

Mears Ashby and Hardwick and Sywell with Overstone



**Prayers and Reflections
for use at home**

**Sunday 21 December 2025
Advent 4**

Welcome to this week's Prayers and Reflections. Our journey through Advent is drawing to a close. On this final Sunday, we come to Mary's story of courageous faith. She was willing to allow God to disrupt her life so that his Messiah could come and transform lives. It was a truly brave 'Yes, let it be to me.' It is equalled by Joseph's gentle courage in saying to Mary, 'Yes, I will stand by you.'

May you be inspired by their courage.

Every blessing,

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*As you prepare to wonder at Mary's courage,
and her quiet faith, open your heart in praise.*

Tell out, my soul,
the greatness of the Lord:
unnumbered blessings,
give my spirit voice;
tender to me
the promise of his word;
in God my Saviour
shall my heart rejoice.

Timothy Dudley-Smith (1926-2024)

based on Luke 1:46-55

CCLI reported

Prayers and Reflections
for use at home on Advent 4
Courage to say 'Yes'

PREPARING OURSELVES

Take a moment to be still in God's presence and feel his love. If you are indoors, you may wish to light a candle as a sign of God's love - here, in your room. You may also wish to have a bowl of water ready for the time of letting go. When you are ready, say this opening prayer.

O God, you search me and you know me.
All my thoughts lie open to your gaze.
You know the journeys that I take
and the places where I rest.
You know all that is on my heart,
every one of my worries.
Help me to let go of them,
for a while, as I spend time in your presence.
Amen.

LETTING GO

If you come to this time of prayer and reflection with any regrets, with things that you wish you had not said, done or been, offer them to God in the silence of your heart. And then, when you are ready, reflect on your life with the second verse from this week's hymn.

Tell out, my soul,
the greatness of his name:
make known his might,
the deeds his arm has done;
his mercy sure,
from age to age the same;
his holy name,
the Lord, the mighty one.

Timothy Dudley-Smith



If you wish, dip your finger into a bowl of water and make the sign of the cross on your palm.

Mary's song praises God for being God. She trusts absolutely in his name, which is "I AM who I AM" – the name that he revealed to Moses at the Burning Bush. It is a holy name that has the power to transform lives, Joseph's as well as Mary's, by the way that he favours his chosen ones. Pause to reflect on the times that he has lived up to his name and been a powerful source of blessing.

Mary recognises that God is a God of mercy. Mercy is a two-sided coin, a precious coin. It begins with God's sympathy and compassion for those who are struggling in life – the hungry and homeless, the down-trodden and looked down on, the lost and lonely, the frail and the sick, and so the list goes on. He sees the brokenness in our world today. He recognises the causes of their suffering. His Messiah is coming to bring light into their darkness. He is also coming to bring God's forgiveness to those who have lost their way in life. The only condition is that they turn their lives away from the darkness of sin and selfishness towards the light of love, peace and justice.

Ponder your own need of God's mercy – whether it is his compassion and/or his forgiveness. Pause in stillness to receive of him. Give thanks for his faithfulness – from age to age he is the same. Praise be!



Ascribe to the Lord, you powers of heaven,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
Ascribe to the Lord the honour due his name;
worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.
The Lord shall give strength to his people;
the Lord shall give his people
the blessing of peace.

Psalm 29:1-2, 10

PRAYING TODAY'S PRAYER

(The Collect)

Today, this prayer is being said across our villages and the worldwide Church. Add your voice to the earthly circle of prayer to our Faithful One.

Eternal God,
as Mary waited for the birth of your Son,
so we wait for his coming in glory;
bring us through the birth pangs of this present age
to see, with her, our great salvation
in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Our prayer invites us to picture Mary in her nine months of waiting: waiting on Joseph and with Joseph, waiting with her cousin Elizabeth, and on her own, waiting on the birth of her special Son. Being a first-time mum is hard enough, but to be the centre of so much attention - she was after all unmarried as her pregnancy began - would have been tough. Yet, she also had the secret knowledge of who her Son will be. The Son who she sang about in her song (the Magnificat) – the song which is the inspiration for this week's Advent hymn. You can feel the joy bubbling up inside Mary as she pondered the angel's visit and her 'Yes, let it be to me.' The bible hasn't recorded Joseph's song. He too had his life changed by an angel's visit and by his courage to say, 'Yes, I will stand by Mary.' His joy may be more muted than Mary's, but it is heartfelt. The Messiah is coming!



