



# KNOX CHURCH, DUNEDIN

## 10am – Sunday 19 December 2021

### Fourth Sunday of Advent - Upside Down

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Music to prepare us for worship *Chorale prelude on 'Den die Hirten lobten shere'* Helmut Walcha (1907-91),  
*Prelude on 'O little town of Bethlehem'* Gordon Phillip (1908-91), *"Walking in the air"* Howard Blake (b. 1938)  
played by Carolyn Schmidt  
*"Comfort ye"* G F Handel (1685-1759) Jesse Hanan/ soloist

**Introit** *"Torches"* text J B Trend, from the Gaelic, music John Joubert (1927-2019)

### Greeting and call to worship

Kia noho a Ihowā ki a koutou. The Lord be with you.

**Ma Ihowā koe e manaaki. The Lord bless you.**

...

Nau mai, haere mai, e Wairua Tapu. Come, Holy Spirit of God.

**Open our lips that our mouths may proclaim your praise.**

...

God's love was revealed among us in this way:

God sent God's only Son into the world

so that we might live through him. Beloved:

**Let us love one another, because love is from God.**

Lighting of the fourth Advent candle

### Hymn *(we will stand and sing while masked)*

(Woodlands) CH4 286 - Timothy Dudley-Smith

1 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the  
Lord!  
Unnumbered blessings, give my spirit  
voice;  
tender to me the promise of his word;  
in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

2 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his  
name!  
Make known his might, the deeds his arm  
has done;  
his mercy sure, from age to age the same;  
his holy Name, the Lord, the Mighty One.

3 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his  
might!  
Powers and dominions lay their glory by.  
Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to  
flight,  
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

4 Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!  
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.  
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord  
to children's children and for evermore!

### Prayer of approach

...

Te Harinui! Hear the good news, Christ is with us,  
coming into the world through you and me.

E te whānau a te Karaiti, family of Christ, we are forgiven. **Thanks to be God.**

*Remain seated as we sing:*

Te Harinui, te harinui,

Te harinui, glad tidings of great joy.

Now in this blessed land

United heart and hand

We praise the glorious birth

And sing to all the earth...

Te Harinui, te harinui,

Te harinui, glad tidings of great joy.

## **Declaration of peace**

Kia tau te rangimārie o te Karaiti ki runga i a koutou. May the peace of Christ be with you always. **And also with you.**

*Please stand and make a gesture of peace towards people around you.*

## **Firs reading: 1 Samuel 2:1-10**

*In this reading, we hear Hannah's prayer of praise and thanksgiving to God. Hannah was unable to conceive – a source of shame in a society that prized fertility and saw it as a sign of God's favour. As the story goes, having asked God to be given a child, God answers her prayer and she gives birth to the prophet Samuel, who ends up anointing Saul as the first king of Israel. This miraculous birth begins the history of the kingdom of Israel (the story of 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings).*

Hannah prayed and said, "My heart exults in the LORD; my strength is exalted in my God. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in my victory. "There is no Holy One like the LORD, no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God. Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry are fat with spoil. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn. The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low, he also exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and on them he has set the world. "He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness; for not by might does one prevail. The LORD! His adversaries shall be shattered; the Most High will thunder in heaven. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king, and exalt the power of his anointed."

*Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church* **Thanks be to God**

## **Gospel reading: Luke 1:46-56**

*In this reading, we hear Mary's song, also known as the Magnificat. Luke almost certainly draws parallels with Hannah's prayer. As you listen to Mary's prayer, what similarities do you notice with the reading from 1 Samuel? What might Luke be signalling to his audience by drawing this connection between Mary and Hannah?*

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.' And Mary remained with her for about three months and then returned to her home.

*This is the Gospel of Jesus Christ Praise to Christ the Word*

**Anthem** "When a child is born" K Knudson (2020) (lyrics Fred Jay, melody "Soleado" by Damico, 1972)

## Sermon

The Knox Church young adults' small group has been meeting over the course of Advent. To guide our conversation we have been focussing on Mary. Alongside the stories of Mary in scripture, we have also been contemplating a series of icons, artistic depictions of Mary in the Eastern Christian tradition. Icons are a tool for prayer, an aid to contemplation. And Mary is a common subject for iconography.

There are a number of ways in which Mary is typically depicted. In the first week of Advent, we looked at this icon: The *Oranta*, the praying one. Her arms are raised in an ancient posture of supplication and prayer. She gazes slightly off-centre, over the shoulder of the viewer, as if captivated by something we cannot see: the mystery of the living God who is ever-present and yet always out of the frame. Someone in our group noted that she has a wise, discerning face. Despite being a young woman, her facial features almost look older. Her eyes are almost comically big. This is not someone who is taking a blind leap of faith, helpless, ignorant, naive. But someone who ponders, intelligently discerns, seeking to understand the mystery of faith. (And we might see something of that in our reading today...)

