

The Blessed Virgin Mary & Stewardship Sunday 2025

Introduction and Call to Worship

Today we give thanks for the faithfulness of Mary, Mother of our Lord. Her example of humility, generosity and pointing to Jesus inspire our own worship of God, through his Son, our Saviour. Let us come before God in celebration, praise and worship.

Today's Readings

First Reading Isaiah 61.10–11

The prophet proclaims good news of deliverance for the people who remain faithful to God, who will always show mercy and forbearance.

Gospel Luke 1: 46-55

Mary, having been overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, journey's to her cousin Elizabeth to tell the great news of her pregnancy – she is to be the God-bearer. She proclaims God's praises in a hymn, known as the *Magnificat*, in which she recognises that she will be known to future generations as blessed.

HOMILY ***“Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed.” (Luke 1: 48)***

Since the first century, devotion to the Virgin Mary has been a major element of the spiritual life of the vast majority of Christians.

From the Council of Ephesus in 431 to the Book of Common Prayer, the Second Vatican Council and the report of ARCIC (the joint working group of Roman Catholic and Anglican Scholars) the Virgin Mary has been recognised not only as the Mother of God, and God Bearer, Theotokos, but also as the Mother of the Church, a Mediatrix who intercedes.

Mary is the first Christian and the first to say 'Yes' to God's call to make Christ known to all people, for all time. She does this with generosity, thanksgiving and joy!

In the Gospel reading that we have just heard, we are told of Mary's love of God, in her great song, the Magnificat. The passage follows on in St Luke's Gospel from his account of the annunciation of the Angel Gabriel to Mary. She has just been told that she is to conceive a Son, and that she must name him Emmanuel, which means God, is with us. In response to this news, she sets out on a long journey, a four-to-five-day trip, to visit her friend Elizabeth.

It is a meeting of special joy and significance for them both, who have much to share. On meeting Elizabeth Mary bursts in song, a hymn full of Old Testament phrases echoing the song of Hannah, which Mary may have known and loved from childhood.

Full of 'Hebrew' influence, it tells us an enormous amount about God. Mary recognises that what God is asking of her requires her participation, her generosity and engagement, her love and free-will offering of all she has. Consequently, in human history Mary is highly favoured, blessed. And she offers back to God those feelings of Joy.

In the Magnificat, this wonderful song of Mary's glorifying the works of God, we can learn more about the nature of God, a God who is merciful, but 'scatters the proud, casts down the mighty and lifts up the lowly.'

This is a God of justice, who engages with the world. But we also learn much more about Mary herself. In just 3 verses, 46 – 48 Mary's natural strengths shine through. She is humble, she is accepting, she is loving, she is filled with hope and joy, and she is filled with praise for the works of God.

On this Stewardship Sunday, we are asked to think again about our own Christian call to give back to God some of what we have already received. But I wonder if we are tempted to hold back? Mary is called, in the most direct and dramatic way to offer everything she has, to care for and nurture a child, and there are few demands upon anyone that could match her call to be the Mother of our Lord.

Yet her call does tell us something of God's need for us, as Christians today, to offer back to God in thanksgiving, with generosity and joy, something of the provision we have already received, and that is part of our stewardship.

Do we allow all that we are, and all we have to point beyond ourselves to Jesus, giving of our whole lives to God? Or do we keep things back for ourselves in a way that doesn't honour God, or ourselves?

Or to put it another way, can we speak with Mary's conviction, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to God's word.' (Luke 1.38)

We all have a lot to do if we are to live up to the example of Mary, who gave of everything she had, in every way, that all glory may be given back to God. Indeed, she is an evangelist today as she continues, through our prayers to magnify the Lord.

At the very least we must surely be able to acknowledge that Mary is "blessed among women". Indeed, we do call Mary Blessed, now and for generations to come. And we can follow her example in our stewardship, with generosity and joy.

Amen.

Fr Damian Harrison-Miles, September 2025.