



Humble Lifted High

A service for Lady Day 2007

mothers
union



Christian care for
families worldwide

Introduction

On this Lady Day, we celebrate with members around the world, recognising that we belong to an international organisation in which we all share an equal part.

We come together on the same day that the church remembers, reflects on, and responds to the Bicentenary of the Abolition of Slavery Act that was passed in UK Parliament this day in 1807. We join in the process of acknowledging that modern slavery still exists.

At the annunciation, Mary made a free choice to be the bearer of a child who would bring freedom to the entire world. Traditionally, the church has characterised Mary as silent and passive, but in fact, she is a major spokesperson for those who are oppressed. In the Magnificat, Mary tells us that justice is at the heart of the Christian message. She rejoices because of the freedom God offers in lifting the humble high.

Today, we join in with Mary's song.

Gathering

Today is the beginning of our liberation.
Today Gabriel announces God's dwelling on earth.
Together with him let us cry out aloud:
**Let us rejoice,
God is with us.**

Listening, like Mary, as we open our minds:
**Let us rejoice,
God is with us.**

Watching, like Mary, as God surprises us:
**Let us rejoice,
God is with us.**

Being honest, like Mary, when we don't understand:
**Let us rejoice,
God is with us.**

Responding, like Mary, to God's promise of freedom:
**Let us rejoice,
God is with us.**

Questioning, like Mary, as we engage with the world:
**Let us rejoice,
God is with us.**

Pledging, like Mary, to lift up the humble:
Let us rejoice,
God is with us.

Adapted from the traditional Eastern Orthodox hymn for the Annunciation and Luke 1:26–28

Hymn

Luke 1: 26 - 38 - adapted by Gillian Barker

... And then, something very strange happened. I was sitting in my room, on my own, when I realised there was someone standing beside me. I remember thinking that perhaps I was having a vision, or was I just daydreaming? However, when he spoke, his voice sounded real enough, and he greeted me most courteously, as if I was someone very special.

He said that God had sent him to give me a message. It was Gabriel! - the angel we think of as being God's special messenger. I can tell you, I was worried - and frightened too. But he tried to reassure me, and said that I had no need to be afraid, that God was being particularly gracious to me. So I listened as calmly as I could, and there was a big shock coming! He told me that I was going to give birth to a baby boy. He even told me what name I should give the baby ... Jesus.

He spoke to me very quietly.

"Don't be afraid Mary. The Holy Spirit will come to you, and it will be through the power of the Lord High God that you will conceive. You will give birth to a holy child, and he will be called the Son of God. He will be a great king, and his reign will never end."

I was speechless. I couldn't take it in, and part of me still thought I might be dreaming. The angel seemed to be waiting for me to say something, and suddenly I was filled with a feeling that everything was going to be all right. So I bowed my head and said:

"I am God's faithful servant. I trust and believe that your words will come true." And then he was gone.

Your word is a lantern to our feet
and a light upon our path.

The Magnificat, adapted from Luke 2:46–54

Reader 1

And Mary said:
"My soul glorifies God,
my spirit rejoices in my Saviour,
for he has remembered my humility.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
for God has done great things for me —
holy is his name.

Reader 2

God remembers everyone who turns to him
from generation to generation.

Reader 3

God has performed mighty deeds
and has cast out the proud.

Reader 2

God has lifted up the humble
and has brought down rulers from their thrones.

Reader 3

God has filled the hungry with good things
and has sent the rich away empty.

**My Soul glorifies God,
my spirit rejoices in my saviour.**

Reflection

Jesus sat in the temple, surrounded by the people.

"And what of the humble?" the people asked.

"What of those who walk with their eyes cast down and their heads bowed low, examining the grains of the pavement? What of minority groups, the abused, the mistreated, those told by society they must fall and never rise?"

"They will be lifted up", Jesus said.

"A hand will reach down and raise their heads, turning their eyes from the pavement to the light of the sun, like Mary, rising from her knees as the angel blessed her".

"And what of the disadvantaged?" the people asked.

"What of those who are weighed down, their necks burdened by other people's abuses of power? What of people caught up in unfair trade, in unemployment, in discrimination, those told by society they must fall and never rise?"

"They will be lifted up", Jesus said.

"A hand will reach down and roll away the burden, releasing their crushed bodies and freeing them to dance, like Mary, rising from her knees as the angel blessed her".

"And what of the hungry and poor?" the people asked.

"What of those who scabble around in the dust searching for food, what of the homeless, the people in developing countries, the refugees, those told by society they must fall and never rise?"

"They will be lifted up", Jesus said.

"A hand will reach down and hold on to their hand, drawing them to their feet, and supporting their every step, like Mary, rising from her knees as the angel blessed her".

"And exactly how, Jesus, do you suppose this will happen?" the people asked.

"We are not like Mary. We not visited by angels, or given mystical apparitions. How will they be lifted up?"

Jesus looked at them calmly and said, "To lift up the humble, stop priding yourself. To lift up the disadvantaged, stop flouncing your power. To lift up the hungry, stop grabbing with your own hands. For whatever you do for the least of the people, you do for me".

Confession

In penitence and faith, let us confess our part in the continuation of oppression today.

We have been proud
and have made others lowly.
We have abused power
and have made others suffer.
We have misused riches
and have made others poor.
God of all freedom,
have mercy on us.

Absolution

May the God who lifts up our heads
when we bow down in penitence
forgive us, and lift us up high again,
and make us always mindful
of what other people need.

Amen

Hymn

Intercessions

Holding in mind now the needs of the world, we bring before God and ourselves
our intercessions.

*Please insert your own diocesan intercessions, and after each
intercession, end with the response:*

Grant them, God, to rise higher and higher.

Each time we say these words, a candle will be lit to symbolise how people are
lifted up as we pray for them. Our prayers are lifted high to heaven, just as the
flames rise upwards.

Based on an African prayer, from Samburu, Kenya, in *Hallelujah for the Day*,
ed. Anthony J Gittins, Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002

Lord's Prayer

Calling to mind the unity the whole world shares in God, we join in the Lord's
Prayer.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and for ever.
Amen

Mothers' Union Prayer

Remembering the work of our organisation, unified in lifting the humble high across the world, we say together our Mothers' Union prayer.

Loving Lord

We thank you for your love so freely given to us all.

We pray for families around the world.

Bless the work of the Mothers' Union

as we seek to share your love

through the encouragement, strengthening

and support of marriage and family life.

Empowered by your Spirit,

may we be united in prayer and worship,

and in love and service reach out

as your hands across the world.

In Jesus' name,

Amen

Sharing the Peace

United in prayer, we join together at the close of this service to commit ourselves to lifting the humble high, as Mary did.

The sign of peace is a model for the way we should seek to live. We are offering affirmation, lifting each other up with love. As we exchange a sign of peace, let us dedicate ourselves to lifting the humble high in the world at large in our daily lives.

God is our peace.

May we embrace each other in God's peace,

holding divine love within our clasped hands.

The peace of God be with you now and always.

And also with you.

We exchange a sign of the peace.

Hymn

Blessing

The God of Mary's song
preserve us from our pride,
disrupt our patterns of power,
detach us from our greedy hands,
strengthen our work for the freedom of all
and bless us as we lift the humble high.
Amen

Go now, and seek to bring freedom
to everyone you meet,
and everyone you should be meeting.
As you seek to lift the humble high,
may God be with you.
In the name of Christ
Amen