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An open letter to our parishioners

Dear Friends,

I am grateful for Matthew for reminding me that Today is the Feast of the Annunciation, and his very thoughtful notes are included in today's bulletin. For me it has brought to mind the famous song that is based upon the Magnificat, the song that Mary sang when in her early pregnancy. It has a particular poignancy for me, it is a song that I woke with when on a silent retreat many years ago, and I couldn't get the tune out of my head and wanted to giggle, lots, which was very awkward when sat with silent monks at breakfast. It took me a few more hours of silent humming to consider checking my dates, and realising that I might be pregnant: A test taken once home proved that inkling to be right. It was the most joyful of annunciations for me, however, the baby didn't live beyond the first 10 weeks of pregnancy, and the song became bitter sweet.

There is a happy ending (or new beginning). Fast forward a few years, and with a toddler in tow, I found myself preparing to preach on the Magnificat for Christmas Eve 8am. Part of those preparations had been to take another pregnancy test, again positive, and the result you can see in our beautiful daughter, Daisy. I had wanted to give her the name 'Magnificat', but Dave vetoed it, even for a middle name, so instead we chose Beatrice, which means 'bringer of joy'.

We are currently in very bitter sweet times. There is fear of the virus itself, fear of isolation and the pain of not being able to see loved ones. There are practical difficulties of not being able to buy essentials. There are battered and bruised dreams, of weddings and baptisms (Christenings) being postponed; and the pain and confusion of not being able to attend funerals. For those due to leave school, the rites of passage have been denied, and even the exams have been cancelled. Education is, to a certain extent, on hold, although our valiant teachers are doing a wonderful job of sending work home, and ensuring the children of other key workers are able to continue with vital jobs.

The sweetness is that we are beginning to be creative, to reconnect with former ways of communication: telephone and post (our postal workers are also heroes at this time). The internet is proving its value many times over, please pray for its strength to hold! In fact please pray, in particular for those in our communities whose grief cannot be held in the way it usually would be: for the Family of Marian Grundy, Ian and Helen, and for the family of Jack Cullen, Linda, Debbie and Janice. The sweetness is also that for those of us who are not key workers, we are able to slow

down, enjoy the signs of spring, and perhaps even enjoy spending time with those we live with. Above all, the sweetness as we journey through lent together, is that we know Easter *will* come. There *will* be life in all its abundance, there *will* be resurrection, and we too will be able to emerge from our 'caves' to greet a new day.

*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.*

*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.*

*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.*

*Tell out my soul, the glories of His word!
Firm is His promise, and his mercy sure.
Tell our my soul, the greatness of the Lord
To children's children and forever more.*

Timothy Dudley-Smith from Luke 1

Feasting (from Matthew)

Today, Wednesday, is the feast of the Annunciation.

That is the day when the angel came to Mary "announcing" she was to bear a child. Curiously, this came to mind yesterday whilst I was praying psalm 46, below. Mary may well have known this psalm, and thus was prepared for the hand of God to come close.

Psalm 46

- 1 God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
- 2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be moved,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
- 3 though the waters rage and swell,
and though the mountains quake at the towering seas.
- 4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.
- 5 God is in the midst of her;
therefore she shall not be removed;
God shall help her at the break of day.
- 6 The nations are in uproar and the kingdoms are shaken,
But God utters his voice, and the earth shall melt away.
- 7 The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.
- 8 Come and behold the works of the Lord,
what desolations he has wrought on the earth.
- 9 He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.
- 10 "Be still, and know that I am God!
I am exalted among the nations,
I am exalted in the earth."
- 11 The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.

The angel came to Mary, saying "*Blessed are you among women. The Lord is with you*"
And we are blessed in the same way, the Lord is with us, "our refuge and strength".

I am also struck that we call such special days in the church year Feast Days. Usually we *feast* when someone is celebrating a birthday, or anniversary. We *feast* when someone special is in our home. No wonder we *feast* when we remember the Spirit coming to Mary in a special way.

We also *feast* in the midst of difficulties because we have Hope. If your larder is full, and your cellar well stocked, have a good *feast* tonight! But remember the actual *feast* is on grace, on the love the Lord has for us.

And pray that when we can gather together once more in Holy Communion, you will be impressed and grateful that here is a *real feast*, for Jesus the Christ is amongst us.

I grieved last week when someone said, "Well it doesn't matter if we can't have Communion, matins will do". "Lord open our eyes to the feast of your presence."

Yesterday I had many different problems with live streaming and I may have to resort to pre-recording. I will be praying each evening at 6pm, if it doesn't appear on screen, why not click on a previous post and pray along with that, knowing that I am praying with you.

The Pope has requested that we all stop to pray the Lord's Prayer at midday, so let's join with nations in doing that. Perhaps even setting an alarm to remind you that it's time to pray?

Prayer

Matthew adds that we pray for:

- those who live in high density housing, where self isolation is so difficult (and boring, and noisy, and cupboard space for food is limited, and there is no freezer), whether in Southall in London or a township in South Africa, a Nairobi slum, a Buenos Aires barrio, a Bangkok slum.
- the self employed and those in the 'gig economy' who are so vulnerable to hardship.
- For those who cannot visit relatives and friends who are dying, a particular grief for Jane and myself as our friend Helen is in Ealing hospice.

I have received some other thoughts, prayers and poems in response to the daily bulletin which I will share in the days ahead. I think we are unlikely to get many more edicts for a while now, so I hope this bulletin can be filled with encouragement for us all.

Keep safe everyone, keep home,

With love and blessings,

vanessa and matthew

God is our refuge and
strength
kingdoms are shaken
come and behold the
works of the Lord
Amen