**EXPLORING THE SUNDAY GOSPEL AT HOME**

**THE BABY**

**EXPLORING NEXT SUNDAY’S THEME**

***Introducing the Gospel***

*Mary (Luke 1: 39-55)*

On the last Sunday of Advent the Church focuses attention on Mary who prepared for the first Christmas in a very special way. According to Luke, Mary (the mother of Jesus) and Elizabeth (the mother of John the Baptist) were relatives and were pregnant at the same time. In this Gospel passage the two pregnant women meet and Elizabeth acknowledges the supremacy of Mary’s unborn child.

The image to stimulate reflection on this passage is *the baby.*

***Core extract from the Gospel (Luke 1: 39-55; for reflection throughout the week)***

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.’

***Gospel prayer (for use throughout the week)***

Lord Jesus Christ,

you were born as a baby like us.

Help us to see you

in every human child;

for you are one with us.

Amen.

**READING NEXT SUNDAY’S GOSPEL**

**Luke 1: 39-55**

**Mary Visits Elizabeth**

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.’

**Mary’s Song of Praise**

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.’

**ENGAGING WITH THE THEME**

***Dwelling with the text (Luke 1: 39-55)***

Begin to explore Luke’s account of the meeting between Mary (the mother of Jesus) and Elizabeth (the mother of John the Baptist) by employing the SIFT approach of Sensing, Intuition, Feeling, and Thinking. You may find that one of these approaches comes easier to you than the others. But it is worth trying all four.

* What details in the passage catch your attention (Sensing)?
* What big ideas in the passage spark in your mind (Intuition)?
* What most touches your heart in the passage (Feeling)?
* What most stretches your mind and makes you think in the passage (Thinking)?

***Thinking and talking***

Identify topics within the passage that can get you thinking and talking. Here are some ideas to get you started.

* What is the significance of the meeting between Mary and Elizabeth?
* What is the importance of Luke reporting that Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit?
* What are the main themes in Mary’s song?
* Why does Mary’s song refer to Abraham?
* What does this narrative say for us today?

***Using your Bible***

Explore the importance of canticles in the two opening chapters of Luke’s Gospel.

* Luke 1: 67-79
* Luke 2: 28-32

Explore the Old Testament roots of Mary’s song.

* 1 Samuel 2: 1-10
* Psalm 34: 2-3
* Psalm 35: 9
* Psalm 71: 19
* Psalm 72: 17

***Exploring online***

Widen your exploration of Luke’s account of the meeting between Mary and Elizabeth by looking up some of the following themes and others of your own choosing.

* Mary and Elizabeth in the Bible
* Magnificat
* Magnificat musical settings (videos)

***Drawing on experience***

The image to stimulate reflection on Luke’s account of the meeting between Mary and Elizabeth is *the baby*.Draw on your own experience of babies. For example:

* What images and experiences do you associate with babies?
* What thoughts get prompted in your mind by Jesus as a baby?
* What do we learn about what it means to be human from a baby?

What have you learned about babies?

***Creating and making***

This section offers pointers to some creative activities that may be inspired by Luke’s account of the meeting between Mary and Elizabeth.

* Create a poster about preparing for a baby.
* Create a collage of images of babies.
* See how many people have pictures of themselves as a baby.
* Create a reflection, poem, or prayer on the theme of babies.



**EXPLORING THE SUNDAY GOSPEL AT HOME**

Each week we are inviting people in their homes to look forward to those Sunday services that follow the Revised Common Lectionary Gospel readings. We employ the SIFT approach (Sensing, Intuition, Feeling, and Thinking) to encourage reflection on the Sunday Gospel.

We are suggesting a variety of ways in which people of all ages, and households working together, may engage with the Gospel reading and celebrate that engagement with shared activities.

Our invitation then is for you to share your reflections, prayers and photos of your creative work with the Cathedral by emailing them to smc.lesliefrancis@gmail.com.

These materials have been developed by the Canon Theologian of Liverpool Cathedral working in collaboration with the staff team here at the Cathedral, and with sponsorship and support from the St Mary’s Centre in Wales.



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