



COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION
SUNDAY 21 DECEMBER 2025 – Advent 4

COLLECT

God our redeemer,
who prepared the Blessed Virgin Mary
to be the mother of your Son:
grant that, as she looked for his coming as our saviour,
so we may be ready to greet him
when he comes again as our judge;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Psalm 80. 1-8, 18-20.

- 1 Hear, O Shepherd of Israel, ♦
you that led Joseph like a flock;
2 Shine forth, you that are enthroned upon the cherubim, ♦
before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh.
3 Stir up your mighty strength ♦
and come to our salvation.
4 Turn us again, O God; ♦
show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.
5 O Lord God of hosts, ♦
how long will you be angry at your people's prayer?
6 You feed them with the bread of tears; ♦
you give them abundance of tears to drink.
7 You have made us the derision of our neighbours, ♦
and our enemies laugh us to scorn.
8 Turn us again, O God of hosts; ♦
show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.
18 Let your hand be upon the man at your right hand, ♦
the son of man you made so strong for yourself.
19 And so will we not go back from you; ♦
give us life, and we shall call upon your name.
20 Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts; ♦
show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.

A reading from the letter to the Romans, chapter 1, verses 1-7.

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

At Morning Prayer, the Gospel is simply the second reading, people sit to hear it and is introduced in the same way as the first:

The second reading is from Matthew, chapter 1, verses 18-25

and then at the end:

For the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God.

For Eucharists/ Communion people stand to hear the Gospel. Everywhere except Fitz introduces it with an Acclamation (the blue bit), and then we all use the introduction and ending (the green bit):

Alleluia. **Alleluia.**

Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

Alleluia.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to Matthew, chapter 1, verses 18-25.

Glory to you, O Lord

And then at the end:

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel',

which means, 'God is with us.' When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

A Reflection from Hannah

On this, the fourth Sunday of Advent when we traditionally remember Mary, we are just as much invited to remember Joseph- whose solidarity and stability were a huge blessing. And in doing so, we also can appreciate anew those Josephs of today- those men and women who may not be at the centre of a story, who may not even want to articulate a belief in God, but who are faithful companions to those who do. Men and women who support and enable the life of the people of Christ, and who are part of that family, but in the broadest sense.

In many ways, we could argue that society today is rife with Josephs- people whose words are absent, but whose actions speak love. And it's good to feel thankful and grateful for them as we think of the family into which Jesus was born.

So that's Joseph. What of Mary? We often consider Mary as the prototype for our own pilgrimage. She bears God- isn't that what discipleship is? To let God grow in us, fill us, be the one who speaks through our actions, be birthed into the world and be a blessing to all?

She is our example. Armed with one piece of information- she is the mother of the Christ- Mary sets forth in the world and the story unfolds. Mary would still be, in our culture, a child. She accepts, in the way a trusting child accepts, the call upon her life. Children often know God better than we do- what happens as time goes on is the world gets in, and that sense of the divine is side-lined. Those of us who are older, more cynical, more used to being let down and letting others down, might have scoffed if the angel had visited us, we might have suggested it was a mistake!

So Mary went into the great revelation of the Gospel, and its great mystery. She didn't know anything of the nuts and bolts of what being the mother of Christ would mean. Mary just trusted.

All these years later, there is mystery for us, too... where we come to the end of our words, we can turn instead to action. To the humble, earthy simplicity of two people getting on with bringing up a child, accepting their lot, leaving us few words or reflections, but instead gifting us a person... the messiah.

May the faith, the obedience, the grit of Mary and Joseph be an inspiration to us in our own daily struggles and blessings. We give thanks for a young girl and her husband, in the swirl and clammer of an occupied land where life was precarious and their people were dispensable, a couple who were able to keep still enough to notice and attend to and obey the call of God, in order that we all can have life in abundance.