



Welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church, meeting here at Bethesda Chapel on Sunday October 18th 2020 at 10:45.

If you are not able to meet with us in person at present, we hope and pray that you will find this outline of our service helpful, as we all seek to worship God as a Church family, wherever we are.

Our worship today is led by **Colin** who gives us a warm **welcome** (noting that it is lovely and warm at Bethesda this morning – especially if you’re sitting by a radiator!) He welcomes those who are present, those who are watching the livestream, and those who may watch the recording later. We also welcome those who are reading this at home. He reminds us that today is the Last Sunday of summer time; our clocks go back an hour next weekend. Don’t forget!

Lancashire is now in level 3 lockdown. It’s easy to become down and depressed with the mood of the nation at the present time. Colin said “I find my mind being drawn towards the Psalms and especially Psalm 121.

This morning our bodies are COVID secure, for the body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit, but more importantly our souls are secured in Christ from the curse of sin, which is a spiritual pandemic affecting everyone. Our hands are sanitized, but our hearts as Christians also need to be sanitized through the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit. This is our hope and peace in Christ.”

Colin shares that Alec is at present in Germany, attempting to finalise some of the personal issues resulting from Brexit, but also being able to spend some time with his family. We pray this may have been a productive and positive time.

We now join in song, with a **Hymn** that may be new to some of us although it has been played here at Bethesda recently. Again, it is from Getty Music.

Getty Music and others are allowing churches to use their music in worship during the present time, waiving the usual copyright licensing arrangements, which is why we are able to watch and listen and read it today.

(Whilst those meeting in person are not able to lift their voices in song, if you are at home you can sing as loudly as you wish, to any tune you like, or read the words either aloud or silently:)

You may wish to note the powerful words of the refrain:

“Sing Hallelujah... now and ever we confess Christ is our hope in life and death! “

We pray this may become true for all.

What is our hope in life and death?
Christ alone, Christ alone.
What is our only confidence?
That our souls to Him belong.
Who holds our days within His hand?
What comes, apart from His command?
And what will keep us to the end?
The love of Christ, in which we stand.
O sing hallelujah !Our hope springs eternal,

*O sing hallelujah! Now and ever we confess
Christ our hope in life and death.*

What truth can calm the troubled soul?
God is good, God is good.
Where is His grace and goodness known?
In our great Redeemer's blood.
Who holds our faith when fears arise?
Who stands above the stormy trial?
Who sends the waves that bring us night
unto the shore, the rock of Christ?
*O sing hallelujah! Our hope springs eternal,
O sing hallelujah! Now and ever we confess
Christ our hope in life and death.*

Unto the grave, what will we sing?
"Christ, He lives; Christ, He lives!"
And what reward will heaven bring?
Everlasting life with Him.
There we will rise to meet the Lord,
then sin and death will be destroyed
and we will feast in endless joy
when Christ is ours forevermore.
*O sing hallelujah! Our hope springs eternal;
O sing hallelujah! Now and ever we confess
Christ our hope in life and death.
(O sing hallelujah! Our hope springs eternal;
O sing hallelujah! Now and ever we confess
Christ our hope in life and death.
Now and ever we confess
Christ our hope in life and death.)*

Songwriters: Matt Boswell / Matt Papa / Keith Getty / Matt Merker / Jordan Kauflin
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Here is the link if you would like, and are able, to access the internet and would like to see what is being shown at Bethesda:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oibli1rz7mw>

Colin now leads us in **Prayer**

Our loving Heavenly Father, you are awesome and wonderful in your majesty and in all ways; your name is indeed great in all the earth. You looked down in mercy and grace on us, and sent your Beloved Son to save us. We rejoice in Your gracious love and great compassion, and we celebrate the Lord of our Salvation, Jesus, our Prince of Peace. We sing your praises, if only in our hearts, for you alone are worthy to be praised and worshipped. Help us, just for this brief time, to put aside the worries of this world, with the stresses and strains of Covid 19, and come into your presence through your Spirit on this Lord's Day to look upon, like John of old on the Isle of Patmos, the Son of Man exalted on high. Pour some of his glory upon us, we pray, as we seek to lift him high in our service this morning.

