



Borders Mission Circuit

Part of the Methodist Church of Great Britain



The **Methodist** Church 

# Advent Course 2020



## ***Waiting for ??***

This booklet has been produced by Rev Peter Taylor on behalf of the BMC Staff Team. It is designed to be used either alongside the Zoom Advent Course sessions on Wednesday evenings from 25<sup>th</sup> November at 7.30pm or as a stand-alone guide.

Please contact a member of BMC Staff for the Zoom details if you would like to share face to face. The Advent Course sessions will also be available on YouTube.

In this course we will be journeying through the season of Advent and we will explore its central theme of waiting (something we are not always good at in our culture). This will be done in the company of the biblical characters who feature in the lectionary readings for the season:

- Abraham and Sarah who waited for a child
- Isaiah and the prophets who waited for judgement and redemption
- John the Baptist whose role was to wait in the wilderness until the prophecies he foretold were realised
- Mary whose waiting began in pregnancy and continued as she stood at the foot of the cross

At points we will refer to Paula Gooder's book 'The Meaning is in the Waiting' as well as looking at pictures to help us think about Advent, perhaps in a fresh way. The Advent course will be facilitated by Circuit Ministers. Contact your minister for more information.

Each week we will begin with a prayer from the Advent Collects in the Methodist Worship Book. We will conclude with a prayer adapted by Rev Peter from Alison Adam and Frances Copey in *Candles and Conifers* (Wildgoose Publications, 2005).

Some useful information for those of you who have the Paula Gooder book: You will see the book has 4 chapters, one for each week of Advent. Each chapter is split down into 6 sections. This allows you to read one section a day from the first day of December to Christmas Eve. (See page xii for more) I encourage you, especially those of you following the course in your own time without technology, to use a journal (note book) as you move through the weeks, for questions or observations that come to you.

**Introduction: Waiting for ??** We live in an instant world. We can read news on our phones without waiting for tomorrow's papers. We can order things in less than a few minutes. No need to wait, cut to the chase! We see around us in early November (or straight after Halloween) Christmas lights and decorations in and outside homes as well as the shops. In her introduction to her Advent book Paula Gooder recalls that she was quite entertained one year *"to find a box of mince pies in a Supermarket in September with a best before date of the end of October. Not only were we to buy our mince pies early, we were to eat them early too."* The concern is that so often God is present in our world but we fail to recognise it. Elizabeth Barrett Browning expresses this powerfully in her poem 'Aurora Leigh: *"Earth's crammed with heaven, and every common bush*

*afire with God; But only he who sees, takes of his shoes- The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.”*

Waiting in Advent is important, in life and in the Church. We are to wait in the present, the past and to wait for the future. Advent (as Paula Gooder puts it) *“calls us into a state of active waiting, a state that recognizes and embraces the glimmers of God’s presence in the world, that recalls God’s historic yet ever-present actions and that speaks the truth about the almost-but-not-quite nature of our Christian living. Advent summons us to the present moment, to a still yet active, a tranquil yet steadfast commitment to the life we live now. It is this to which Advent beckons us, and without it our Christian journey is impoverished.”* So, let us be open this Advent and Christmas to each of the central characters of the Advent candles.

“Advent candles tell their story” StF 165 © Mark Earey

## **Advent 1**

Advent candles tell their story  
as we watch and pray,  
longing for the Day of Glory,  
'Come, Lord, soon,' we say.  
Pain and sorrow, tears and sadness  
changed for gladness  
on that day.

## **Advent 2**

Prophet voices loudly crying,  
making pathways clear,  
glimpsing glory, self-denying,  
calling all to hear.

Through their message — challenged, shaken —  
hearts awaken:

God is near!

## **Advent 3**

John the Baptist, by his preaching  
and by water poured,  
brought to those who heard his teaching  
news of hope restored:

‘Keep your vision strong and steady,  
and be ready  
for the Lord.’

## **Advent 4**

Mary’s gift, beyond all telling,  
was to give Christ room.

She gave God a human dwelling  
in a mother’s womb.

Who could guess the final story?  
— cross and glory;  
empty tomb!

## **Christmas Day**

Advent candles tell their story  
on this Christmas Day.

