

Magnificat

Gillian Cooper *reflects on* Luke 1:46-55

“My soul magnifies the Lord.” Where does Mary find the strength and the courage for this song? Pregnant before marriage in mysterious circumstances, visited by a terrifying divine messenger, why is she not covering in her parents’ home, hoping it will all go away? But Mary is brave. God has, it seems, chosen well.

Mary’s Magnificat is extraordinary. It is magnificent. It comes from a meeting of two women, both bearing miracles inside them. And it tells of possibilities. The rules that govern the life we know can be broken. Those who think a lot of themselves may not necessarily be rewarded. Those who hold power can lose it. Those with all the money may find it does not buy them what they need. And those who are poor, marginalised, oppressed, insecure, despairing – they can find freedom and hope. As we solemnly sing Mary’s words at Evensong, we are singing about revolution. We are reminding ourselves that God’s values are not the values of our world and that God’s plans do not involve the obvious people. The most important event the world has ever known is announced by a young woman from an obscure village in a remote corner of the Roman empire.

Therein lies our hope. When we look at the world and despair, Mary reminds us that things can change. God’s angel can come, God’s Spirit can breathe, the world can be transformed. 🍷



Pere Lachaise Cemetery, Paris

Keep us mindful, Lord, of your promises, brought to their first fulfilment in Christ, that our spirits may rejoice in you, our Saviour, as we look for the coming of Christ’s reign, when all things will be made new. Amen.

The Sheldon community in a time of pandemic

Part III – “it is good for us to be here”

by Julian Smith

When we met for Sheldon’s first post-lockdown retreat, both guests and volunteers echoed the words that Peter said to Jesus at the transfiguration.

Things had moved on since the trial run in July, and much time, thought and money had been invested in the safe re-opening of the centre. Opening windows had replaced fixed glass, air “scrubbers” had been bought, and open doors

and windows enabled fresh air to circulate. Face masks were standard and one was never far from a hand-gelling station. Lunch and supper were served cafeteria-style to masked, hand-sanitised queues.

It wasn’t Sheldon as we had known it, but the welcome was still warm, the atmosphere tranquil and God was close at hand. Above all, in these uncertain times, we felt safe and knew that everything that could be done for our well-being was being done.

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Catherine Booth

Co-founder of the Salvation Army, Catherine Booth is commemorated with her husband William on Friday. Jeni Parsons looks at her life and legacy.

Here is a woman of great spirit who, with her husband William, founded the Salvation Army. Her Methodist background and her work among very poor people led her to try to help those struggling with alcoholism from the cheap “grog” of the time. Catherine was working against poverty rather than as a killjoy.

She founded food shops where those who were poor could buy a cheap meal. She was a remarkable preacher at a time when it was thought unfeminine for women to speak in religious meetings and her preaching was to those who were rich.

So here is a practical, energetic, Christian woman who raised eight children and was active in the Church and the world. That makes her an interesting role model for all sorts of people of faith, because what motivated her was a profound belief in the equality of men and women before God, rather than a secular view of equality. 🍷

“I don’t believe in any religion apart from doing the will of God.”

Catherine Booth (1829-1890)