As we continue our study in the first chapter of Luke's Gospel and reflect upon the mysteries of the birth of Jesus, may we also reflect and take delight in the mysteries of our new birth

through the salvation that has been made possible for us in and through his coming and his cross-work.

Praise the Lord forever and ever. In Jesus' name, Amen.

and then shares the **Notices** for this week:

- Alec in Germany
- Virtual Coffee time on Zoom @ 1 o'clock – Look for the link
- Thursday Prayer Meeting on Zoom @ 7.30 – Again, look for the link. Please join us for this precious time, it's only half-an-hour, and no one expects you to pray if you don't wish to. You can always add your own Amen to the prayers that are said, so that you make them your own.
- Operation Christmas Child – there are still boxes and forms available.

Colin then introduces another **song** saying “Songs and singing are an important part of the Christian Faith. Christianity is a universal religion of song, especially the Song of Redemption. Its choral tradition provides a rich source of brilliant sacred music. The Bible inspires us to lift up our voices and instrumental playing in praise and worship, from Psalm 150 to the Hallelujah Chorus of Revelation. “

This is a song from Keith and Krystin Getty, which was sung by 1000's of voices from churches all around the world in 2016. “Facing a task unfinished” is sung to a tune many of will recognize, (we usually sing The Church's One Foundation to this tune), it's called Thornbury, but there is an added refrain, Read it aloud or sing it to yourself!

Facing a task unfinished that drives us to our knees;
A need that, undiminished, rebukes our slothful ease.
We, who rejoice to know Thee, renew before Thy throne
the solemn pledge we owe Thee to go and make Thee known.

Where other lords beside Thee hold their unhindered sway;
where forces that defied Thee defy Thee still today;
with none to heed their crying for life, and love, and light,
unnumbered souls are dying and pass into the night.
*We go to all the world with kingdom hope unfurled,
no other name has power to save but Jesus Christ The Lord.*

We bear the torch that, flaming, fell from the hands of those
who gave their lives proclaiming that Jesus died and rose.
Ours is the same commission, the same glad message ours,
fired by the same ambition to Thee we yield our powers.
*We go to all the world with kingdom hope unfurled,
no other name has power to save but Jesus Christ The Lord.*

O Father who sustained them, O Spirit who inspired;
Saviour, whose love constrained them to toil with zeal untired,
from cowardice defend us, from lethargy awake!
Forth on Thine errands send us to labour for Thy sake.
*We go to all the world with kingdom hope unfurled,
no other name has power to save but Jesus Christ The Lord.*

*We go to all the world His kingdom hope unfurled,
no other name has power to save but Jesus Christ The Lord.*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UIm3WsRo0TY&list=PL0ONU3wVC9D3R_WpIIHf4Td5bjF8lf6gD&index=26

Our Bible reading, Luke 1, 26-38 is read today by Jean Williams.

The birth of Jesus foretold

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.'

²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants for ever; his kingdom will never end.'

³⁴ 'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?'

³⁵ The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail.'

³⁸ 'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May your word to me be fulfilled.' Then the angel left her.

Thanks be to God for his Word.

Alec now shares his message with us, based on this passage.

OBEDIENT SERVANT

There are three variously coloured threads running through the fabric of my message this morning.

As Jean read it, the story line is clear. We will come back to that in a minute.

The background material shines and is then darkened by a very sad event. As the curtain rises at the beginning, we see God creating the earth. It was His idea. He made it. Then we hear God saying "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness." So that is exactly what we see Him doing.

And everything is good, very good and everything looks promising and cool and God is really pleased.

Looking carefully at the written programme we received in the entrance hall we see that God has really very helpfully written a creative, constructive and genuinely interesting job and role description for us. How we are to live and not to live.