Those who waited for God’s glory:  
they prepared the way.

Christ is with us: loving, giving,  
in us living,  
here today!

# Week 1: Abraham and Sarah- Our Ancestors in the Faith, Called to Wait.



## Opening Prayer

Lord our God, keep us your servants alert and watchful as we await the return of Christ your Son, so that when he comes and knocks at the door he may find us vigilant in prayer, with songs of praise on our lips. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

(We read / sing our Advent carol, StF 165 v1)

## Setting the scene

- Look at some images of **'waiting.'**
- What are we waiting for in Advent?
- The Past, the Present and the Future? (If you have the Advent book already, you are encouraged to read the introduction "*a reflection on waiting*" p1-16) Heavy stuff but well worth reading!

You may want to come prepared this week to know what **Your NAME means.**

The **First Advent Candle is associated with the 'Patriarchs'**.

The word comes from the Greek for 'Father.'

- What do family pictures tell us?

Read Genesis 12:1-9. Abram (Abraham) is commanded to 'leave & Go.' For us with God the command is to both go and to come. With Jesus for the first disciples it was 'Come, follow me.' And 'Go'.

Abram's call is really a call to waiting. He is promised great things, but he doesn't really see the fruits of this promise. Did he at the end of his life look back and wonder if it was all worth it? Think about that, How would you feel? God's call to come, go, move, change, still speaks to us today. God's call is not only physical (place) but internal.

(p23. Gooder) God says 3 things (Genesis 15:1-2)

1. Don't be afraid.
2. I am your shield.
3. Your reward will be very great.

**DISCUSS** (In small groups or with your Notebook at home)

Genesis 17:1-15 **'What is in a NAME?' Do you know the meaning of your name?** While most of us probably don't have **names** that God transformed so that we would be remembered for generations, our names often carry stories with them. In what ways does your name carry its own kind of promise for you? Perhaps the promise comes from the joy in

sharing memories with loved ones talking about your name, or in your own association **with what your name means?** What stories do you recall about how you, friends, or family members considered the meaning of names for their children?



**Sarai/Sarah** (Genesis 18:10-12) **From cynical laughter to real joy?** Gooder feels “there is something typically ‘British’ about us when we laugh cynically sometimes, that something is not to be believed?” **Discuss.**

Genesis 22:1-19 **Troubled and tested.** To sit in the dark mysteries of God. Sitting in dark places can be deeply uncomfortable. Sometimes those dark places come in the form of scripture and contemplating God, sometimes in grieving, sometimes amidst the struggle to find joy or meaning in life. Reflect on a time when a glimmer of light, or hope, or love came to you when you were sitting in a dark place and waiting for

something to happen. How can our experience of these glimmers shape our expectations when we find ourselves waiting in the dark? Any thoughts on this?

**Question:** Who are the people who have helped prepare you to be ready to meet God?

For further reading in your own time, read through Chapter 1 of 'The Meaning is in the Waiting' or read more about Abraham and his life, perhaps the quite unsettling and difficult story in Genesis 16 about Abram, Sarai & Hagar.

## Prayer

God of Past, Present & Future, we watch, wait and travel through Advent as forgiven and hopeful people. We lift our faces towards the light of the Advent candles. Through the darkness these candles, and who they represent, are tokens of unimaginable light. So, Lord of light, God most high brought low for our sakes, this Advent & Christmas we offer you our adoration. **Amen.**



# Week 2: The Prophets-

## Waiting for the day of the Lord

### Opening Prayer

God of all holiness,  
your promises stand unshaken through all generations and you lift up all who are burdened and brought low: renew our hope in you, as we wait for the coming in glory of Jesus Christ, our Judge and our Saviour, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. **Amen.**

(We read / sing our Advent carol, StF 165 v1 & 2)

### Setting the scene

- Look at some images (pages 12 and 15)
- The second candle on the wreath is associated with the Prophets. “The one who is to come.”
- **What is a Prophet?**

Gooder p40: *“We are waiting for the future, and all it might hold. However Which precise future? The prophets’ future that may or may not have come to fruition before the time of Jesus. Israel’s future that came to fruition at the time of Jesus. Our own future that will come to fruition at the end of all times (as well as partially during our lifetimes) Confused!?! You should be because the answer to each of these questions is Yes and No.”*

