Mary sounds as though she had a similar experience when she met her relative Elizabeth. An angel had told Mary that God would give her a son who would be great – almost beyond belief. She was overwhelmed by this and in turmoil went to visit a relative whom she loved and trusted.

Elizabeth greeted her by saying that her baby had leapt with joy in her womb at Mary’s greeting – and so confirmed what the angel had told Mary. Mary could not contain her excitement and burst into an outburst of praise to God. He had chosen her to mother his Son - a totally unexpected and huge privilege and task. Let’s look at what she said: ‘My soul magnifies the Lord’. A magnifying glass does not enlarge the object that we look at through it, but it does enlarge our vision and understanding of it. Mary had an enlarged understanding of the power, love, and purposes of God. She joyfully expressed this through the totally unexpected actions that she saw he was taking.

1. Choosing her to be the mother of his Son.

Yes, he might have been expected to choose a descendent of Israel’s greatest king David, which she was, but she was just an obscure teenage girl living in a backwater of Galilee, a town a long way from Jerusalem only known because it was a junction of trade routes: Nazareth, the Crewe of Israel. This humble youngster who would otherwise have left little mark on the tapestry of Israel’s history would now always be known as blessed. Notice that it does not make her proud: ‘I’m a special person; aren’t I marvellous!’ A student was once told by his professor that he was very gifted. He blushed with embarrassment. The professor saw this and said ‘I am not talking about your character. You can claim no credit for this – you have been given gifts to be developed and used’. Mary saw this is what happened between God and her. Her being blessed did not mean she was special; she had just been given a hugely special task. Praise God.

2. His mercy extends to those who hear him.

Many in Israel at her time had given up hope of a real messiah appearing, anointed by God to live out and proclaim his kingdom. Many had tried to lead Israel triumphantly against the Romans and establish God’s rule on earth. Their attempts led to yet another crucifixion with the dead body hanging beside a road as an ominous warning. No prophet worth his salt had spoken for four hundred years. The hopes of a real messiah were fading. Yet her was Mary saying that God had not forgotten those who took him seriously, who feared him.



3. God has done mighty and unexpected deeds.
- A) He has scattered those who are proud and their whole way of thinking: self-centred and self-sufficient. It showed itself among those who built the tower of Babel – so they could reach Gog rather than wait for him to come to them. The Baal prophets whom Elijah confronted were proud because they assumed they could manipulate their god to do what they demanded. Jesus told of a rich man who planned to enlarge his storage barns so he could rest on his laurels: ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?!’ Our contemporary culture is proud in ignoring God in our pattern of thinking. When I taught in a school in East London many of the youngsters could not see the relevance of God to any part of their lives. I am just old enough to remember the calls to national days of prayer in the second world war. I’ve heard no such calls during the Covid pandemic.
- B) He has lifted the humble. It is a sad trend that links ‘humble’ with poor, meek and weak. Field Marshall Montgomery wrote a book describing those he saw as the greatest leaders in the world. He refused to consider Jesus which is a shame, but he included Moses in his leading Israel from slavery to freedom. The Bible states that Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth. He expressed his humility by never thinking of his convenience, but always obeying God at what ever cost. This made him a brilliant leader of a people who moaned and rebelled endlessly. Ironically he failed once: ‘Listen you rebels must we bring you this water out of this rock?’. So God said ‘Because you did not trust in me enough to honour me as holy in the sight of the Israelites you will not bring this community into the land that I give them.’ Only Jesus never failed. Humility means obedience to God and serving others without letting self getting in the way. A friend once said to me; ‘Every man has his price’. In other words in the end self-interest will win. This is not what Mary said nor what Jesus did.
- C) He has brought down the rulers from their thrones. This is a tricky one. In the Old Testament rulers often appear in a bad light. ‘Rulers gather together against the Lord.’ ‘Their rulers clearly love shameful ways’ Rulers are evening wolves’. presumably prowling in the fading light looking for victims. Many kings are condemned for disregarding the Lord, while some stand out as faithful and righteous taking God seriously. In the New Testament Paul told the Roman Christians to obey those in authority because it is established by God. The key is in the words of Jesus: his disciples James and John asked for special places of honour in God’s kingdom. Jesus responded ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, not so with you; whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant...’ Thomas Cranmer hit the nail on the head in a prayer for the monarch: ‘that he knowing whose minister he is may above all things seek thy honour and glory and that we duly considering whose authority he has may faithfully serve, honour and obey him...’ Let us pray for rulers throughout the world who are neither despotic nor caring what happens to their subjects but just that hold on to their power, not just



populist so they will win the next election. Pray for leaders who genuinely and effectively serve the people they rule.

- D) He has fed the hungry but sent the rich empty away. A member of a church I led in London said his biggest temptation was to drive round a nearby estate which contained some of the richest homes in London. He was a committed Christian but he longed for a grander home. The Old Testament is quite clear: 'The abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep'. 'Let not the rich man boast of his riches.' In a society that sometimes saw riches as a sign of God's blessing Jesus told warning parables and Paul said to Timothy: 'Love of money is a root of all kinds of evil'. 'How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!'. Riches can be a dangerous distraction from loving God and lead us to a complacent self-sufficiency that ignores the huge hunger there is all over the world. One of the best ways we in prosperous southwest Cambridgeshire is to give sacrificially to the poor of the world and equip them with what they need to live wholesome lives. This theme needs another sermon all on its own.

Mary's words are strongly revolutionary: the unknown blessed world- wide, the rulers dethroned, the rich dispossessed. The proud humiliated. These are signs of God's rule of justice, righteousness, love and joy all to be proclaimed by the life and ministry of her Son Jesus. So much of it is as unexpected today as it was when Mary spoke it. Let us disciples of Jesus work for her vision and so magnify the Lord.