The second week of Advent, we looked at this icon: The *Hodegetria*, Mary the Guide. Unlike the last type where she looks beyond the viewer, in this type she typically looks directly at the viewer, confronting us, asking us the question: well, what do you make of all this? She invites us in, through her gaze, to share in her devotion. Her whole body is kind of warped, leaning into, turned towards the Christchild. We are led through her to contemplate Christ. (Again, something we see when we take up Mary's song ourselves...)

And then, this week, we looked at this icon: The *Panokranta*, Mary the all-immaculate. Unlike the previous two, in this type Mary is depicted sitting on a throne, lifted up in glory. And not just any throne, this is the judgement seat occupied by Christ, a depiction of God's final judgement when the world will be set to right. And yet, astoundingly, here is Mary, Christ sitting in his mother's lap. For us Protestants, we're not used to thinking about Mary in this way, the apotheosis of Mary, the deification of Mary to the highest place. There may be part of us that instinctively reacts against such a depiction.

But actually it captures something of the essence of our scripture reading today from Luke. These words from Mary's song:

*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.*

Mary is giving us a vision of where things are headed, God's final judgement, which has been set into motion with the lifting up of Jesus from the dead and, with him, all who have been made low. The one who was humiliated, brought low, suffered, and killed at the hands of the powerful, has been raised up to the highest place. The way things are in the world has been turned upside down.

This icon, then, is an image of defiance, of subversion, at the way the world is. Inviting us to contemplate Mary's gaze of? humility, compassion, sadness? as she surveys the tumult of history.

This turning things upside down is a common theme in Luke's gospel. So much so that it actually has a name: *the Great Reversal*. The icon depicts this Great Reversal. For much of history, the world has been judged by those in power. Mostly men. Mostly those who are rich. Mostly those who have military might or popular influence. If human history were anything to go by, we might expect to see an old man with a beard sitting on the throne of judgement. And there have been many attempts to depict God in this way.

But in Panakranta, Christ is depicted not as a full-grown man in the height of strength, but as a helpless child in the lap of his mother, Mary, the all-immaculate, Mary the untouched, the innocent. It is a confronting image to think that history could be judged by a child and his young mother. If we were to see the world through their eyes today, what would we see?

## II.

Mary's song, depicted so powerfully in the panakranta, gives us an insight into the final judgement of the world. The trajectory of history. The orientation of all things through God who is setting things right. (Sand-timer, things have been flipped) It suggests that there is an orientation, a movement, a pull to our lives and to history, a meaning to it all. It's not all just a chaotic, dog-eat-dog world where you look out for your own because that's all there is.

And we can see this trajectory, this pattern in scripture. The vision articulated in Mary's song follows a long pattern reaching right back to the beginnings of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament.

Have you noticed that one of the ways to understand the story of scripture is as a long line of miraculous births? Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, the matriarchs of Israel, were all unable to conceive until, unexpectedly, God heard their cries and they became pregnant. There are other lesser known examples as well. Seen in this way, the stories of Elizabeth and Mary are entirely predictable – with the exception that Mary's pregnancy is doubly surprising because she's still a virgin... as if Luke is saying, God is doing something completely new in Mary. Something completely inconceivable has been conceived.

The story of the Hebrew scriptures is a story of a miraculous, unexpected births in the midst of barrenness; of a God who is constantly bursting the banks of our expectations, birthing hope where there was none, bringing about God's promises to Israel – not through acts of military might or displays of great power – but through a line of humble births.

Certainly there's no shortage of violent and horrifically abusive stories in the Bible as well. But this central subversive thread remains through it all. God's promises are enacted not through coercion, domination, taking away life – but through the *giving* of life.

## III.

And of course there is Hannah, the mother of the prophet, Samuel, whose prayer we heard just now. Hannah's prayer, you may have noticed, is remarkably similar to Mary's song – hence why we heard them both alongside one another this morning. Luke was almost certainly echoing Hannah's prayer in Mary's song. There is a pattern here that Luke is drawing attention to. A trajectory of history.

A more technical word would be *type*. Mary is a *type*, an example of a common pattern. Hannah is a *type*. Luke has a *typological* view of history. Seeing these patterns emerge and draws our attention to the patterns, seeing something of who God is and how acts in the world in these patterns.

