

CHRISTMAS revisited

Quiet Day Resources 1



Sacred texts for meditation & reflection

The Annunciation

Luke 1: 26-38 (NRSV)

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.'

Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?'

The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.'

Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.'

Then the angel departed from her.

The Visitation

Luke 1: 39-56 (NRSV)

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'

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 for ever.'
And Mary remained with her for about three
months and then returned to her home.

Sacred texts for meditation & reflection

Zechariah's Song

Luke 1: 26-38 (NRSV)

Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:

'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has looked favourably on his people
and redeemed them.
He has raised up a mighty saviour for us
in the house of his servant David,
as he spoke through the mouth of his holy
prophets from of old,
that we would be saved from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us.
Thus he has shown the mercy promised to
our ancestors,
and has remembered his holy covenant,
the oath that he swore to our ancestor
Abraham,
to grant us that we, being rescued from the
hands of our enemies,
might serve him without fear, in holiness and
righteousness before him all our days.
And you, child, will be called the prophet of
the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his
ways,
to give knowledge of salvation to his people
by the forgiveness of their sins.

By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness and
in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.'

Hannah's Song

1 Samuel 2: 1-10 (NRSV)

Hannah prayed and said,

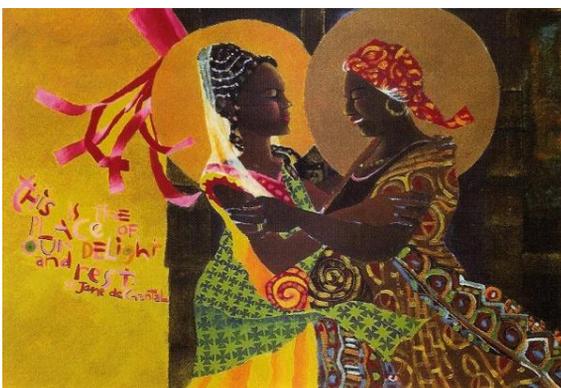
'My heart exults in the LORD;
my strength is exalted in my God.
My mouth derides my enemies,
because I rejoice in my victory.
'There is no Holy One like the LORD,
no one besides you;
there is no Rock like our God.
Talk no more so very proudly,
let not arrogance come from your mouth;
for the LORD is a God of knowledge,
and by him actions are weighed.
The bows of the mighty are broken,
but the feeble gird on strength.
Those who were full have hired themselves
out for bread,
but those who were hungry are fat with spoil.
The barren has borne seven,
but she who has many children is forlorn.
The LORD kills and brings to life;
he brings down to Sheol and raises up.
The LORD makes poor and makes rich;
he brings low, he also exalts.
He raises up the poor from the dust;
he lifts the needy from the ash heap,
to make them sit with princes
and inherit a seat of honour.
For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's,
and on them he has set the world.
'He will guard the feet of his faithful ones,
but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness;
for not by might does one prevail.
The LORD! His adversaries shall be shattered;
the Most High will thunder in heaven.
The LORD will judge the ends of the earth;
he will give strength to his king,
and exalt the power of his anointed.'

Art for meditation & contemplation



As a form of prayerful meditation, I invite you to take a few moments contemplating one or more of the paintings explored in our online retreat. You can click on each image to access a high resolution image. Let the art speak to you; let any memories or emotions surface and be acknowledged. You may find some of the following questions helpful in order to engage with and reflect on each painting:

1. What do you notice in this painting?
2. How does it reflect/complement the biblical story?
3. What does it say about God?
4. What does it say about human beings?
5. Do you have a favourite depiction?



Music for prayer & meditation

“Benedictus” (The Song of Zechariah) by Karl Jenkins (Hauser)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eGbHnJCDMyE>

Magnificat by Antonio Vivaldi -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kGJYPSSJM7k>

Vivaldi interpreted each verse of the Magnificat canticle with different musical material but kept the work concise. Michael Talbot characterised the movements in liner notes:

1 The first movement expresses the magnification, "Magnificat anima mea Dominum" (My soul magnifies the Lord), with a striking upward chromatic passage in slow tempo.

2 In the second movement, three passages of the verse are given to different solo voices in an aria a tre. "Et exultavit spiritus meus" (And my spirit rejoices) is sung by the soprano, "Quia respexit humilitatem" (because he regarded the humility of his servant) by the alto, with a choral entry to illustrate "omnes generationes" (all generations), and the passage "Quia fecit mihi magna" (because he did great things for me) by the tenor.

3 The third movement, "Et misericordia ejus", speaks of the mercy of the Lord for all who fear him. Both mercy and fear are expressed in a dense texture of imitative music, with chromatic lines and leaps of minor sixths and major sevenths, called "anguished intervals".

4 The fourth movement, "Fecit potentiam" (He exerts power), is a fast, powerful choral movement.

5 The next verse, "Deposuit potentes", describes how the mighty are thrown from their seats while the humble are exalted. Vivaldi expresses it in graphically dramatic unison lines of the choir.

6 In the sixth movement, "Esurientes implevit bonis", a duet of sopranos, often in parallel lines, illustrates how the hungry are filled with good things, on an ostinato figure in the bass line.