Tell out, my soul,
the greatness of his might:
powers and dominions
lay their glory by;
proud hearts and stubborn
wills are put to flight,
the hungry fed,
the humble lifted high.

Timothy Dudley-Smith

LISTENING TO GOD'S WORD

Joseph says 'Yes'

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: his mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.'

All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel' (which means 'God with us').

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Matthew 1:18-25

Yes, I will stand by Mary...

A young woman preparing for her marriage is confronted with a most unwelcome message. She is to become pregnant before her married life begins. Not so unusual for today's society, but deeply shameful in Mary's society. She is being asked to do what is wholly against her religious tradition and social upbringing. She is to sacrifice her social standing, facing the disapproval of her family, friends and neighbours... and Joseph too. She is being asked to put God's plan before her own life. Who will believe that the child she is carrying is of the Holy Spirit? That he is God's own Son – the Messiah? Courageously, she says, 'Yes, let it be to me.'

Mary has gone down in history as the mother of Jesus, God's Son. Less is written or sung about the man who had been looking forward to Mary becoming his wife – Joseph. The consequences of her 'Yes, let it be to me' were devastating for Joseph. He faced three stark choices – he could have her stoned to death as set out in the Law of Moses, divorce Mary and try to get on with his own life or stand by Mary and bring up her son as his own. All three options would have had an impact on his standing within the community.

We learn two things about Joseph from this short passage on his wrestle with God and with his conscience. Firstly, Joseph is a man of mercy, showing both compassion for Mary and forgiveness as he doesn't wish to punish Mary for her unfaithfulness. He plans a quiet divorce. Secondly, he is a man who trusts God enough to say 'Yes' to standing by Mary. He is willing to believe what feels unbelievable – Mary's child is from God, not man. Mary is without sin.

What love is this! What courage is this! What faith is this! Like Mary, Joseph will have to face his parents' questions and his friends' comments and live with the shame that comes with God's radical plan.

Joseph's ear is finely tuned into what God is saying to him. During the long months of waiting, he will come to realise the degree of trust God is placing in him. The Messiah is going to be in his care. The world's future will be in his carpenter's hands as well as God's Son's. What an awesome responsibility! Ponder this as you sing or say Mary's final verse.



Tell out, my soul,
and Spirit now proclaim;
with Mary let the world rejoice
and praise God's holy name!
Tell out, my soul,
the greatness of the Lord
to children's children
and for evermore.

Timothy Dudley-Smith

OUR PRAYERS

Feel free to use one or more of these prayers and to add your own.

Lord Jesus, with Mary my soul rejoices at the wonder of your coming to live as her Son and as our Saviour King. You fill me with joy!
Yet, at times, I also need Mary's quiet courage. Strengthen me, I pray...
Lord, hear my prayer.

Lord Jesus, with Joseph my soul rejoices at the trust God shows in us. The planet you made with love and came to redeem is in our hands. Strengthen, Lord, those who are your lights in the world's darkness...
Lord, hear my prayer.

Lord Jesus, with Mary and Joseph my soul rejoices at the gift of new life. Being parents-to-be can be a joyous time. For some, it can be an anxious time. Strengthen, Lord, all parents in waiting...
Lord, hear my prayer.

Offer your own heartfelt prayers and yearnings, praise and thanksgivings.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. **Amen.**

PRAYER OF BLESSING

A closing prayer of blessing for this week.

O God, you search me and you know me,
all my thoughts and feelings are open to your gaze,
you see the paths I will take before I take them. Guide my daily living.
Bless me and keep my loved ones safe, I pray. **Amen.**