



Love

Sunday
22nd December, 2024

*Love is all
around us*



St Peter's by the Lake
PAYNESVILLE
Anglican Diocese of Gippsland



Breaking Open the Word

Prepared by

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INTRODUCTION

READINGS

Micah 5.2-5a

Canticle: Magnificat or Psalm
80.1-8

Hebrews 10.5-10

Luke 1.39-45 [46-55]

Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collect

Introduction

Reflection

Discussion Questions

Five Days of Meditation and Prayer

O Lord, raise up (we pray thee) thy power,
and come among us, and with great might succour us:
that whereas, through our sins and wickedness,
we are sore let and hindered
in running the race that is set before us,
thy bountiful grace and mercy
may speedily help and deliver us;
through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord,
to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost
be honour and glory, world without end.

Dennis explores the significance of Mary's song, the Magnificat, in his sermon, as recorded in Luke's Gospel. In the face of life-altering events, he emphasises how Mary and Elizabeth express profound joy and praise to God for His faithfulness and mercy.

Through the Magnificat, Mary highlights God's enduring promises and willingness to overturn societal norms by uplifting the lowly, filling the hungry, and bringing justice, resonating deeply with themes of social justice in Scripture.

Mary's song serves as a call to acknowledge God's intervention in the world and inspires believers to actively participate in promoting compassion and justice within their communities.

Dennis further articulates that worship is not merely a routine practice but a holistic way of life, urging believers to integrate praise

into everyday interactions. He reflects on how worship reorients focus on God, instilling hope, purpose, and peace while encouraging a communal sense of belonging in the body of Christ.

He posits that believers can profoundly impact the world around them through living out worship, allowing God's love to shine through their lives.

Ultimately, Dennis invites everyone to embrace a lifestyle of worship filled with joy and devotion to God, fundamentally transforming how they relate to themselves and others in their faith journey.

Prayer

- You can pray for the courage to apply the principles from the sermon in your daily interactions with others this week.
- Think about how you can actively serve someone in your community, and pray for the opportunity and the willingness to take action.
- You can seek God's guidance in navigating strained relationships, reflecting on the message of forgiveness and reconciliation.
- Reflect on ways to nurture gratitude in your life this week, and offer a prayer for the awareness to recognise and appreciate the blessings surrounding you.

God of Creation, breathe into us, made of clay,
your gift of life so that we, made in your image
may become your eyes, ears, hands and voice.

In Luke's Gospel, Mary's song, the Magnificat, responds to the news of bearing Jesus and her subsequent visit to Elizabeth, who greets her as "blessed among women." Both women, experiencing miraculous pregnancies, respond with praise, undaunted by the profound changes that lie ahead.

Many traditions outside the Roman Catholic church tend not to make much of Mary's song, although, for us Anglicans, her song is at the heart and centre of our faith. We sing her song at Evening Prayer, using the beautiful tradition of the Magnificat, even doing so last night. In these very words of Mary, there are profound lessons her song imparts.

The Magnificat is a profoundly expressive hymn in which Mary does not merely recite words but passionately exalts God for honouring the sacred promises made to her ancestors. In her heartfelt expression of gratitude, she celebrates God's greatness and boundless mercy, touching her life in her humble state.

Mary's worship goes above and beyond what is personal; it beautifully resonates powerfully and universally, highlighting the depth of God's unwavering care and justice. The Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55), which is Mary's heartfelt song of praise, wonderfully emphasises the fulfilment

of God's ancient promises of power and justice in several meaningful ways:

Mary joyfully shares that God "has helped his servant Israel, remembering his mercy, as he promised to our ancestors, to Abraham and his descendants forever" (Luke 1:54–55). This beautifully links her current experience with God's covenant with Abraham, reminding us that God's promises are enduring and trustworthy.

Mary's song beautifully expresses how God's power works in extraordinary ways to bring to life the ancient promises of justice. She joyfully praises God for scattering the proud, unseating the powerful, and lifting the lowly (Luke 1:51–52). This message deeply resonates with the themes found in the Hebrew Scriptures, mirroring the beautiful reversal of fortunes described in Hannah's heartfelt prayer (1 Samuel 2:1–10).

