Dear friend
I am pleased to enclose this week's virtual service, prepared by Judith.

As an opening hymn, Judith has suggested 'Tell out my soul', a version of the Magnificat, sung to Woodlands, here in a Songs of Praise recording from St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast, with lyrics:
https://youtu.be/s6ji4y9Q-K0

A setting of the Magnificat by the Spanish renaissance composer, Sebastián de Vivanco, performed by the Orchestra of the Renaissance under Richard Cheetham:
https://youtu.be/hKm2IiJ9I8c

John Rutter's setting of the Magnificat, sung by his own band, the Cambridge Singers:
https://youtu.be/K9YRn0BVmWM?list=PLXpQCRhZw2lbBEWepbFkuf3hRwdlZz3OZ

Judith has suggested 'Slumber beloved', from Bach's Christmas Oratorio. Of the many recordings, Janet Baker's still takes some beating, here she sings it in the original German; Schlafe, mein Liebster:
https://youtu.be/7XYdvb9y35I

Finally, Amy Grant's prayerful interpretation of 'Mary's Song, Breath of Heaven':
https://youtu.be/FWo3qlqyW1c

Peace to you all!
Chris

Service sheet for Sunday 19th December
The fourth Sunday of Advent



Grant us, O God, in all our doubts and uncertainties, the grace to ask what you would have us do, that the spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices; that in your light we may see light, and in your path may not stumble; through Christ our Lord. Amen. *(William Reed Huntington 1838-1909)*

CONFESSION

The Virgin Mary accepted your call to be the mother of Jesus. Forgive our disobedience to your will. We have sinned: forgive and heal us.*(Common Worship)*
His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. (Luke 1:50)

COLLECT

God our redeemer, who prepared the Blessed Virgin Mary to be the mother of your Son: grant that, as she looked for his coming as our saviour, so we may be ready to greet him when he comes again as our judge; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

READINGS

Micah 5:2-5a; the Magnificat: Luke1: 46-55; Hebrews 10: 5-10; Luke 1:39-45

REFLECTION

In our day, when secularism appears to be taking over, and even the Lord's prayer has to be written out for church services because people don't know the words, it is refreshing to read Mary's story – not the actual annunciation in today's readings, but the acceptance of the fulfilment of the scriptural prophecies in which Mary and her family had been immersed. The words from Micah foretell the promised Messiah, and Mary's outpouring, which we know as the Magnificat, is an echo of other cries of gratitude and understanding of the power of God. Compare it with Hannah's song, 1 Samuel 2:1-10; Mary is using words well known in her day – the complete understanding of the supremacy of God, and of his love for all people. We have no way of knowing the context in which Luke wrote his gospel, whether, for example, he did have real first-hand knowledge of Mary's life, but Luke was intent on an accurate account of what really happened; what were the circumstances surrounding Christ's conception and birth? The intimate detail of the story of Mary's visit to the home of Elizabeth and Zechariah leads us to assume that there was real evidence which Luke was able to use when describing Mary's acceptance of God's will for her. What is truly important for us is that Mary did indeed accept her Lord's will, and brave censure and punishment in order to fulfil her part in the manifestation of his prophecy.

PRAYERS

We praise you, our Father, for the marvellous news announced to Mary; for the grace of life that prepared her for her call; for her obedience to your will and her humility in accepting it; for her loving care and patience in fulfilling it. Give us such grace and obedience that we may be accounted worthy to bear the good news to our world; through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Basil Naylor)

We pray for the world in which we live; for the people who have to accept circumstances outside their imagining; for all who suffer shame and ridicule; for all who persevere in God's work on earth, despite persecution.

We pray for the sick and suffering, and in a few quiet moments, we name those known especially to us……

We pray for those affected by the new strain of Covid and for all who are working tirelessly to heal the sick.

We pray for all who are the victims of prejudice and cruelty. We thank you for those who take up the cause of all who are treated unjustly.

Hear our prayer for the peace of the world.

WE SAY THE LORD'S PRAYER

WE SHARE THE GRACE

Lord Jesus, grant us the double joy of Mary and Elizabeth: the joy of carrying you in our hearts, and the joy of recognising you in the hearts of others, that out of joy may come praise, telling out the greatness of God our Saviour. *(Susan Williams)*



The Annunciation by Fra Angelico (1395-1455)