

Advent 4 – Luke 1.26-38

Here we are, the last Sunday before Christmas Day – I wonder if we should be feeling a little more Christmassy – as if we don't have our own challenges going on we have the pandemic challenge and the impact we have on all that we understand of what it means to celebrate Christmas – with family, friends, socialising – being together...

But despite where we are in the world – on the ground – there is something about this time that remains constant, no matter what is happening on the outside.

This is a time when the 'earthiness' of a worldly Christmas meets the heavenly wonder and anticipation of what is about to happen – the birth of the baby Jesus – who is Emmanuel – that is – God with us. We are all part of the story that unfolds before us and within us.

This week, the fourth candle – the pink candle of Mary, the candle of joy, is lit to remember the woman Mary, not only for being the prophetic bearer of the long-awaited Messiah who will be crowned and given the throne of the house of David, a house built by God, but we will also remember Mary for being the ideal Christian role model – a devoted follower of her son, and a servant of God who embodies faith and faithfulness.

And Like Mary – and like her cousin Elizabeth who rejoiced in the fact that she is to bear a son – we are - 'regarded' – we too have been noticed and favoured by God. This becomes harder to remember this in the middle of Christmas season activities – and in the middle of the difficult times we are facing, so it is good that here we can be still for a moment and listen to – and breathe into ourselves - the words heard by Mary.

I invite you to listen to these words again, as if Angel Gabriel has come and spoken them only for you.... 'Greetings favoured one! The Lord is with you!... Do not be afraid...for you have found favour with God...'

You have found favour with God..... We are all favoured by God and nothing is impossible with Him in our lives

Although we aren't the ones who will be in Bethlehem literally giving birth to Jesus Christ, we can be the ones to consciously give birth to him in our hearts, minds and actions – through the life we lead and the Christian story we tell. This is a message for us to remember that nothing is impossible with God...

Here we have on one hand we have an elderly woman, pregnant after years of barren longing, and a young, ordinary small-town teenager chosen to give birth through the Holy Spirit - both 'favoured'. If these experiences are believed, they crash through the scientific, emotional, and logical boundaries of our worldly realities according to Luke, taking us along into God's world in which nothing is impossible – and everything is possible, including an immaculate conception.

We heard that Mary herself is totally bewildered by the seemingly impossible situation. When Mary ponders, the angel has barely said anything at this point – so perhaps the impossibility for her is that it is she who has been favoured despite her unworthiness - and not the fact that the birth will be immaculately conceived. That, she believes...

Mary shows us how to move from the pondering and waiting of Advent into the joyful reality of Christmas and shows us how to bear witness to God's transforming grace incarnated on earth in the birth of Jesus by believing, obeying and following – she shows us how to accept and receive the blessings of God's grace just as she herself was blessed.

We can deepen our conviction that God's word WILL be fulfilled – that the world's impossibilities – the world's NO to God – will be smashed by God's YES for the world and all that God shows us through Jesus – YES to the possibility of peace and wholeness.

In Advent Mary waits for the birth of her child... The Church waits for Christ to come again in glory.... And each one of us waits and longs for redemption, new birth, new life symbolised in a newborn child – light in the darkness, a Springtime experience in the middle of Winter.