Mary praises God for filling the hungry with good things while sending the rich away empty, as mentioned in Luke 1:53. This idea reflects justice in the law and the prophets. Here, God is seen as the defender of those who are oppressed and the provider for those in need. This aligns with the ancient vision of a just and righteous world, as expressed in Isaiah 61:1–3.

Mary beautifully highlights that God's power shines not through domination

but through the loving mercy and care for those who respect Him, as we see in Luke 1:50. This message resonates with how the Bible portrays God as both mighty and compassionate. He embodies a vision of justice for marginalised people while lovingly keeping His promises of mercy to the faithful.

The Magnificat presents the arrival of Jesus as the realisation of God's cherished promise. This promise is for justice and strength, deeply rooted in the ancient covenants with Abraham and Israel. In her song, Mary joyfully proclaims a God who intervenes in our world to right wrongs, uplift the oppressed, and usher in a fresh wave of divine loyalty and justice.

In a world often clouded by despair, she boldly uplifts the downtrodden, feeds the hungry, and bravely stands against oppression. The Magnificat becomes a timeless call for social justice and compassion, encouraging everyone to partake in this divine mission of mercy and love. We can turn the vision of peace into reality through our collective social justice and compassion efforts.

Following Mary's inspiring example, we are inspired and motivated to acknowledge the divine presence that permeates our lives and the world around us. This awareness has taken on particular significance in contemporary Australia, compelling us to champion justice as an abstract ideal and a tangible, everyday commitment to one another within our communities.

Our social fabric can significantly

benefit from the promotion of compassion. Each act of kindness and understanding is a fundamental building block for peace, creating environments where individuals feel safe, valued, and loved. Just imagine communities coming together to support one another, fostering a culture of empathy that celebrates diversity and promotes inclusivity rather than fearing differences.

Justice and compassion can be more than ideals—they can flourish as a way of life! By embodying these excellent virtues in our daily interactions, we're helping to weave a beautiful love narrative across Australia. This positive energy inspires those around us, creating a ripple effect that lovingly urges others to join us in our mission. By embracing these values, we enrich our lives and nurture a more harmonious society. Together, we promote peace, understanding, and a warm sense of community that truly benefits all individuals, no matter their background.

Mary's song beautifully resonates with us, capturing the joy of God's promises while acknowledging the challenging realities of a world filled with injustice. As we explore the Magnificat, we discover how to intertwine praise and protest. It's not only about celebrating God's goodness; it's also about nurturing our desire for a fairer world. We may ask, How does our praise strengthen our commitment to fighting injustice? And how does our deep longing for justice enhance our worship experience?

Worship isn't just about singing songs on Sunday or praying in church—it's a way of life. It's about recognising who God is, giving Him honour, and letting that shape how we live daily. Worship is the outward expression of a heart tuned to God, one of the clearest examples of living a godly life.

In Romans 12:1, Saint Paul encourages us to offer our bodies as sacrifices that are holy and pleasing to God, as this truly reflects worship. Worship is more than just our words or songs; it's about how we live our lives daily. We worship by honouring God through our thoughts, words, and actions, making every moment meaningful.

Worship teaches us to trust God, to stay humble, and to recognise God's goodness in our lives. It keeps us focused on the divine plan instead of our own, reminding us that every part of our lives—our work, our relationships, even how we spend our time—can honour him. It is the core part of what we call our mission.

When worship becomes the centre of our lives, everything changes. Let me explain how:

When we worship, we shift our focus away from ourselves and towards God. Concentrating on God's greatness, power, and love gives us a new perspective on everything else. Our challenges may not vanish, but worship reminds us that God is more significant than our struggles. Even in difficult times, it gives us hope, purpose, and peace.

Let's be honest—life can be exhausting. But when we worship, we're not just singing or praying; we connect with God

who sustains us. Worship fills us with His strength, His wisdom, and His peace. Suddenly, even the most ordinary tasks—like working, helping a neighbour, or caring for family—become opportunities to serve God and reflect His love.

