

**I Bring my busyness and your worries.
I bring my doubts and your desires.
I bring my fears and your failures.
I bring my hopes and your passions.
I bring all that I am, to the one who knows you through and through,
and loves you. Amen.**

Some of us are weary or downhearted.
Still, we say: let our hearts be glad, God is always here.
Let us approach God with confidence, because
God has always been with us.
Let our hearts be glad! Amen.

Read or Sing:

- 1 O come, O come, Immanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear :
*Rejoice ! Rejoice ! Immanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.*
- 2 O come, O come, O Lord of might
who to your tribes, on Sinai's height,
in ancient times did give the law
in cloud, and majesty, and awe :
- 3 O come, O Rod of Jesse, free
your own from Satan's tyranny ;
from depths of hell your people save,
and give them victory o'er the grave :
- 4 O come, O Key of David, come,
and open wide our heavenly home ;
make safe the way that leads on high,
and close the path to misery :
- 5 O come, O Day-spring, come and cheer
our spirits by your advent here ;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadows put to flight :

Latin, 18th century, based on the ancient *Advent Antiphons translated by John Mason Neale (1811–1866)* Reproduced from *Singing the Faith*
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Luke 1.46b-55 (Magnificat).

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 forever.”

Reflection: Mary’s beautiful song of praise is commonly called the Magnificat, from the Latin for “magnify. “Mary magnifies the Lord, proclaiming God’s greatness and rejoicing in God as Saviour. She begins with God’s actions in her own life, for in choosing her to be the mother of the messiah, the Mighty One has indeed “done great things for” her. Elizabeth has just welcomed and honoured her, saying, “blessed is she who believed.” Now she recognizes with awe that not only Elizabeth, but all generations will call her blessed. In our culture blessed has become a trend word. “Feeling blessed” makes regular appearances in Facebook posts. People tweet images or post pictures of themselves enjoying a delicious meal or an exotic vacation or a shopping spree at their favourite shop. “Blessed” has come to mean living a life of privilege and comfort. Using the term has become a way of celebrating those moments when everything is going well, and all seems right with the world — or at least one’s own little corner of it.

The blessedness that Mary celebrates stands in stark contrast to our culture’s attitude. By our standards she does not look at all blessed. God has chosen her to be the mother of the messiah, but in practical terms what does that mean for her? She is a nobody, a peasant girl from a small village. Her friends and neighbours see her as a disgrace because she is unmarried and pregnant (see Joseph’s initial reaction to her pregnancy in Matthew 1:19). Furthermore, as she will soon learn from Simeon if she has not perceived it already, being the mother of the messiah is a mixed blessing. She will bear the unspeakable grief of watching as her son is rejected, shamed, and crucified: “This child is destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel ... and a sword will pierce your own soul too” (Luke 2:34–35). Despite all this, Mary praises God for honouring her.

Furthermore, she perceives God’s action in her life as consistent with God’s saving action in history. Mary’s celebration of God’s strong arm recalls Hannah’s song in 1 Samuel 2:1–10. Like Mary, Hannah experienced a miraculous pregnancy. Like Mary’s son, Hannah’s son Samuel spoke God’s word. Both Hannah and Mary praise God for overturning society’s structures by bringing down the powerful and lifting the powerless. Mary’s song does not share Hannah’s militaristic imagery, however, for Mary’s son will bless not the makers of war, but the peacemakers.

Mary sings about the God who saves not just souls, but embodied people. The God she celebrates is not content merely to point people toward heaven; God’s redemptive work begins here on earth. God fills the hungry not only with hope, but with food. Rather than being satisfied with comforting the lowly, Mary’s Lord lifts them up, granting them dignity and honour, a seat at the table and a voice in the conversation. At the same time, God shows strength by disrupting the world’s power structures, dethroning rulers, and humbling the mighty.

Clearly such saving acts are good news for the poor and lowly, but what does Mary's song mean for the wealthy and the powerful? Is there nothing but judgment for them? Though judgment and salvation may seem like opposites, they go hand in hand. Those who stand in awe only of themselves and their own power will be judged. Yet if the wealthy and powerful can only see it, by bringing them down — by emptying and humbling them — God is saving them. When they turn their gaze from themselves and their own accomplishments, when their awe is directed to God — then there is mercy for them, too.

When God empties the rich of their excess and fills the hungry with good things, the result is not social reversal — with the powerless and the powerful changing places — as much as it is social levelling. The rich and powerful are stripped of their arrogance and taught to love their neighbours as they love themselves. Thus, God provides for the poor and honours the humiliated. When the arrogant are scattered and the powerful brought down, then every person has access to enough of the world's resources, and no one has too much. Every person is treated with dignity and respect, and no one uses power to harm.

Mary's song magnifies the Saviour who loves the whole world with a love that makes creation whole. The mother of the Messiah has experienced God's blessing. She is not blessed, as the 'world' understands it. Her blessing, like ours, is a cross-shaped blessing, "a condition of complete simplicity costing not less than everything"

Sing or Read:

- 1 How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
in a believer's ear!
It soothes our sorrows, heals our wounds,
and drives away our fear.
- 2 It makes the wounded spirit whole,
and calms the troubled breast;
'tis manna to the hungry soul,
and to the weary, rest.
- 3 Dear name — the rock on which I build,
my shield and hiding-place,
my never-failing treasury, filled
with boundless stores of grace!
- 4 Jesus! My Shepherd, Brother, Friend,
my Prophet, Priest, and King,
my Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,
accept the praise I bring.
- 5 Weak is the effort of my heart,
and cold my warmest thought;
but when I see thee as thou art,
I'll praise thee as I ought.
- 6 Till then I would thy love proclaim
with every fleeting breath;
and may the music of thy name
refresh my soul in death.

Prayers for others

We pray today for all who are downtrodden, all who are oppressed, all who know the heavy hand of marginalisation on them. God, we turn to you, remembering the words of Mary, praying that you will lift up the lowly, you will raise the voice of justice, and you will scatter oppression. May all who are oppressed be set free.

We ask this, in joy and gratitude. **In your name we pray.**

We pray that we might find rhythms of life that sustain us here. Rhythms for cultivating and renewing the earth; human community; justice; and creativity.

We ask this, in joy and gratitude. **In your name we pray. Amen.**

**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.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.**

**May our heart be at peace,
and our mind be at rest.
May I be confident in who you are,
and share God's gifts of light, hope and grace
with those I meet and those I pray for.
Amen.**

The Blessing of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, be with you, with those you love and with those you ought to love this day and forever more. Amen

