**Westfield URC 10.30am 29th November 2020**

**Call to worship Psalm 89 v 1-4**

I will sing of the Lord’s great love forever;
    with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known
    through all generations.
I will declare that your love stands firm forever,
    that you have established your faithfulness in heaven itself.
You said, “I have made a covenant with my chosen one,
    I have sworn to David my servant,
‘I will establish your line forever
    and make your throne firm through all generations.’

**Hymn No. MP 102 Come thou long**-**expected Jesus**

Come, thou long-expected Jesus,

born to set Thy people free;

from our fears and sins release us;

let us find our rest in Thee.

Israel's strength and consolation,

hope of all the earth Thou art;

dear desire of every nation,

joy of every longing heart.

Born Thy people to deliver;

born a child, and yet a King;

born to reign in us for ever;

now Thy gracious kingdom bring.

By Thine own eternal Spirit

rule in all our hearts alone:

by Thine all-sufficient merit

raise us to thy glorious throne.

Charles Wesley (1707-88) CCLI 150801

**Family Prayer & Lord’s Prayer**

Gracious God, coming to your people in a child, bringing your people new hope,

offering your people new life.

We come before you in worship we bring you all we are we lay before you our gift of praise.

Advent is a time for preparation – preparing for Christmas, for presents, cakes, trees.
Thank you, Lord, for the busy preparations for Christmas.

Advent is a time for preparing for the future, for thinking about our lives with Jesus,
rejoicing in our hopes and dreams.
We place these in your hands, Lord. Please help us to grow closer and closer to you in our lives.

Advent is a time for preparing for your coming as a tiny, helpless baby, and for when you come back again. It's a time for sharing you with friend & stranger, Lord, for clearing a way through the desert.

Loving God, help us to prepare well, with hope and joy, for Christmas, for the future, for your coming again.
Amen

Lord’s Prayer

Mission Prayer

**Advent One** (29th November) Candle reading

**People who follow**

Today is Advent Sunday, and we begin by looking back to the people God called to follow his path. We remember people like Adam and Noah and Abraham and Moses and the whole People of Israel who waited in excitement and hope for the promised Messiah.

We light this first candle to remember those who waited for the Messiah and pray that its light might bring us joy and hope as we travel through Advent together.

**Light one Candle**

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for those who followed your path, help us to follow the path Jesus set for us.

Amen.

**Hymn No. MP 62 Born in the night**

Born in the night, Mary's child,

a long way from your home:

coming in need, Mary's child,

born in a borrowed room.

Clear shining Light, Mary's child,

your face lights up our way.

light of the world, Mary's child,

dawn on our darkened day.

Truth of our life, Mary's child,

you tell us God is good;

prove it is true, Mary's child,

go to your cross of wood.

Hope of the world, Mary's child,

you're coming soon to reign;

King of the earth, Mary's child,

walk in our streets again.

GEOFFREY AINGER (1925- ) CCLI 150801

**Reading NT Luke 1 v 46b - 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.

Sermon : **A song of joy?**

The baby jumped with joy

Elizabeth and Mary shared their joy

Mary spoke those wonderful words we know as the Magnificat

If you have been in a school or a toddler group at this time of year you will probably have experienced the time of deciding who will play who in the nativity.

If you are a parent you may have known the joy or repercussions at home of your daughter being Mary or not being chosen. Almost instinctively the best behaved and most appealing looking girl is singled out. How this girl looks and behaves seems vital to the story being told. But does that do Mary justice?

Advent conjures up a variety of feelings but it is not the safe, happy story portrayed in most nativities. Joy is greater than happiness because we can be full of joy as Christians in challenging times as well as happy times. Mary must have been going through so many emotions. Shocked, confused & worried as well as full of joy because God had chosen her to fulfill the prophesy she would have heard about as she grew up.

Luke draws his readers into this exciting story. We can picture the young (and at this stage of her pregnancy, probably tired) Mary, making her way through hilly terrain with a spring in her step. She arrives at the house of her visibly expecting cousin,

Elizabeth, who is now at least six months pregnant. The words Elizabeth speaks to Mary, “Why am I so favoured that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”

mirror those that her son, John the Baptist, would one day say to Mary's son, Jesus:

“I need to be baptised by you, and you come to me?” This sense of humility and overwhelming wonder at being swept up into the purposes of God stands in stark contrast to those who presume they are favoured, those who already regard themselves as the rightful heirs of God's kingdom.