**Read Isaiah 7:14-16.** Gooder writes *“This is surely one of the most iconic prophecies used of the birth of Jesus”... can remind us of the smell of candles tingled with fir trees, hear the hum of ‘Once in Royal David’s City’... This prophecy lies right at the heart of Christmas and is picked up in Matthew’s Gospel, see Matt 1:23) as a prophecy of Jesus’ birth. But... “What on earth has the laying to waste of the land of two kings got to do with Christmas? Well nothing at all, and this where we become alerted to the fact that that this Prophecy speaks into at least two (if not more) contexts.”* If you have the Gooder book you can, this week in your time, read more about this. Those of you without the Advent book, why not read Isaiah 7:1-9.

To ponder this week: As we see, one of the things modern Christians sometimes struggle with is the **immediacy** with which writers of scripture sometimes talked about salvation. Gooder’s interpretation here brings us alongside one of those examples. How does Jesus’ birth bring salvation *now*?

How can we claim this salvation even while the world continues to conform to a vision that is so unlike God’s vision of peace? What does this salvation mean if the leaders of violence, greed still seem to reign?

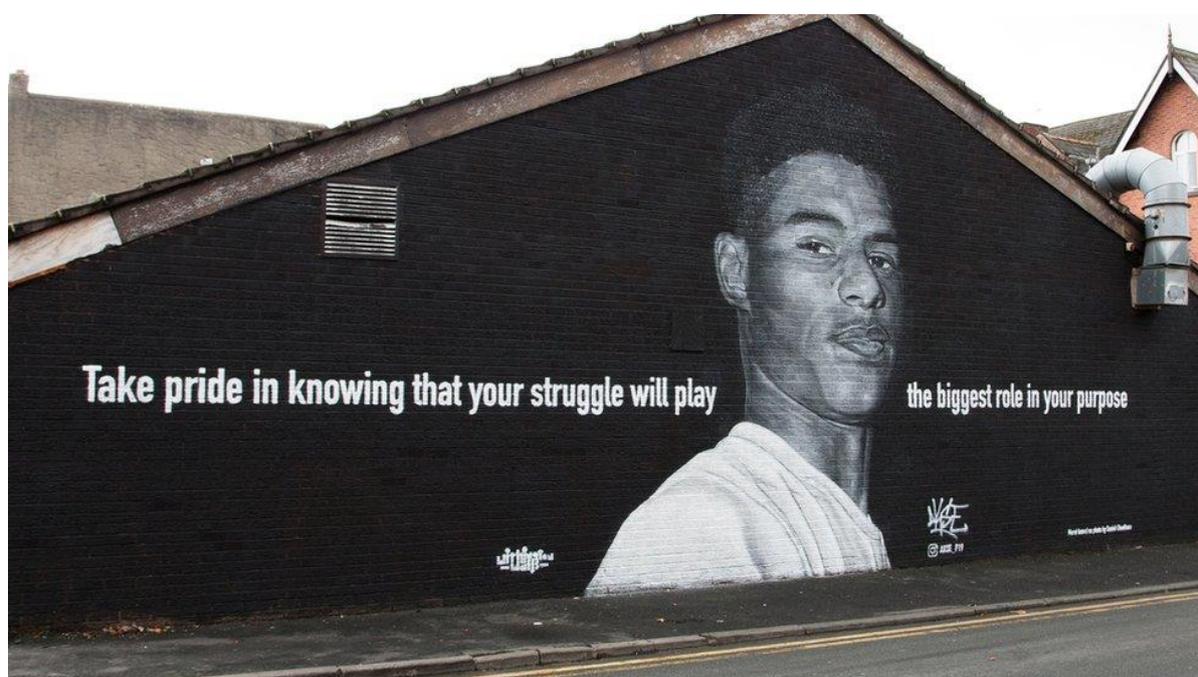
**DISCUSS** (In small groups or with your Notebook at home)

**Who is your favourite Prophet? Why?**

Look at pictures (Graffiti art? Banksy? Is his art 'Prophetic?')



