

Weekly Bible Study for Highcliffe and Bransgore Methodist Churches

Advent #2 Peace Luke 1 26-38 by Judith Allebon w/c Sunday 6th December 2020

These verses epitomise all that we know about the beginning of Christianity; all that we believe and all on which our faith is based. At the same time it represents all that we do not yet understand, comprehend or rationalise. The verses introduce us to the mysterious, the historic and the future roles of Christ in the human and the spiritual world.

Young Nazarene women of marriageable age would have attended Synagogue regularly; but unlike the boys in their families would not have studied Scriptural texts and history. Mary's parents would have considered her betrothal very carefully and would have known a little of Joseph's background. Would they have known his lineage? Would they have understood what was happening to their daughter? We can explore the historic aspects of this passage, delving deeply into Christ's ancestors. **The passage could lead us to discuss each of the Old Testament prophecies and consider how they are associated with so many aspects of Christ's life. Or we could look quietly at the words and begin to realise that they are speaking to us and the way in which we lead our own lives.**

Luke tells us that Mary, still a teenager, has to deal with a mystical messenger; the news that her mature cousin is to be a mother at last and that she will also become pregnant soon. With little opportunity to process these astonishing details; Mary is then told that she will carry The Son Of God, that he will be Great. The child will be descended from King David, will be made a King by God, but unlike a mortal king, his kingdom will have no end. We learn that Mary, unsurprisingly, questions her role. **Why was she chosen? How could she become a mother at this point in her life?**

Questioning in this way is symbolic of all our doubts, our incomprehension, our wavering humanity. Mary's response to this pivotal experience, such a momentous challenge, is sublime. She accepts totally as "The Lord's Servant". Mary had not gone on a retreat, searching for signs of how she was to lead her life. This challenge was imposed during the course of an ordinary day and according to Luke, accepted totally with dignity and grace. Mary was to carry The Servant King; she was compliant because she trusted utterly saying "May it happen to me as you have said". **How compliant and trusting are you?**

This passage is deeply significant because it not only heralds Christ's arrival on earth but introduces us to the "Kingdom without end". We all hold this as a central tenet, and in this beautifully worded passage we are linked to the moment of this promise and to the future. When we accept that "His Kingdom will have no end"; we are committing ourselves to live a Christian life which is not only about our own Spiritual journey; but also about playing our part in continuing, developing and promoting the Kingdom here on Earth. In this extraordinary year during the COVID pandemic we have a unique opportunity to do this. Advent has started, Gabriel has announced that Christ will arrive. We can show the world the true meaning of Christmas as lavish celebrations are curtailed but we welcome the Light of the World with all the deeper significance of the Christian festival. By exploring Mary's reactions, we put ourselves in the story. As with Mary, God sets us challenges when we least expect. **What divine voices or promptings do you hear today leading you to a challenge in your life? Perhaps a previously overwhelming idea or prompting that you ignored** -remember what God says about the seemingly impossible.

If you would enjoy an Advent outing with a difference go to Christchurch Priory where the reredos is in the form of a Tree of Jesse. It dates back to about 1350 and is a visual representation of Christ's lineage. The figures of Jesse, King David and another prophet all survive; and Christ is represented as part of a Nativity scene. There are Tree of Jesse windows in glorious Cathedrals and tiny chapels, celebrating Isaiah 11:10 the prophecy of the Messiah from the root of Jesse, the father of King David.