

# Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> April 2020 – reading and reflection

## **Collect – 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter**

Almighty Father,  
who in your great mercy gladdened the disciples  
with the sight of the risen Lord:  
give us such knowledge of his presence with us,  
that we may be strengthened and sustained by his risen life  
and serve you continually in righteousness and truth;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

## **Luke 1. 39-56**

<sup>39</sup> At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, <sup>40</sup> where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup> When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. <sup>42</sup> In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you will bear!" <sup>43</sup> But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? <sup>44</sup> As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. <sup>45</sup> Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfil his promises to her!"

<sup>46</sup> And Mary said:

"My soul glorifies the Lord

<sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,

<sup>48</sup> for he has been mindful

of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,

<sup>49</sup> for the Mighty One has done great things for me—  
holy is his name.

<sup>50</sup> His mercy extends to those who fear him,  
from generation to generation.

<sup>51</sup> He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;  
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

<sup>52</sup> He has brought down rulers from their thrones  
but has lifted up the humble.

<sup>53</sup> He has filled the hungry with good things  
but has sent the rich away empty.

<sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel,  
remembering to be merciful

<sup>55</sup> to Abraham and his descendants forever,  
just as he promised our ancestors."

<sup>56</sup> Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

## Reflection

It seems strange. We're currently sitting in the season of Easter and yet our key reading for weekday Morning prayer happens to be travelling through the gospel of Luke and over a couple of weeks, telling parts of the Christmas story. There must surely be method in this apparent contradiction and clash? Well dare I say, I think that it is really just luck of the draw, and to try and get through scripture over a three year cycle, it means things don't always 'fit' as we might want them to. But maybe this is a good lesson for us to learn?

In our reading today we hear the story of Mary walking around *70 miles* to visit Elizabeth, the one person who might understand her experience now they are both 'with child' through miraculous means. On hearing Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's baby joined with joy, and the two women praised God. I always smile when I see icons of this very scene, where often you will have Mary and Elizabeth standing next to one another and a 'cut out' of their belly's with the unborn John and Jesus with their hands up in excitement!

Mary in her praise then sings a song which echoes Hannah's story in 1 Samuel chapter 2, when she took her longed-for Samuel to the shrine. Mary joins the lineage of women who exult in God when they glimpse the radical extent of God's actions, God's much bigger plan and agenda that is rooted in the saving works among the nations. As we know, this child's birth would affect far more than the women's immediate families. This is not salvation just for a chosen few but an earth-shattering salvation for the *whole* of humanity. There is a challenge for us here: at times, are we too focussed on ourselves to see God's bigger picture?

Elizabeth had asked, 'Why has this happened to me?', now with Mary staying with her for three months, we can imagine the endless talking about the strange ways of God that had led these two women into unfamiliar territory. One long-shamed for being childless, the other facing shame and perhaps stoning to death when her pregnancy becomes known. They give to each other the gift of encouragement. Mary needed Elizabeth's wisdom about how to endure for the long haul of commitment to the God who was entrusting his Son to be born and raised by her in turbulent times. We need such encouragement, support, care and love in the uncertainty and fear of our present age.

Going slightly off topic, this idea of asking and questioning why did God choose to do something that might seem so crazy and unusual – the saviour of the world being born as a helpless babe into the most unusual and yet mundane of circumstances, goes to the heart of what is fancifully known as incarnational theology. One such person who spoke with such conviction and poetry about this, is remembered on this day by the Church worldwide. She is arguably one of the most influential women of history, who many might not have heard of. Her name is Catherine of Siena. Catherine was born in 1347 and became a Dominican tertiary at the age of eighteen. Nourished by a life of contemplative prayer and mystical experience, she devoted herself to active care for the poor and sick. She became increasingly sought out as an advisor on political as well as religious matters, and in 1376, she journeyed to Avignon as an ambassador to the pope and influenced his decision to return to Rome. This avoiding a

major schism not just within the Church but also within national relations. Catherine suffered a stroke on 21<sup>st</sup> April and died eight days later, on this day in the year 1380.

Catherine wrote a wonderful prayer that I think sums up God's action and plan as one that is simply rooted in genuine selfless love for all of the created order. It is something for us to cherish and to hold on to as we reside in our messy, unknown present. That God has a much bigger vision than we can imagine and yet through the life, death and resurrection of his Son, encourages, cares and carries us all.

Dear Lord,

it seems that you are so madly in love with your creatures that you could not live without us.

So you created us; and then, when we turned away from you, you redeemed us.

Yet you are God, and so have no need of us,

Your greatness is made no greater by our creation; your power is made no stronger by our redemption.

You have no duty to care for us, no debt to repay us.

It is love, and love alone, which moves you.

Let us therefore simply love one another as God loves us. Whether Easter, Christmas or any other time of the year, you can't go wrong that. Amen.