

A song of praise



Katharine Smith *reflects on* Luke 1:39-45 [46-55]

Last week we were out in the wilderness listening to John the Baptist calling people to repent and be baptised. We heard him talking about the One who was to come after him, a powerful one, who would baptise with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Today John is still unborn, held in his mother's womb – an unexpected but longed-for baby, to be born in fulfilment of God's promises. And the powerful One who is to come after John, Jesus, is also held in his mother's womb – an unexpected baby to be born because Mary said "yes" and accepted God's will for her. Even before their birth, John it seems is aware of the presence of Jesus and lets his mother know as much.

Both mothers-to-be are filled with joy and praise God for his great faithfulness and goodness to them and to their people. Mary sings of God's compassion and mercy and the justice God brings to all people.

We don't know if Elizabeth is still alive when her son meets his violent death. We do know that Mary's heart is pierced with bitter agony and grief when her son is nailed to the cross. And we can imagine that, when Jesus is raised from the dead, Mary again sings the songs of joy and praise that we hear today. 🌸

Lord Jesus, help us to follow the example of your blessed mother Mary, who humbly accepted God's will. In all our joys and sorrows may we know your loving presence alongside us, our saviour and our friend. Amen.

Walking with Rosie

by Gillian Cooper

Rosie and I go to the garden centre, where shrubs and trowels have given way to Christmas decorations. We walk past the indoor plants into a dark space filled with lights – red, gold, green and blue – twinkling and glowing, overwhelming and magical. I know they are there to encourage me to spend money. Yet in the dark days of the year the lights are like the fire in the cave of our ancient

ancestors, the stars in the night sky. Rosie and I stand there, entranced.

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it," says St John. "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light," proclaims Isaiah. Soon we will hear of shepherds and their angels, magi and their star. In a world where darkness and danger seem so near, the light of the Christ Child is still shining. 🌸

“God is coming! God is coming! All the element we swim in, this existence, echoes ahead the advent. God is coming! Can't you feel it?”

Walter Wangerin Jr (1944-2021), American author and educator

Advent

Part 4 – Forest Green, a village in Surrey

by Julian Smith

In 1866 the American clergyman Phillips Brooks spent Christmas in Bethlehem. Moved by that experience he later wrote the carol "O Little Town of Bethlehem". The carol was published in *The English Hymnal* in 1906 set to a tune composed by Ralph Vaughan Williams.

RWV had collected the folk song "The Ploughboy's Dream" from Henry Garman of Forest Green, Surrey, in 1903 and he adapted the tune to fit the

carol. He called the tune "Forest Green". The folk song is a robust cautionary tale of a negligent ploughboy who shirks work and abuses the horses. Its message is that hard work is the lot of every ploughboy.

Christmas is eternal. This Christmas is about the here and now, all the Christmases we've experienced and all that have ever been. The folk music that sits deep in our consciousness, familiar without our knowing it, links us to that eternal Christmas. 🌸