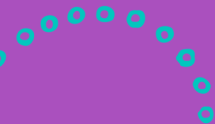




Anglican
Overseas
Aid



*Our Story ~
His Glory
An Advent Reflection*





Our Story ~ His Glory

Advent is a special time in the church calendar. We remember and prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus more than 2,000 years ago, and we look forward to the time when we will see him face to face.

The opening chapters of Luke's gospel capture the anticipation of his first coming. We hear the news of Mary's and Elizabeth's pregnancies, witness Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, see the good news shared with shepherds and read as Simeon welcomes Jesus at the temple. We see people of all ages and stages in the story respond with joy and faith. Some burst into song. What a time to be alive!

We live in another part of God's redemption story; between Incarnation and the coming glory. These are wonderful and difficult days. The Kingdom of God is growing, but the world is still groaning.

As we once again contemplate Jesus' birth and await his second coming, may we be moved beyond Christmas nostalgia and the temptation to bide our time until he returns. God is still at work in the world, by his Spirit and through us. His Kingdom is growing. May he inspire us with joy and courage to respond to his call this Advent.

About The Author

Beck Miller is Assistant Minister at Merri Creek Anglican. She grew up in a church that sang the songs in Luke chapters 1 and 2, Sunday by Sunday. She is thankful to know them by heart and for the example of faith she received from older Christians in that community.



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Mary's Song – Joy Overflowing

Read Luke 1:26-56

Read the story and imagine the scene. What might Mary's ordinary life have been like? Picture her reaction to the extraordinary interruption to her day, when Gabriel appeared. I am struck by Mary's openness to the amazing news that she will bear God's Son, the promised Messiah. Young and unmarried, this changes her whole future and reputation. Her "yes" to God reveals an inner strength and humility. Surely she had also been prepared for this moment through years of worship and guidance from her family and community under God.

Reflect on Mary's Song: vv 46-55

Elizabeth was overcome with excitement at the sight of her young cousin Mary.

Can you picture the women rejoicing together? This is the first glimpse we have of the celebration and joy in store for all who will be drawn to Jesus.

Mary's own joy overflows into song: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour".

She remembers and celebrates the just work of Almighty God that she knows from Hebrew scriptures: He has performed mighty deeds, Bringing down proud rulers from their thrones, and lifting up the humble,

filling the hungry and sending the rich away empty (vv 51-52).

She recognises that she is one whom God has lifted up:

“He has been mindful of the humble state of his servant ... all generations will call me blessed” (v 48).

God’s mercy extends throughout time, Mary declares, from generation to generation. She anticipates his faithfulness into the future through the Messiah whom she carries in her womb (vv 50, 54-55).

Respond

Take a moment to humble yourself, thanking God for his love and faithfulness to you in Jesus. How might you proclaim God’s

greatness today?

What invitation is there for you and your church to be involved in God’s merciful work of lifting up the humble, and filling the hungry with good things?

The projects of Anglican Overseas Aid can help us to engage.

Loving God,

Thank you for your mercy towards us in Jesus Christ, who was rich, but for our sake became poor.

By the power of your Spirit, enable your church to speak of your goodness today, and to offer kindness to others.

As we wait for Jesus to return, revive our humility and joy, and make us instruments of your glory.

Amen



Go Tell Your Neighbour

For Miremba*, who lives in Uganda, life-changing knowledge didn't stop with her.

Many women experience inequality, facing gender-based violence, limited control over their reproductive choices and, often, a brief education. Imagine realising that the oppression and restrictions you endure can and should change. Would you share this revelation with your neighbours? That's precisely what Miremba (pictured right) did after attending training with Wise Choices For Life (WCFL).

'I shared with my neighbours what I learnt from the program, especially about child spacing and proper communication... This has improved our community relationships.'

For a time, Miremba struggled with inequality in her home; however, things have changed for the better. She can now practice child spacing to ensure her body stays healthy and describes her family as living harmoniously, with strategies for parenting that have enabled positive change.

'I teach them how to behave, live and work together...how to value education, and now they are not forced to go to school... More importantly, whatever I learn at WCFL, I am able to pass on to the children.'

Miremba is confident that in 10 years' time she will see her community experiencing better health outcomes and peace due to improved relationships.

*Name has been changed



Zechariah's Song - Faithfulness Remembered

Read Luke 1:5-25 and 57-80

Imagine the life of Zechariah. He was further along in years than Mary and had lived long enough to experience disappointment. He and Elizabeth had not been able to have children. His Israelite community lived under Roman occupation.