Now the skeptic might say, Luke's just reading into things. In fact, isn't all religion reading meaning into history that isn't actually there? Well, maybe. But we all do it, not just religious folk. We all read patterns into our lives, trying to make meaning out of the things that happen to us, seeing in our lives a story, how various events have shaped us over the course of time. And we instinctively try to make sense of our present by looking back at history.

In recent times, we've seen the danger of this, for example in relation to the pandemic response, where people are very quick to draw analogies between our present situation and other times in history. The South African apartheid and the holocaust are mentioned with scary regularity.

So the question is not so much whether we place patterns on history but *which* patterns we choose to orient and make sense of our lives by. The patterns we choose have a real impact on how we respond to real-world situations, they impact profoundly on the course of history for good or for ill.

And so in the song of Mary, Luke is drawing our attention to a pattern, *the* pattern, *the* trajectory of history – fundamentally a *claim* that God is not abandoning this world to the forces of chaos and evil, but is turning things on their head, bringing down those in power and raising up those brought low; a claim that God's work begins, not on the global stage, with superpowers or multinational corporations, but with the lives of ordinary people like you and me; a claim that our lives can be a *type*, an example of the pattern, a sharing this long line of God's subversive salvation birthing in the world, like sand in the hourglass bringing about the fullness of time.

In the telling of the Christmas story every year, and more generally in regularly gathering for worship, we are joining our voices to Mary's song, learning to see and to live our lives according to this pattern of God's transformative love in the world, in which the little and the low will one day reign on the judgement seat of God. Amen

## Hymn (*Please stand*)

(Gonfalon Royal (CH4 184)) CH4 329 - Shirley Murray

1 O little Love, who comes again,  
the Word made flesh to make God plain,  
O Child who shines, the Jesus light,  
disarm the world,  
this Christmas night!

3 As all the wise look for your star,  
so I must follow where you are –  
as you are light so must I be,  
as you are peace,  
be peace in me.

2 No heart so hard it may not move,  
no hate resist your open love;  
defenceless in our hands you come  
to Herod's power,  
to Mary's home.

## Prayer for others followed by the Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power, and the  
glory are yours  
now and forever. Amen.

E tō mātou Matua i te rangi  
Kia tapu tōu Ingoa.  
Kia tae mai tōu rangatiratanga.  
Kia meatia tāu e pai ai  
ki runga ki te whenua,  
kia rite anō ki tō te rangi.  
Hōmai ki a mātou āiane  
he taro mā mātou mō tēnei rā.  
Murua ō mātou hara,  
Me mātou hoki e muru nei  
i ō te hunga e hara ana ki a mātou.  
Āua hoki mātou e kawea kia whakawaia;  
Engari whakaorangia mātou i te kino:  
Nōu hoki te rangatiratanga, te kaha,  
me te korōria, Āke āke āke. Āmine.

## Notices and dedication of offering

### Hymn *(we will stand and sing while masked)*

(Iris) CH4 324 - James Montgomery

1 Angels from the realms of glory,  
wing your flight o'er all the earth;  
ye who sang creation's story  
now proclaim Messiah's birth:

*Come and worship  
Christ, the new-born King.  
Come and worship,  
worship Christ, the new-born King.*

2 Shepherds in the field abiding,  
watching o'er your flocks by night,  
God with us is now residing,  
yonder shines the infant Light:  
*[Refrain]*

3 Though an infant now we view him,  
he will share his Father's throne,  
gather all the nations to him;  
every knee shall then bow down:  
*[Refrain]*

4 All creation, join in praising  
God the Father, Spirit, Son,  
evermore your voices raising  
to the eternal Three in One:  
*[Refrain]*

## Benediction

Music for our leaving "*Votre Bonte Grand Dieu*" (*Your Bounty Great God*) from '*Deuxieme Suite de Noels*'

Claude-Benigne Balbastre (1727-99)

played by Peter Stockwell

## **Serving today**

Associate Minister - Jordan Redding  
(jordan.redding@otago.ac.nz 0274285234)  
Organist and Choir Director - Karen Knudson  
Reader - Carolyn Richardson  
Prayers for Others - Rachel Tombs

*In relation to your monetary offering, you may:*

- *Make regular automatic payments (which are tax deductible) - contact Helen Thew at [plannedgiving@knoxchurch.net](mailto:plannedgiving@knoxchurch.net)*
- *Give online to the Church's bank account at 03 0903 0016425 00 - our charity number for tax rebate purposes is #CC52318*
- *Give before the service, into the offering boxes at the back of the church*

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