7 The seventh movement, "Suscepit Israel", is a short chorale movement saying that the Lord sustains Israel, adding in a faster middle section "Recordatus misericordiae suae" (remembering his mercy).

8 The eighth movement, "Sicut locutus est ad patres nostros" (As He has promised our fathers), is a cheerful trio for three soloists and two obbligato oboes. A reviewer described the lines of oboes and bassoon as "bubbly", in dialogue with "lively transparent vocal lines".

9 The final movement adds the traditional doxology on the biblical text "Gloria Patri" (Glory to the Father). The music recalls the beginning of the first movement, with a long chromatic melisma on "sancto" (holy). "Sicut erat in principio" (As it was in the beginning) is also reminiscent of the first movement but leads to a traditional double fugue treatment of "Et in saecula saeculorum" (and for ever and ever) in one voice and simultaneously "Amen" in another.

Music for prayer & meditation

“Redemption Song” by Bob Marley

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kOFu6b3w6c0>

Old pirates, yes, they rob I
Sold I to the merchant ships
Minutes after they took I
From the bottomless pit
But my hand was made strong
By the hand of the Almighty
We forward in this generation
Triumphantly

*Won't you help to sing
These songs of freedom?
'Cause all I ever have
Redemption songs
Redemption songs*

Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery
None but ourselves can free our minds
Have no fear for atomic energy
'Cause none of them can stop the time
How long shall they kill our prophets
While we stand aside and look? Ooh
Some say it's just a part of it
We've got to fulfil the book

*Won't you help to sing
These songs of freedom?
'Cause all I ever have
Redemption songs
Redemption songs
Redemption songs*

Redemption Song lyrics © Odnil Music Ltd., Fifty Six Hope Road Music Ltd.,
Blackwell Fuller Music Publishing Llc



Poetry for prayer & reflection

“For My People” by Margaret Walker

For my people everywhere singing their slave songs repeatedly: their dirges and their ditties and their blues and jubilees, praying their prayers nightly to an unknown god, bending their knees humbly to an unseen power;

For my people lending their strength to the years, to the gone years and the now years and the maybe years, washing ironing cooking scrubbing sewing mending hoeing plowing digging planting pruning patching dragging along never gaining never reaping never knowing and never understanding;

For my playmates in the clay and dust and sand of Alabama backyards playing baptizing and preaching and doctor and jail and soldier and school and mama and cooking and playhouse and concert and store and hair and Miss Choomby and company;

For the cramped bewildered years we went to school to learn to know the reasons why and the answers to and the people who and the places where and the days when, in memory of the bitter hours when we discovered we were black and poor and small and different and nobody cared and nobody wondered and nobody understood;

For the boys and girls who grew in spite of these things to be man and woman, to laugh and dance and sing and play and drink their wine and religion and success, to marry their playmates and bear children and then die of consumption and anemia and lynching;

For my people thronging 47th Street in Chicago and Lenox Avenue in New York and Rampart Street in New Orleans, lost disinherited dispossessed and happy people filling the cabarets and taverns and other people’s pockets and needing bread and shoes and milk and land and money and something—something all our own.



For my people walking blindly spreading joy, losing time being lazy, sleeping when hungry, shouting when burdened, drinking when hopeless, tied, and shackled and tangled among ourselves by the unseen creatures who tower over us omnisciently and laugh;

For my people blundering and groping and floundering in the dark of churches and schools and clubs and societies, associations and councils and committees and conventions, distressed and disturbed and deceived and devoured by money-hungry glory-craving leeches, preyed on by facile force of state and fad and novelty, by false prophet and holy believer;

For my people standing staring trying to fashion a better way from confusion, from hypocrisy and misunderstanding, trying to fashion a world that will hold all the people, all the faces, all the Adams and Eves and their countless generations;

Let a new earth rise. Let another world be born. Let a bloody peace be written in the sky. Let a second generation full of courage issue forth; let a people loving freedom come to growth. Let a beauty full of healing and a strength of final clenching be the pulsing in our spirits and our blood. Let the martial songs be written, let the dirges disappear. Let a race of men now rise and take control.

Margaret Walker, “For My People” from *This is My Century: New and Collected Poems*. Copyright © 1989 by Margaret Walker.

Other suggestions for your quiet time...

Getting creative

If you wish to get creative, why not use the story of the visitation or the Magnificat itself as an inspiration to write a poem, or your own redemption song? Or, if you're more visual, why not create a collage – using contemporary images from papers or magazines, or make a sketch, a drawing or a painting?

Let the creative process itself become a form of prayer so that you can encounter the living Christ in the midst of it.



A time to pray...

Finally, you may want to have a time of prayer (intercessory prayer), using Mary's Song to inspire you to pray for those in the margins of society, that God may bring them to the centre and lift them up. You may focus on a particular group of people or a particular part of the world, or situation that is close to your heart.

- The poor
- The hungry
- The victims of war
- The victims of abuse
- The refugees and asylum seekers
- The disappeared
- The sexually exploited
- The jobless
- The homeless
- Those with mental health issues
- Those going through a dark night of the soul