Zechariah was obedient to God, but his expectations of God's goodness had been lowered. When the angel tells him of Elizabeth's pregnancy, he expresses doubt: "How can this be?" Then he is silenced for nine months. That's a lot of time to think things over! When his son John was born,

Zechariah prophesied with renewed conviction in God's power and promises.

Reflect on Zechariah's prophecy:

vv 67-79

This song conveys the knowledge Zechariah had of God's promises to Israel, that he would defeat Israel's enemies by raising up a great leader and a prophet to announce his coming.

What amazes Zechariah is that it is happening sooner and nearer to him than he expected; his own son John would be the prophet to announce the Messiah!

In the final verses (vv 76-79) Zechariah declares that the mercy of God will

come through the forgiveness of sins. It is not just about political freedom in that particular time and place, Jesus' victory is over sin and death. Forgiveness and life stretch throughout time, to us here and now, and for generations to come.

Respond

Do you ever wonder "How can this be?" as Zechariah did?

Doubt and disappointment can erode our faith and limit our vision for what God is doing.

If you relate to this, take some time today and be honest with God about your questions.

As you look at the world, where do you long to see the renewing work of God?

Share this with him in prayer and ask for his abundant mercy to reach these people or places.

Almighty God and Heavenly Father, In your tender mercy, would you continue to call more people to salvation in Jesus.

Please strengthen and equip your church to declare your forgiveness and offer your kindness throughout the world.

In these days, as we wait for Jesus' return, would you expand our vision and inspire us to participate in your story of salvation.

Amen





A New Outlook

Receiving a pig was the start of a more positive outlook on life for Sok, who lives in Cambodia.

Of course, it was about more than the animal. It began with a neighbour's invitation. Our partner PNKS was running training on pig raising. For 51-year-old Sok, this meant the possibility of earning an income, leading to some life-changing decisions: 'It means my family does not need to migrate for work.'

'Since I've been involved in the team and project work, I have seen myself as another person. I've become more positive... I started with small projects for income at home that a woman like me can do. After I attended training, I started pig raising.'

Sok's income allows her to support her family when there are food shortages. Being part of the broader community transformation has also been satisfying. 'People are aware of caring for their health; the village and the environment

surrounding households are clean, and disease is reduced... Last but not least, we have additional income which contributes to our children's education.'

PNKS equips people in Cambodia with the knowledge and resources required to make choices for themselves; choices not forced upon them, but ones that enable people like Sok to stay united with their families.

PNKS relies on funding from AOA supporters and also receives funding from the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).



'It means my family does not need to migrate for work.'



Sok with her pigs.

Angels and Shepherds - Peace on Earth

Read Luke 2:1-21

God announces the birth of his Son in the way he intends to continue - with lavish grace directed towards humble people, in their ordinary lives.

Shepherds working late at night in a field were first to hear the news. God sent a whole army of angels to them, lighting up the dark sky with a message of peace in chorus.

The angels encouraged the shepherds to find the baby, giving them a sign: they would find him lying in a manger.

This distinctive element reassured the shepherds as they went, and they

found him just as they had been told. They became the first worshippers at Jesus' feet that night.

Reflect on the Angels' song v 14

"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests."

How wonderful it must have been for the shepherds, witnessing the night sky lit up with angels singing glory to God! It's a beautiful picture of heaven breaking into our world, exactly what Jesus' birth is all about.

God became one of us. We relate to his ordinary life of family, friends, of needing to sleep and eat, of being loved and loving others. We see God's glory and his promises fulfilled in a person, Jesus of Nazareth.

In that nativity scene, God's favour rests on the weary travellers Mary and Joseph, on the humble shepherds, and on the tiny baby who comes to bring peace to the world, through his death on the cross. The connection between a person's humility – their poverty even – and the peace of God is clear.

Respond

In your time of prayer today, give thanks for the Incarnation, for God meeting us in our humanity and weakness. Take a moment, in your own weakness, to rest in his love for you.

Take some time also to wonder at marvellous things unseen (for now): angels, the heavenly realms, Christ crowned in glory. What would you like to say or sing in response to all this?

Consider the people of the world today who are weak or in need – all whom God created and loves. As you hear today's world news, perhaps there is a particular place or people in your heart or mind. Pray for them today.