Marcus Rashford mural in Stockport (November 7<sup>th</sup> i-paper)



**Who are *Prophets* in our world (current and in history)?**

Spend time reflecting on the lyrics of the Simon & Garfunkel Song "The Sound of Silence" or listen on YouTube:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R\\_xWCJAtz3U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R_xWCJAtz3U)

The Sound of Silence lyrics © Paul Simon Music

Hello darkness, my old friend  
I've come to talk with you again  
Because a vision softly creeping  
Left its seeds while I was sleeping  
And the vision that was planted in my brain  
Still remains  
Within the sound of silence.

In restless dreams I walked alone  
Narrow streets of cobblestone  
'Neath the halo of a street lamp  
I turned my collar to the cold and damp  
When my eyes were stabbed by the flash of a neon light  
That split the night  
And touched the sound of silence.

And in the naked light, I saw  
Ten thousand people, maybe more  
People talking without speaking  
People hearing without listening  
People writing songs that voices never share  
And no one dared  
Disturb the sound of silence.

"Fools", said I, "You do not know  
Silence like a cancer grows  
Hear my words that I might teach you  
Take my arms that I might reach you"  
But my words, like silent raindrops fell  
And echoed  
In the wells of silence.

And the people bowed and prayed  
To the neon god they made  
And the sign flashed out its warning  
In the words that it was forming  
And the sign said, "The words of the prophets are written on  
the subway walls  
And tenement halls"  
And whispered in the sound of silence.

While waiting can be difficult no matter what your circumstance, consider what it means to claim the promises of God in the middle of true suffering: living in a war-torn country, a grieving family, those without access to any sense of security, etc. Surely any light brought by Jesus is not light unless it offers hope even there.

So many of these prophecies point to a radical reorientation of world, or as Gooder writes on page 67, "*a world-shattering peace.*" Sometimes we mistake peace for something passive and consenting. And while peace might sometimes imply an absence of conflict, true peace cannot exist alongside injustice, which perpetuates violence through unjust systems of oppression and intolerance. To embrace peace means to act in the face of these injustices, to "shatter them" with the tools provided by God.

**What are the tools** available to you to actively embrace and advocate for peace, to cooperate with the spirit of God in this work?

**DISCUSS** (In small groups or with your Notebook at home)

What (prophetic) ministries does your Church community offer to truly gather and include everyone, as well as “the outcasts”? Are there ways your church truly seeks to enter into mutual relationship with those persons that your culture dismisses as “less valuable” than others?

**What could you/your Church commit to supporting or campaigning about?** Speaking out about an issue in your community/town/village? Anything else?

A prophet for our time?



Greta Thunberg, Climate Change Activist

The upside-down-ness of so much of Israelite prophecy often gets glossed over in modern readings; it is deeply challenging. As we look towards Christmas, which often tends towards excess, how can we change our Advent habits to show that we take these prophecies seriously? How can we transform our gift giving patterns, our attitude toward indulgence, and our attachment to possessions?

### **Prayer**

God of Past, Present & Future, we watch, wait and travel through Advent as forgiven and hopeful people. We lift our faces towards the light of the Advent candles. Through the darkness these candles, and who they represent, are tokens of unimaginable light. So, Lord of light, God most high brought low for our sakes, this Advent & Christmas we offer you our adoration. **Amen.**