Then from deep down stage left we see that someone has had another idea. Obviously wants to do his own thing. He goes to God's role description, rips it up and throws it out into the darkness through an almost invisible door at the side of the stage.

Well I am sure you can imagine that doing the things God hadn't wanted really screwed up the whole scenario. The whole creation, all of mankind, every living creature, the whole show was doomed.

But the Creator was working on a Plan B. Well it wasn't really actually a plan B. But let's concentrate on central issues! The plan was now what to do when your created beings are doomed to die for ever and ever.

This is where we come to the passage that Jean read this morning. We understand the story line. But we lost the plot.

Our three threads begin to reveal themselves. And then they begin to unwind. Let's look more closely.

There is a small green thread in the background. Doesn't look very significant at all; it is hardly noticeable at first. But then our attention is drawn to it.

Read Luke 1:26-28

Gabriel appears in verse 26. Again. He might think he should be given a break but his aforementioned involvement, his previous mission, was over six months ago now. He is an angel, a ministering spirit, a servant of God.

Can you imagine his reaction when God speaks to him?

Wait a minute. Hold on a minute. You want me to go where? To Nazareth? Never heard of it. To a woman? It's not another one of those birth messages is it? To a virgin? To someone called Mary? I think that's something of a half-baked choice. Not sure if that's such a good idea, the neighbours will catch on and contact the police. Anyway if she says she's seen an angel they'll treat her for mental health issues, say she's suffering from depression, is bi-polar or some complicated medical term; some kind of psychotic problem in any case.

OK I'm your servant. I'll go. But let me get something to eat and watch the end of the Test match first. That's really exciting at the moment.

Do we speak like that to God?

Let's be clear on one this too, God does not say to his servant, "Hey Gabriel. This one is a bit different. This is more important than the last time with Elizabeth. This is a massively big responsibility. This will build up your ego and your self-confidence. This will widen your life experience; improve the quality of your curriculum vitae."

Luke writes simply God sent Gabriel. Into the world.

Like He sends you and me.

What did Jesus say in John 17:18? "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world."

Obedient servant?

As you may know during part of my training I lived for a short time in the Philippines. I actually lived in a rather crowded part of Metro-Manila known as Pasay City. But this was not so far

from Ayala Avenue in Makati, a business area and some really nice hotels. Not far from the sea either.

One great attraction for the team I was working with was to go into the Hilton. I am sure anybody thinking of staying anywhere would say, "Wow: A great place to go. Let's go there. Everybody knows the Hilton. That's first-class accommodation."

We actually entered the hotel when we had the chance to in order to wash our hands in hot water in the rest rooms.

Maybe the Hilton would have fitted the angel Gabriel?

But God chose to send him to a place that was so little known. To a place that had not even got a mention in the Old Testament. In order to make the location of this place clear Luke writes "Nazareth in Galilee". Galilee means the most northerly administrative area of Palestine, bordering on the boundary to Phoenicia. The full name of this area was "area of the heathen" because of it being populated by many heathen people. If you are interested in this look up Isaiah 8:23 and 9:1. This borderland area was despised by the more-committed Jews.

So the area was a no-no.

To go to a female was a no-no. It was not considered to be good behaviour, it was not considered appropriate to greet a woman. We see this in a not particularly amusing way in the traditional Jewish prayer which goes like this: "Thank you God for not making me a heathen, a leper or a woman."

To visit a poor lady in her probably very simple living accommodation was also really a no-no. She did not live in a rich man's palace.

You know in Japan this would probably not even have been described as a 1K apartment, a one room apartment with a kitchen. Or maybe it would even have a simpler layout, a 1R apartment with no division between the entryway and the room, so that opening the door led directly into the apartment with a kitchen also fitted into the room.

Luke shows that the stress is not on human acceptability, but on God's choice.

He chose Mary.

Perhaps surprisingly to some we do not find here in Luke or anywhere else a long list of Mary's attributes, qualities and qualifications. The only thing we really find out about her, is that she loved and adored the Lord.

