

Reflection

St Mary's Patronal Festival: Sunday 6 September 2020

Today we are commemorating the feast of the Birth of the Virgin Mary, and since it is a Marian feast we have as our reading the Magnificat, Mary's song. It is a passage we all know so well since we say it every day at Evening Prayer. When I was pondering this passage this week the phrase which was sticking in my mind was "He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble and meek." I was pondering who the mighty in our society are today, and how in the last ten to fifteen years or so those who are seen as mighty have changed. We have witnessed the decline in power and influence of the big and powerful institutions of our nation – including, it must be said, our own



Church of England, and we have seen the growth of influence through things like social media, an almost mob culture and the dreadfully-termed "influencers." Whilst there are some who would laud the decline of institutions, especially religious ones, the void this has created has hardly been replaced by anything coherent and helpful, or any sense of a common good. The echo chambers that new forms of media and communication are creating has led to a hugely judgemental society which is at odds with the Christian worldview of forgiveness and reconciliation. Against this backdrop of shaming and condemnation, it was hardly surprising to read this week that the male suicide rate is at its highest level in twenty years.

This rather bleak picture perhaps shows why the mighty are put down from their seat. The humbling of the Church of England, then, could be seen as a positive thing, and I wonder what it would look like for our church to be more humble and meek? Interestingly, the Greek word used in the Magnificat is "tapeinos", which simply means "lowly", or more literally "not rising far from the ground". This is different to when we hear about meekness in the beatitudes when Jesus says "blessed are the meek" – the word there is "praeis" which perhaps means something more similar to "gentleness". So if, as Mary sings, those who are exalted in God's economy are those who are lowly, or who don't rise far from the

ground, perhaps that can offer us a clue about how the church, and we as Christians, ought to live. As the Church as a whole, and our churches here, continue to discern how we can proclaim the faith afresh in this and in each generation, perhaps being more low to the ground is a good way to go. Rather than joining the rather noisy shouting match about whose views have ascendancy in a rather troubled society, instead let us be lowly and simple in helping others, in caring for those who are really needy in our communities, in showing the love of God and evangelising in generous and honest ways.

It will be by doing these things rather than seeking might and power that the church will be exalted, and it is by continuing in lowliness and humility that our souls will magnify the Lord and through that we and many others will continue to rejoice in God our saviour.

Rev'd Tom