## Week 3: John the Baptist – Waiting between the times

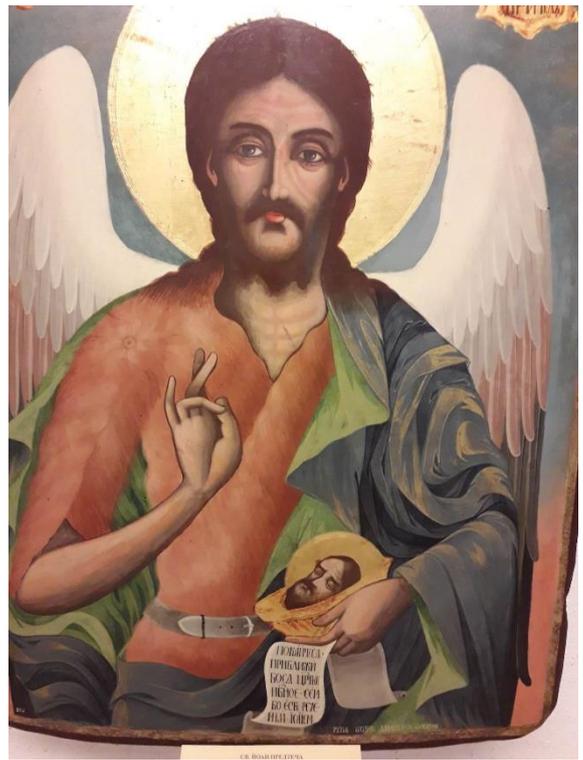
### Opening Prayer

God for whom we wait and watch, you sent your servant John the Baptist to prepare your people for the coming of the Messiah. Inspire the ministers and stewards of your truth to turn our disobedient hearts to you; that, when Christ shall come again in glory to be our judge, we may stand with confidence before him, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. **Amen.**

(We read / sing our Advent carol, StF 165 v1, 2 & 3)

### Setting the Scene

When you think of John the Baptist, what comes to your mind?



Read Mark 1:2-8

John the Baptist is one who waited between the times. He certainly represents waiting.

### John the BAPTIST

We can take John's message of **Baptism** for granted. The words used - repentance and the forgiveness of sins that his message are almost commonplace. (Some notes from Gooder p71-73) *"We are told that John came proclaiming repentance baptism into the forgiveness of sins (literal translation of the Greek) ... Ritual washing was common in first century Judaism ... Ritual washing was what one did in preparation for worship. In contrast John's Baptism was a single, unrepeatable action... Rather like immersion ...*

John's Baptism remains different, for two reasons. Firstly, all the ritual cleansings were self-administered ... John's Baptism was done by him to someone else. This makes John's Baptisms a community event ... This carries a corporate significance that stretches beyond an individual.

**DISCUSS** (In small groups or with your Notebook at home)  
*(Gooder p 72) A second difference is that John's Baptism took place not in the specially built, ritually clean miqva'ot but in the grubby, unappetizing River Jordan. Here true cleansing can take place because it is a place of homecoming (see the story of Joshua crossing the Jordan in Joshua 3:1-7) And*

*moreover, the Baptism of John was for insiders (the people of Judea and Jerusalem) to repent. The Greek word metanoia means literally a change of mind or heart. The only way these people could be prepared for the One who was to come was through an entire reorientation of everything they knew. This would have been a shock as many Jews believed that forgiveness of sins could only happen in the temple.*

**Think about the baptism liturgy your church uses when celebrating a baptism. What parts of the liturgy resonate with Advent and with the already-but-not-yet nature of this time?**

We note briefly that John is like ‘the Bridesmaid or Best Man’, the ‘Warm up act’ - pointing to the main attraction. He is on the side-lines. **Do you love to be in the limelight or are you able to stand aside and let others take the attention?**