Mary could have said, "Wait a minute. I'm not sure if that is what I really want. That doesn't fit my plans, my goals, my aims, my objectives."

Mary could have said, "You've got to be joking."

Mary could have said, "Why me? Why don't you, why didn't you choose somebody else?"

But she didn't say any of these things. Maybe she didn't even think them either.

Mary believed the unbelievable.

Mary grasped the truth of the incomprehensible.

Mary accepted the validity of the unproven.

She was willing to believe. To live by faith not by sight.

No word of God will be powerless.

She'll be very bothered and confused thought Gabriel.

And he seems to have been right in this.

Here is your quiz question for today: why does the angel give Mary a sign and Zechariah no sign, even though he asked for one? I think the answer is that Mary, a mortal being, is being entrusted with Jesus, Son of God, the greatest of all. Gabriel says, "...the power of the Most High will overshadow you."

Mary believes. She sees nothing other than Jesus. She stands her life long as if on a rock on which all surging waves must crash.

Who does God choose?

The wise, the rich and the proud or the simple, the poor and the humble?

That is the first thread in today's message. We come to the second thread which is yellow.

God looks at the heart, God chooses those who are willing to serve Him, God chooses those who love Him more than anything else.

God is looking for those with an obedient servant heart.

These two words, these two attitudes, both these characteristics are viewed basically negatively in our society aren't they. We want to go our own way rather than obey; we prefer to rule rather than to serve.

True freedom comes in obeying the Lord. True service is in giving our lives to and for the Saviour.

Elizabeth said, "The Lord has taken away my disgrace." On the other hand, Mary was prepared to take shame on herself and to be disgraced. An interesting, thought-provoking and behaviour transforming contrast?

The Lord revealed to Mary as he does to us just as much as we can cope with. That is very wise and at the same time gracious. As Job said:

"But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.

My feet have closely followed his steps; I have kept to his way without turning aside." (23:10-11)

Can you say that with me this morning?

Read v. 38.

Mary had made her choice. Have we?

For God nothing is impossible. There is nothing that God cannot do.

We believe what it says in the Apostles Creed don't we?

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son Our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

"Conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary."

Impossible? Made-up? Fabricated? Fake news?

No. Real, genuine, true, miraculous.

Read 1:35-37.

This God is some God. He is King of Kings, Lord of Lords, God of Gods. Nothing is impossible for Him.

God makes a way for us to come back to Him. God makes a way for our sins to be forgiven, for us to have new life in Him.

God sent Jesus, the Son of the Most High into the world renewing the plot, opening up the age of grace, breaking down the barriers we have built up between us and Him.

“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (Heb. 3:15).

“And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Saviour; there is none but me. Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.” (Isaiah 45:21b-22)

We have followed three colourful threads in a fabric or mosaic of amazing character and quality.

The first thread shows us who God chooses.

The second asks us to be and to grow in obedience as servants of the Most High God.

The third thread makes absolutely clear that nothing is impossible with God.

Let's get back to the plot. Let's get back to the word of God.

The solution in our country and in the world today is not to trust the science but lies in trusting God who made and sustains the universe. Let us and our nation, our politicians, our care workers, our people humble ourselves before Him and give our lives and the lives of all living in our country to Him today. He knows. He cares and He can and will then do the seemingly impossible. When our country is brought to its knees before God it will become great again.

Amen.

At Bethesda we are going to watch and listen to a reflective song entitled “Is He worthy?”

Here are the words for those of you at home. As you see, it's in the form of questions and responses, the questions sung by Kristyn Getty, the responses on this recording sung by young voices.

Do you feel the world is broken? (We do)

Do you feel the shadows deepen? (We do)

But do you know that all the dark won't stop the light from getting through? (We do)

Do you wish that you could see it all made new? (We do)

Is all creation groaning? (It is)

Is a new creation coming? (It is)

Is the glory of the Lord to be the light within our midst? (It is)

Is it good that we remind ourselves of this? (It is)

Is anyone worthy? Is anyone whole?
Is anyone able to break the seal and open the scroll?
The Lion of Judah who conquered the grave,
He is David's root and the Lamb who died to ransom the slave.