*Heavenly Father,
you sent your Son into the world as
one of us.
Lord Jesus Christ,
you died for our sins and you rose to
bring us new life.
How wonderful you are, Prince of
Peace!
Holy Spirit,
Inspire us again with this good news.
Give us confidence in your ongoing
mercy for this world
and courage to partner in your saving
works.
Amen*

Paying It Forward

Upheaval sat heavily in the air as Sri Lanka faced an unprecedented multi-dimensional crisis beginning in 2022.

An economic crisis, the rising cost of living, shortages of essential goods, and reduced agricultural production resulted in up to a third of the population facing food insecurity.

Our partner, Lanka Evangelical Alliance Development Service (LEADS), was quick to act. Already working with people living in informal settlements, plantation communities, and those still suffering the effects of civil war, they began creating Savings Groups for women living in Sri Lanka who have been marginalised.

Their goal of reaching 150 households to enhance economic resilience is progressing well. One group has been so successful at developing their livelihoods and managing their income that they have started their own

community outreach initiatives. They support vulnerable families with 5kg of rice monthly and work with a midwife to ensure pregnant women receive nutritious food.

These outcomes demonstrate community-led development at its best. Through training and witnessing their financial transformations, group members can now support others in their community.

Rachel, who is part of the group, proudly shares: 'We hope to create a common marketplace for the sale of products from all the Savings Groups, and hope to use the knowledge we received to work for the well-being of women and children in our community.'



The Savings Group participating in a nutrition program and making palm products.

Simeon's Song: I Have Seen Your Salvation

Luke 2:21-40

Simeon and Anna were wonderful people of faith. In their old age, they remained steadfast and hopeful.

A generation ahead of Zechariah, they also continued to show up for prayer at the temple. No doubt they had endured pain and disappointments in life; we know Anna was widowed early. However, the passing years had strengthened their faith. They were singularly focused on the promises of God to his people. Can you imagine their joy at seeing the baby Jesus that day, when his parents brought him to the temple?

Reflect on Simeon's song vv 29-32

Simeon's prophecy declares that Jesus the Messiah will save all nations, not just Israel.

His vision of God's salvation is expansive: blessing for all peoples throughout all generations. As he holds the baby in his arms he knows it to be true.

We see that Simeon's desires are aligned with God's plans, and having seen them fulfilled in Jesus, he wants for nothing more. He is at peace and ready to depart this life.

The church today has been blessed with a generation of older believers who have faithfully prayed and supported missions throughout their lives. Are our younger generations being formed in the same way?

Western, secular culture is making consumers out of us. So how might families and the church be discipling children with a heart for mission? How can we all take up the call to pray and care for those in need, for the glory of God?

Respond

What generation of the church do you belong to?

Is there someone you look up to as a great example of faith and service in the church?

Thank God for them today (and thank the person as well if that's possible).

What might your role be in discipling the next generation?

This Advent season, could your household or church create an

opportunity to learn about one of AOA's projects together? As a way of preparing for Christmas, hear the call to be involved in God's work through times of intergenerational prayer and support for others.

*Thank you God
for your salvation offered to all people
in every time and place.*

*Please continue to raise up
generations of pray-ers, workers and
faithful stewards of your resources.*

*We long to see your saving work grow;
your will be done here as in heaven.*

*Bless the work of Anglican Overseas
Aid today.*

*Come Lord Jesus, to heal and restore
our world.*

*In your glorious name we pray,
Amen.*





A Powerful Force

If someone asked you what the force for change in your community is, could you answer? And would your answer be the Church?

Joaquim, who lives in northern Mozambique, is adamant that the Life Teams established by the Anglican Diocese of Nampula have been a positive force for change in his community.

At first he wasn't so sure about these teams, assuming they were vehicles of the church to get people through their doors, but when serious illness struck his son, and he had no way of taking him to hospital, Joaquim's view changed.

'That's when one of the members of the Life Team realised my situation, came to me and offered to help. At the moment I didn't believe it until he called three more members who volunteered and took my son and me to the medical centre, where he had adequate treatment and thus saved my son.'

From that moment on Joaquim, his wife Aida and their five children committed themselves to the Diocese's program. Joaquim even became a Life Team member.

'I was the person who promoted behavioural changes within my community by teaching my neighbours and friends.'

Anglican Diocese of Nampula relies on funding from AOA supporters and also receives funding from the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).



Joaquim and Aida
with their children.





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