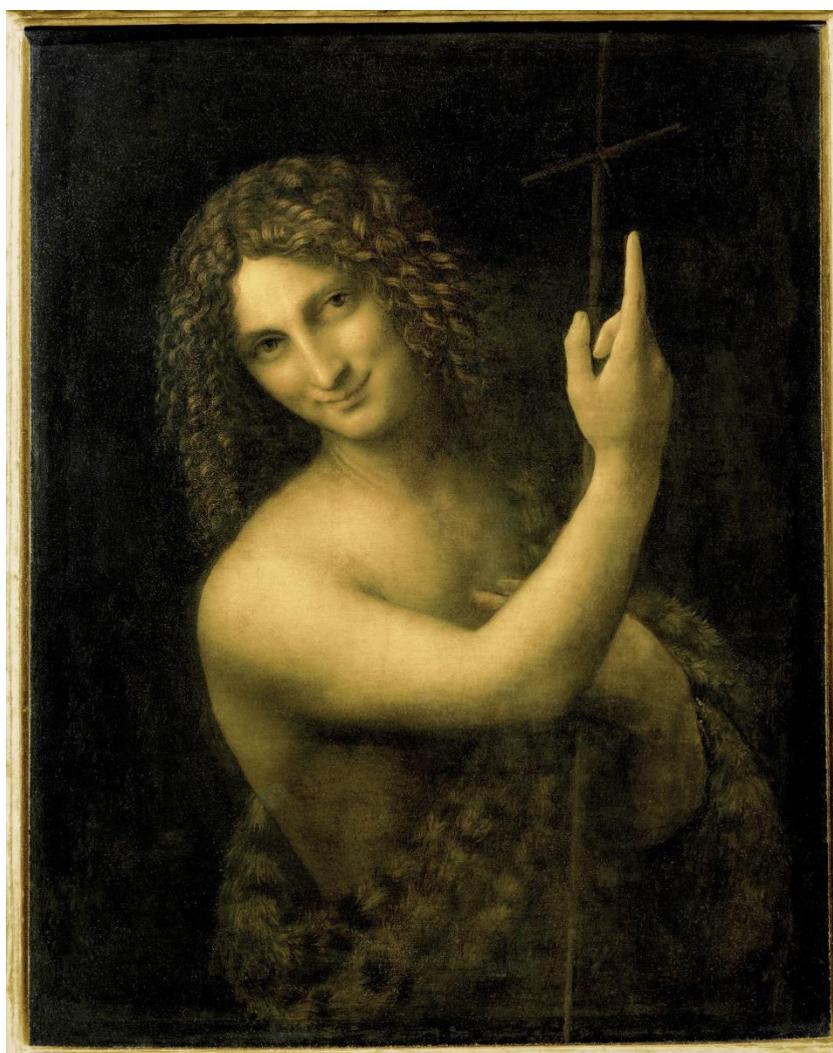
As Gooder highlights, the gospel of John is full of witnesses. We are all called to be witnesses to the work that God does in our lives...but why? Surely the goal of our witness to point others to Jesus. Does true witness happen when we are so moved by the spirit that we overflow with stories of what God has brought to our lives?

What motivation for witness most resonates with you?

And, thinking about the E word 'Evangelism' **What witness would you share, if invited, to reflect on in this season of waiting? And/or in this particular year maybe?**

### **Prayer**

God of Past, Present & Future, we watch, wait and travel through Advent as forgiven and hopeful people. We lift our faces towards the light of the Advent candles. Through the darkness these candles, and who they represent, are tokens of unimaginable light. So, Lord of light, God most high brought low for our sakes, this Advent & Christmas we offer you our adoration. **Amen.**



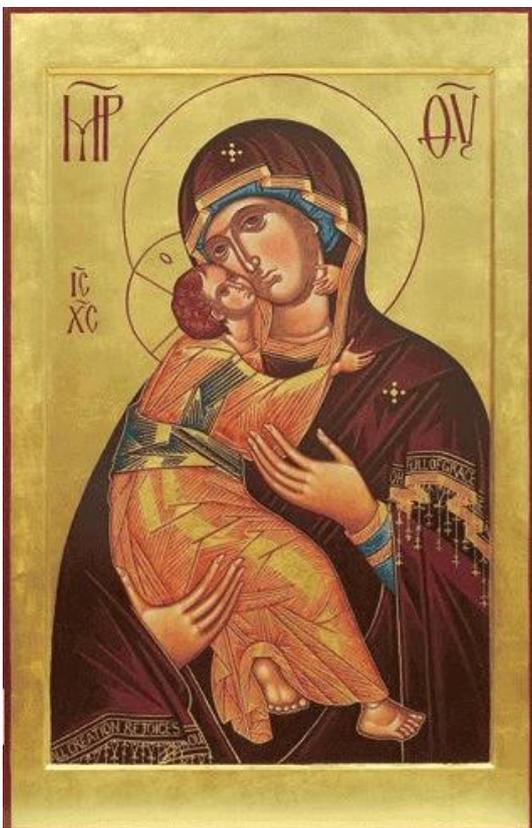
## Week 4: Mary – A lifetime of waiting

### Opening Prayer

God our Redeemer, you chose the Virgin Mary, to be the mother of our Lord and Saviour. Fill us with your grace that in all things we may embrace your holy will and with her rejoice in your salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