The pregnant peasant teenager bursts into spontaneous praise based on words she has heard in the past between such proud rulers and the humble heirs to God's kingdom.

It is a song of liberation, in which rulers are cast down from their thrones, while the everyday people are lifted up.

Mary's song about just reversal of fortune opens up a theme that threads its way throughout Luke's entire Gospel. Jesus brings a kingdom in which there is blessing for the poor and the rich in spirit, in which the first will be last and the last will be first, where those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. Top of Form

Mary’s song of praise illustrates her sense of expectation and her overwhelming joy.

Through looking at it we can explore how we praise God and become excited about the promises ahead. In today’s reading, Luke records Elizabeth’s inspired prayer of blessing over Mary, and Mary’s own song of praise, and they form part of a series of poetic songs in Luke’s birth stories. Elizabeth’s blessing is triggered

by her unborn child John’s reaction to the presence of Mary’s unborn child Jesus.

This pre-birth episode emphasises the point that these boys were destined for particular roles. Mary’s song is based on Hannah’s song uttered at the birth of Samuel. Jesus’ status has already been established by Elizabeth when she says Mary is the mother of her Lord visiting her and this provides the basis for Mary’s understanding of how his authority will affect humanity. Jesus is depicted as the one who comes to do battle with those powers and authorities that oppress and dehumanise, and to restore those who are the victims of such powers to full humanity. This naturally has an effect on the corrupt rich, and on the poor who are affected by them. In this way, Luke is preparing the ground for the way the rest of his Gospel presents Jesus as good news to the poor and the marginalized.

Mary's song of joy constitutes a response to the word of God's faithfulness to Israel.

**It is no calming lullaby but a robust hymn of praise.**

Inevitably, then, with the coming salvation of God, there is the reversal of powers,

the lifting up of the lowly, the hungry fed, the rich sent empty away. This is what can be expected to happen when God's strong rule is displayed in history. As Mary responds to the challenge of her calling we hear her complete acceptance of the immense nature of what she has undertaken. God has not chosen a girl of weakness and submission but a young lady of strength and understanding. The Magnificat is truly the mission statement of Jesus' radical ministry, pronounced outspokenly & joyfully by the lips of Mary. It is a wonderful summary of the challenge which God puts to us to live by His rules not those of the world.

As Mary praises God for choosing her we are reminded how each one of us are known by him, important to him and chosen by him if we are prepared to listen and respond when he speaks to us.

**This is truly A song of Joy for our world Amen**

**Hymn No MP 393 Joy to the world**

Joy to the world, the Lord has come!

Let earth receive her King;

let every heart prepare Him room

and heaven and nature sing,

and heaven and nature sing,

and heaven, and heaven and nature sing!

Joy to the earth, the Saviour reigns!

your sweetest songs employ

while fields and streams, and hills and plains

repeat the sounding joy,

repeat the sounding joy,

repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

He rules the world with truth and grace,

and makes the nations prove

the glories of His righteousness

the wonders of his love,

the wonders of his love,

the wonders, wonders of His love.

ISAAC WATTS (1674-1748) CCLI 150801

**Prayers of Intercession**

Lord, we long for the day
when the human family will stand shoulder to shoulder,
sharing a common vision
revealed through your glory.
We pray for those working for peace and reconciliation in our world

Lord, we pray for your church
as we seek to proclaim our faith in you.
Help all your church family to touch
the places and people in all our communities which have become
a wilderness to your word

Lord, we pray for those in need of comfort:
for the hungry and homeless who need the physical comfort of food and shelter;
for the lonely and rejected who need the comfort of love;
for the sick and suffering who need the comfort of healing;
for troubled souls who need your peace beyond our understanding

We remember those who have died
and pray for those struggling with bereavement.
In the face of the fragility of human life,

remind us daily that our life in Christ will stand forever.

We offer our prayers in the name of Jesus, and in anticipation and sure hope of the day when the only prayers needed will be those of adoration and praise.
**Amen.**

**Hymn No. MP 631 Tell out my soul**

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.

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.

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.

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!

© Timothy Dudley-Smith CCLI 150801

Blessing : As we look forward in hope and with joy as the people of God preparing for the coming again of our Saviour - May the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be among us and remain with us now and for ever more.

Amen