**Reflections 22nd – 28th December**

**Bible study on Luke 1.46b-55 (Magnificat)**

**Begin with an opening prayer**

Lord help us, today and always,
to find and understand the peace that you give.
May we become channels of your peace to others.
**Amen.**

 **Read the passage**

*Consider different ways to read the text. For example, hearing it in more than one version of the Bible.*

**Mary’s Song**

**46**And Mary said:

“My soul glorifies the Lord
**47**    and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
**48**for he has been mindful
    of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
**49**    for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
    holy is his name.
**50**His mercy extends to those who fear him,
    from generation to generation.
**51**He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
    he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
**52**He has brought down rulers from their thrones
    but has lifted up the humble.
**53**He has filled the hungry with good things
    but has sent the rich away empty.
**54**He has helped his servant Israel,
    remembering to be merciful
**55**to Abraham and his descendants forever,
    just as he promised our ancestors.”

 **Explore and respond to the text**

*Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once, or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.*

 **Bible notes**

* This is Mary’s song of praise when she arrives at the house of her relative Elizabeth, after travelling south from her home in Galilee to the hills around Jerusalem. Mary’s Magnificat resembles Hannah’s song (see 1 Samuel 2:1-10), though it is more personal, full of joy and hope because of the salvation she carries in her body. Notice how it pictures the movement of God’s grace. It starts by recalling God’s favour towards her lowliness (v.48; cf Luke 1:30). As it moves outwards, its message becomes more radical. God will transform the injustices enjoyed by those who are rich and well-fed into blessings for the humble and hungry. So, Mary looks forward to a salvation that can be seen, tasted and embodied in the lives of ordinary people.
* The Magnificat doesn’t specifically mention peace; this has to wait until the angels’ Gloria when Mary’s son is born (Luke 2:14). Yet the hallmarks of peace are evident in God’s readiness to bless the lowly (v.48); the mercy that flows from one generation to another (v.50); and the way divine strength re-orders the world to benefit the humble poor (vv.51-53). In all this God is said to ‘look’, ‘remember’ and ‘help’ – language that suggests the humanity and intimacy of God’s dealings with his people. Mary expects salvation to feature in the day-to-day life of ordinary people. But its radical peace doesn’t come cost-free, as Mary will discover when she takes her child to the Temple (Luke 2:33-35). Her song of joy will one day turn to lamentation, like Jesus’ tears for Jerusalem, which cannot be true to its name as ‘city of peace’ because it misses the moment of God’s visitation (Luke 19:41ff).

 **Reflection**

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

Mary and Elizabeth meet at a time full of personal turmoil. Mary is young, probably feeling outcast and unsure. Elizabeth may be conscious of being an older mother and her husband is currently mute. They might both be wondering what the neighbours are saying about their unexpected pregnancies. Yet there is real joy in their time together, and they seem to find peace and acceptance of God’s will. There must have been a real sense of mutual support and encouragement. A hymn by Fred Kaan expresses it like this: ‘Put peace into each other’s hands, and like a treasure hold it ….’ (Stainer and Bell, 1989). Can we do this for each other?

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*



**Questions**

* What is the message of the Knife Angel?
* What does ‘Peace, actually’ mean to you?
* What opportunities are
* there to experience peace this Advent?

**Prayer**

*Adapt to your local context.*

God of wisdom and wonder,
we praise you for your gift of peace:
for its depth when we are most troubled;
for its comfort when we are most afraid;
for its simplicity when we are most pressured;
for its truth when we are most disconcerted;
and for its stillness when we are most swamped by the
noise and busyness of Christmas.
We praise you, in Jesus’ name.
**Amen.**