We get the fantastic opportunity to reflect more closely on His character when we worship God. The Holy Spirit gently works within us, nurturing beautiful virtues like kindness, patience, humility, and love, profoundly influencing how we connect with those around us. Through our acts of worship, we experience an incredible transformation in our presence in the world. We start to understand why hope, peace, joy, and love are the foundations that prepare us to embrace the humble, incarnate Word of God, who lovingly comes to us as a baby in a manger.

Worship isn't just personal—it's something we do together. When we gather to worship, we remind each other that we're not alone but part of God's family. And that sense of community strengthens us, not just in church, but in how we live our daily lives.

Here's something extraordinary: a life of worship speaks to others. When people see how we live—with joy, peace, and purpose—they notice. Worship becomes a way to share God's love with the world around us. Jesus said, "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

So, what does this all mean? It signifies that worship isn't just something we engage in but an integral part of who we are. It is about living every moment to

honour God, allowing gratitude, love, and trust in the Holy Spirit to guide our thoughts, actions, and words.

Living a life of worship beautifully deepens our connection with God. It transforms and strengthens us, allowing us to reflect God's love in amazing ways that can change our world. It's no wonder that the Song of Mary, the Magnificat, highlights the magnificent worship we can embrace to support all we are and can become.

Let's embrace lives filled with worship—each day, in every little way—because our God truly deserves all our devotion. May all that we do showcase our hope, our desire for peace, and the joy that surprises us in the most unexpected moments and places. This joy forms the beautiful foundation of love that has come into the world. Indeed, God's name is holy, and his mercy lasts forever!



1. How does Mary's song, the Magnificat, reflect her understanding of God's promises and their impact on her life?

- The sermon examines how Mary praises God for fulfilling His promises to Israel, establishing a connection between her current circumstances and God's covenant with Abraham.
- Can you think of a time when you felt God kept a promise or showed His faithfulness? How did that experience change you?

2 What does the sermon suggest about the relationship between worship and social justice? How can praising God inspire us to act for justice?

- The emphasis is that worship encompasses singing and living a life that promotes justice and compassion, as inspired by the Magnificat.
- In what ways can you demonstrate justice and compassion in your everyday life? What small actions can you take to contribute to a fairer world?

3. How does Mary's joyful proclamation of God's care for the lowly challenge our understanding of who is significant in society?

- The sermon highlights how Mary praises God for elevating the humble and casting down the proud, thus exemplifying a reversal of societal norms.
- Who are some people in your community who might be overlooked or marginalised? How could you show them value and support?

4. The text mentions that worship is an outward expression of a heart attuned to God. How can worship influence our daily actions and interactions with others?

- The sermon points out that true worship is about how we live our lives, not just what we say or sing.
- I would like you to reflect on your daily routines and consider how to incorporate worship into those moments, exploring potential adjustments that could enable you to reflect God's love more authentically and effectively.

5. What does Romans 12:1 teach us about the nature of worship, and why is it important for believers to understand worship this way?

- The sermon references this scripture to explain that worship involves offering ourselves fully to God, not just through words and songs.
- How can you offer every part of your life, including school, friendships, and hobbies, as an act of worship? What specific changes can you make?

This five-day devotional will explore the sermon from this weekend in greater depth. Throughout these days, we'll explore the concept of joy during Advent, reflecting on essential scriptures and insights to enrich our anticipation and celebration of Christ's coming.



Day 1

Luke 1:46–55

Mary's song, the Magnificat, offers a beautiful reflection on praise, justice, and God's unwavering mercy. In her heartfelt expression, Mary recognises her humble state and magnifies God's greatness. This day invites us to contemplate how often we remember to honour God for the good He has done in our lives. Just as Mary viewed her circumstances through the lens of God's promises, we too can learn to embrace gratitude, even in adversity, knowing God's fidelity will carry us through.

In reflecting on Mary's experience, we can explore how her example challenges us to live authentically and faithfully. When we align our hearts with God's purpose, we can proclaim justice and compassion, becoming a vessel of His love in a world in need.

Let this day serve as a reminder that our worship is not just in our songs but also in our actions and choices—each reflecting the beauty of God's mercy and justice.

- What does it mean for you to magnify the Lord in your daily life?
- How can you embody the themes of justice and mercy in your interactions with others?
- In what ways can you deepen your worship beyond Sunday service?
- Pray for hearts open to God's call for justice in unexpected areas of your life.
- Seek God's guidance on how to reflect His love and mercy amid challenges.