Is He worthy? Is He worthy?
Of all blessing and honour and glory?
Is He worthy of this?
He is.

Does the Father truly love us? (He does)
Does the Spirit move among us? (He does)
And does Jesus, our Messiah hold forever those He loves? (He does)
Does our God intend to dwell again with us? (He does)

Is anyone worthy? Is anyone whole?
Is anyone able to break the seal and open the scroll?
The Lion of Judah who conquered the grave,
He is David's root and the Lamb who died to ransom the slave.
From every people and tribe,
every nation and tongue
He has made us a kingdom and priests to God
to reign with the Son.

Is He worthy? Is He worthy?
Of all blessing and honour and glory?
Is He worthy? Is He worthy?
Is He worthy of this?
He is!

Is He worthy? Is He worthy?
He is!
He is!

Songwriters: Andrew Peterson / Ben Shive
Is He Worthy? lyrics © Universal Music Publishing Group, Music Services, Inc
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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xrbykRFzggo>

This is the internet link if you wish to use it, although I know some areas of Blackburn are having difficulty accessing the internet at the moment!

Hywel now leads us in **prayer**

O God our Father, we thank you for everything that brings us closer to you.

We thank you for your book to tell us of your dealings with your people and which sets before us the deeds and words of our blessed Lord in the days he was on earth.

We thank you for the music and poetry of the psalms and the hymns we sing and for all the memories they awaken.

We thank you for the open door of prayer that is never shut.

We thank you for this day with its call to lay aside the things of earth as we come to worship you.

We thank you for the preaching of your word to comfort our hearts and enlighten our minds.

We thank you for the sacraments of your grace ? be channels of your divine love. Open our hearts and minds today that as we worship you we may desire the precious things you are waiting to give.

We ask O Father that you keep us from all failure all through the coming week.

Keep us from failure in gratitude to those to whom we owe so much.

Keep us from failure in diligence to those to whom we owe our duty and our work.

Keep us from failure in self-control when temptation comes and when passions are strong.

Keep us from failure to give our help to those who may need it.

Keep us from failure to give an example and a lead to others who need support in goodness.

Keep us from failure in kindness to those who are in trouble of any kind.

Help us today to perfectly fulfil our responsibilities to ourselves and to our loved ones.

Grant to us in the coming week to work without haste so that like our Master we may finish the work you have given us to do.

We ask all these things in and through the love of our Lord and Saviour.

Amen

Colin closes our service today as we share the **Grace** together:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forevermore. Amen.

If you have any news you'd like to share let Judith or Tim know please!

Church news: Joan P has now moved to Eastbourne to be with her daughter. She is enjoying her daily walks by the sea and will try to keep in touch with us online! We wish her God's blessing in her new life there, especially as things have happened more speedily than she anticipated! Contact Judith if you'd like her new address.

It's not too late if anyone would like to donate to the BMS World Mission Operation Chad Harvest appeal - just let one of the deacons know, telephone Paul Carter on 665717, send a cheque made payable to BMS World Mission c/o 153 Revidge Rd, Blackburn, BB2 6EE or see the "envelope" below.

OPERATION CHAD

Hope and healing in a Sahel hospital.



GIVE NOW

Place your donation in this envelope, and remember to complete the Gift Aid form on the back.

Please make cheques payable to **BMS World Mission**.

GIVE ONLINE

Visit our website www.bmsworldmission.org/operationchad to donate online by credit or debit card.

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Phone **01235 517641** during office hours to make a donation over the phone and speak to one of our friendly team.

You really can make a difference. Please give.

Donations made to *Operation: Chad* will be used to support life-saving medical work in Chad. If our appeal target is exceeded, additional funds will be used to support other life-transforming BMS work around the world.

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