

## **Evensong 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2012**

Zephaniah 3: 14-18

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away the judgments against you, he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak. The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival. I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it.

### **Luke 1. 39-56**

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessèd are you among women, and blessèd is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessèd is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessèd; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name." "His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

Perhaps the one thing in life that matters most to us is to be noticed, really noticed, accepted and understood for who we are. Another person listening to us, giving of themselves to pour out that moment of true, deep awareness of who we are.

That inborn need gives us a little glimpse of the nature of God in the Trinity. The fullness of the Father in the Son. The Son surrendering himself so fully that he holds back nothing of himself. A perfect Unity of self-giving in the Holy Spirit that is beyond our understanding.

And of course if we have a deep need to receive the self-giving of another, that means there will be times in life when we are the one called to listen to another and offer our self-giving to them.

Yet through the self-giving of God, being called to share in self-giving paradoxically releases us into the fullness of who we really are!

Last week I made a short unexpected visit to Bradford Cathedral where I found a wonderful sculpture celebrating Mary's visit to Elizabeth and the joy of the Greeting. Not a greeting that said hello, but a greeting that released the joy of the Holy Spirit in Elizabeth as she recognised what God was doing – Mary was, as she says "the mother of my Lord". John the Baptist in Elizabeth's body leapt in her womb, again filled with the Holy Spirit far before the maturity of speech and cognition. In the sculpture this is expressed in a wonderful synergy of movement, self-giving and praise. The infants in the sacred space are dancing with joy!

They were sharing the self-giving of God, Father Son and Holy Spirit! Not just within the Trinity, but poured out in self-giving to our world.

Mary gave herself in obedience to the Lord God when the angel Gabriel suddenly appeared calling her to God's purposes. Her Majesty The Queen had a different preparation of several years, though not from birth, for the vows of her calling as Queen. Yet a calling she responded to with dignity, commitment duty and service, deeply expressing her faith in these. Her words on her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday,

I can make my solemn act of dedication with a whole Empire listening. I should like to make that dedication now. It is very simple.

I declare before you all that my whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service and the service of our great imperial family to which we all belong.

But I shall not have strength to carry out this resolution alone unless you join in it with me, as I now invite you to do: I know that your support will be unfailingly given. God help me to make good my vow, and God bless all of you who are willing to share in it.

To accomplish anything like these we must give nothing less than the whole of ourselves. As the Queen said “I shall not have strength to carry out this resolution alone unless you join in it with me . . . God help me make my vow.”

Being together and God’s love and strength are elements in a life of faith, service and obedience to God’s calling to us. Our callings are each suited to us, our gifting and our circumstances. God will give himself and through his self-giving sets us free to be who we are, to serve him, fulfilling our calling and our duty to bring us to the deepest fulfilment of who we are in Him. Not something we can do on our own. Like the Queen we need the support and prayer of each other on our journey.

Elizabeth said to Mary, “Blessèd is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.” Whatever the Lord is calling **us** to in our lives, let’s reach out to Him with whatever belief we can, for whatever He is calling us to.