Day 2

Luke 1:54–55

Mary's declaration that God "has helped his servant Israel, remembering his mercy" signifies a deep connection with the ancient promises made to her ancestors. This day emphasises the importance of generational faith and how God's faithfulness spans time. By reflecting on the covenant made with Abraham and its relevance today, we ignite our understanding of God's long-standing relationship with His people, encouraging us to be

part of this legacy.

As we dive into divine intervention, this devotional encourages us to identify how God has worked in our lives. Just as Mary rejoiced in God's mercy, we are invited to recount and celebrate our experiences of His help and sustenance, fortifying our faith to face the future with assurance in God's promises.

- How has God helped you in moments of need? How can you pass on your faith experiences to future generations?
- How can you celebrate God's faithfulness in your daily life?
- Thank God for showing mercy throughout history and in your life.
- Ask for courage to share your faith story with others.

Day 3

Luke 1:51–52

Mary's praise for God scattering the proud and lifting the lowly underscores the themes of divine justice and reversal of fortunes. This day invites us to consider how often society places value on power and wealth while God champions the humble and marginalised. Mary's song serves as a prophetic reminder that true greatness is found in humility and servitude, challenging us to reexamine our values and priorities. As we engage with the message of Mary's hymn, we are called to actively pursue justice, championing kindness and humility in a world that may often feel unjust.

How might our choices reflect the virtues of God's kingdom? Let us be moved to action, not just in words of praise but through tangible acts that uplift those around us, reinforcing the commitment to live out the beauty of God's promise every day.

- How can you demonstrate humility in your relationships?
- What actions can you take to support marginalised members of your community?
- How does understanding God's justice shape your worldview?
- Pray for those marginalised or oppressed, and seek ways to serve them.
- Ask God to open your eyes to the areas where pride may take root.

Day 4

Luke 1:53

The assertion that God fills the hungry with good things while sending the

rich away empty connects deeply with the mission of justice and compassion. This day focuses on how God's righteousness calls us to engage with those in need actively. When we involve ourselves in acts of generosity, we reflect God's heart, counteracting a culture that often prioritises materialism.

We are encouraged to assess our consumption and generosity in exploring this message. How can we cultivate a heart that yearns to share our blessings with others? In recognising the abundance God provides, we are called to leverage what we have for the benefit of others, living out the Magnificat's call to be active participants in ushering in a more just world.

- How can you identify and respond to hunger (both physical and spiritual) in your community?
- What does sharing your resources look like in practice for you?
- How can you maintain a habit of gratitude for what you have?
- Pray for opportunities to share your blessings with others. - Seek God's guidance on areas where you can improve your generosity.

Day 5

Romans 12:1

Worship that is alive and sincere manifests in our daily lives, guiding our relationships and decisions. This day emphasises the connection between worship and action—offering our bodies as sacrifices means aligning our daily lives with God's purpose. Mary's song ignites the passion to live fully in devotion to God as we celebrate His promises.

As we finalise this devotional journey, reflecting on how worship extends beyond singing into our very being becomes essential. It's about recognising that even mundane tasks can become acts of worship when done with a heart devoted to God. Let us commit to embodying this worship in all areas of our lives, continuously inviting the Holy Spirit to transform our hearts and actions.

- How does your understanding of worship extend beyond just Sunday services?
- In what areas of life can you strive to live out your worship more fully?
- How can this week's reflections impact your worship experience going forward?
- Ask God to help you recognise worship in your daily life.
- Pray for strength to live as a sacrifice pleasing to God each day.

End notes and further reading

Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Luke (St Paul's Press)

The Worship Cloud: articles by N.T. Wright and Jane Williams

Andrew's Version: <https://substack.com/@abmcg>



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Prepared by Rev'd Dennis Webster, Rector of the Anglican Parish of Paynesville, Diocese of Gippsland for personal or small group use.

Acknowledgement of use appreciated

Subscription to "www.breaking-open-the-word.org" is available.

~~Published every weekend, usually on Saturday evening, AEST.~~

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