(We read / sing our Advent carol, StF 165 v1, 2, 3 & 4)

### Setting the Scene



We are likely to encounter Mary as portrayed by an adorable child in the annual Christmas Nativity! The chapter in Gooder's book provides many insights into Mary's appearances in scripture and invites us to wonder about the emotional

complexity of her unique blessing. Following the calling of God doesn't mean that God's presence will always feel close. Mary is visited by an Angel, something that must have been a little unsettling! Yet somehow for Mary, even as he receives the news that she a virgin will conceive the Son of God she responds (Luke 1:38) with the words "*Here am I, the servant of the Lord; Let it be with me according to your word.*" Echoes here perhaps of our Methodist Covenant Service? Mary sings her song (Luke 1:46-55) the famous **Magnificat**, to Elizabeth when she visits after learning of her pregnancy. She has had time to reflect on everything she has experienced so far, time to process some of her emotions, and is in the position of being in a similarly miraculous position as her cousin. She is able to pray this prayer with confidence (and even Joy) when in that place of feeling seen and known (by God). Let's look at some Bible passages concerning Mary that we could easily forget.

**DISCUSS** (In small groups or with your Notebook at home)

**Pondering-** Paula Gooder writes (p93) "*We could be excused for thinking that 'ponder' was one of Luke's favourite words, see Luke 1:29, Luke 1:66 and after the shepherds visit "Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart," Luke 2:19. It turns out to be the favourite word of the NRSV*

*translators. Nevertheless, Luke portrays Mary as someone who thinks very deeply about what she sees and hears.”*

Something to **ponder**- What are you most afraid that God might ask you to be or do?

Read Luke 2:25-35. Simeon’s ‘blessing’ is a blessing that speaks deep truth. Gooder p.94: *“We all know that a ‘nice’ blessing that is untrue has no value whatsoever. Simeon’s blessing spoke the truth about who this child was to become.”*

Mary’s heart will be **pierced**.

A movie from a few years ago suggested the question: “If you knew what suffering your life was going to hold, would you still live it?” How do you respond to that?

In many ways, most of us struggle to have a healthy relationship to our own mortality and to the reality of suffering. While we do not usually have specific prophecy about these things in our lives, the reality of being human means that our hearts will be broken (pierced) during our lives. How do you incorporate this idea into your faith?

For a few minutes look at Matthew 2:13-18. A reading that sometimes gets airbrushed out in worship and preaching but one that reminds us that Mary and her small family were **refugees** having to **flee violent persecution**. Herod takes out

his anger by ordering that all boys aged under 2 in the Bethlehem area are killed.

Spend time reflecting on the lyrics of 'Mary, did you know' or listen on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifCWN5pJGIE>

Mary, Did You Know? lyrics © Greensleeves Publishing Limited, Rufus Music, Word Music, Llc

Mary, did you know that your baby boy would one day walk on water?

Mary, did you know that your baby boy would save our sons and daughters?

Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new?  
This child that you've delivered, will soon deliver you

Mary, did you know that your baby boy will give sight to a blind man?

Mary, did you know that your baby boy will calm the storm with his hand?

Did you know that your baby boy has walked where angels trod?

When you kiss your little baby, you kiss the face of God

Mary, did you know? (Did you know?)

Mary, did you know?

Mary, did you know? (Mary, did you know?)

Mary, did you know? (Mary, did you know?)

Mary, did you know?

The blind will see, the deaf will hear, the dead will live again  
The lame will leap, the dumb will speak the praises of the lamb!

Mary, did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation?  
Mary, did you know that your baby boy would one day rule the nations?

Did you know that your baby boy is Heaven's perfect Lamb?  
That sleeping child you're holding is the great I am

Mary, did you know? (Mary, did you know?)

Mary, did you know? (Mary, did you know?)

Mary, did you know? (Mary, did you know?)

## Prayer

God of Past, Present & Future, we watch, wait and travel through Advent as forgiven and hopeful people. We lift our faces towards the light of the Advent candles. Through the darkness these candles, and who they represent, are tokens of unimaginable light. So, Lord of light, God most high brought low for our sakes, this Advent & Christmas we offer you our adoration. **Amen.**

