

The Feast of the Assumption 2020

In some ways, the inclusion of these verses from Chapter One of St Luke's Gospel, what we usually called the *Magnificat*, in the practice of Evening Prayer or Evensong has done us a disservice. I associate the singing of the *Magnificat*, not with the humility of a young Jewish girl, but with the soaring arches of gothic cathedrals and the well-rehearsed voices of their choirs. I wonder sometimes if they realised the full implications of what they were singing about.

These verses, along with other songs or canticles in Luke (the *Benedictus* of Zechariah and the *Nunc Dimittis* of Simeon), tell us more about the meaning of the birth of Jesus. They are words in which these Jewish speakers look back to the promises God has made to Israel and say that now in Jesus these promises are fulfilled; they look forward to God's Kingdom which Jesus came to begin. They were probably written at a time of persecution of the early Christians, and so represent the song of the whole Church, not just of isolated individuals.

Mary's Song gives us both the 'yes' and the 'no' of God in uncompromising language. The 'yes' is Mary's 'yes' of openness to God's plan of salvation, and recognition of God's mercy through the generations before her: to Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Moses and Miriam, some of whom have also sung aloud. The God who enabled the Exodus of the oppressed Israelites is the same God who has placed in Mary the promise of the Messiah for all people.

The 'no' of Mary is God's 'no' to those who oppose the values and practices of the Kingdom, and a characteristic Lukan defence of poor people. The proud, powerful and rich – the arrogant, the exploitative, the oppressors – are sent packing here in no uncertain terms (scattered and disposed), to make room in God's kingdom for those who are vulnerable and weak. God's 'preferential option for the poor' situates sin firmly as the evil which flows from social injustice, not from individual misdemeanour.

Focus and meditation on Mary's Song, now in this pandemic, enables us to ask sharp questions of the Church of today, of our diocese and parish. Do we sing with Mary the 'yes' of mercy and generosity and the 'no' to injustice and exploitation; or are our eyes dimmed, our ears muffled and our tongues tied? Amen *Fr David*