

yet he is One with the Father. We know more about you because Jesus said, 'I am the Good Shepherd, I am the Bread of Life' as well as 'I am the Light of the World'. Help us share this understanding with those who don't yet know this Good News. Help us to shepherd your flocks, feed the hungry and be lights in the places where we live and worship.

Let us remember...

**T: Transcendent** God, there is no other like you. Your presence **transformed** Mary's life and continues to change lives today. Mary's **trust** in you grew although, as we have heard, hers was not an easy life but as a devoted mother she followed her Son even to witness his **terrible** death on the Cross. The birth of a baby changes a woman's life and we pray for all new mothers who have to make room to nurture a little one. We pray for women who would have loved to have had this opportunity but it never came. We pray for Dalit women who feel ground down and fearful as they try to provide for their families. May their lives be **transformed** in ways beyond their present dreams. So, **transcendent** God we praise you & **trust** you that Christ is with us: loving, giving, in us living, here, and throughout the world, today. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Singing the Faith 193: Born in the night

Blessing:

Lord, we need your blessing to make us whole, fulfilled people; but if that blessing should lead us into strange and difficult paths we ask that you will strengthen our faith and our trust, that we may accept what you would do with us so that, blessed, we may in turn be a blessing to others. The blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit go with you and remain with you throughout this special season. Amen

*Service produced by Methodist Women in Britain [www.mwib.org.uk](http://www.mwib.org.uk)*

## A service for Advent



*The Dalit Madonna by Jyoti Sahi, from the Methodist Church Collection of Modern Christian Art © Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, used by permission of trustees of the collection and by the artist.*

## MARY: A WOMAN OF ALL TIMES

This service, suitable for the season of Advent, is adapted from material written by Joyce Powell, bringing together the story of Mary, mother of Jesus, with the experiences of Dalit women in India.

### Welcome

#### Opening Words

This afternoon we are going to think about Mary and how she might have responded to the news that she was going to bear God's Son. We are also going to reflect, as in a mirror, the life of a Dalit woman in India today. There are some 300 million Dalits in the world today; 200 million of them live in India. Where there is a caste system they are born as the lowest, the untouchables as they used to be called. India has laws outlawing discrimination against Dalits but there is still widespread oppression and violence against them. The word Dalit means crushed, broken or ground down. The 'Dalit Madonna', painted by a Christian Indian artist, Jyoti Sahi, is based on a traditional Indian grinding stone, formed of the mother stone and the baby stone. We are going to use the letters of the word Dalit to help us reflect on Mary and a Dalit woman. Listen for words beginning with these letters throughout the service. Let's now come before God in prayer. The response after each sentence is 'We praise you'.

Prayer:

You, God, are, you just are – **We praise you**  
You are divine and dwell deep within us - **We praise you**  
You are amazing and your Advent comes - **We praise you**  
You are loving and live within us - **We praise you**  
You are beyond all our imaginings and yet you created us in your image  
- **We praise you**  
You touch every part of our lives and trust us to follow where you lead -  
**We praise you**

Mary's gift, beyond all telling was to give Christ room  
She gave God a human dwelling in a mother's womb.  
Christ is with us: loving, giving,  
in us living, here today.

**D:** Heavenly Father, we thank you for the opportunity to begin our journey through Advent at this time and in this place. We thank you for sending your Son to earth as a baby, **divine** yet human. We thank you **that all those years ago Mary dared** to say 'yes' to you. We thank you that even today women are **daring** to stand up for their human rights. Especially this Advent we pray for the Dalit women and that the Indian government will keep their promises and punish those who abuse and **discriminate** against them.

Let us remember...

**A: Almighty** God, guide us through Advent we pray so that on Christmas morning we may truly **adore** the Christ-child. As we pray this for ourselves we pray for **all** our fellow believers in the churches of our Circuit, and **across** the world. We pray for Christian Dalit women suffering **abuse**. Help them to know our concern, and your presence with them. We pray for those who **abuse** them that they may come to realise their wrong and **amend** their ways.

Let us remember...

**L:** Heavenly Father, in your great **Love** for us you sent us the **Light** of the world. Jesus said He had come that His disciples might have **life** in all its fullness so we pray for those who **live** in the dark places of this world. Help us to work and pray for those who do not have **liberty** of body or mind, in whatever form that might take. Let us take Your **Love** to all whom we meet in the next few weeks.

Let us remember:-

**I:** We are filled with wonder, Father God, that you who created the Universe and all within it, should let your only Son become the **Incarnate infant**. Because of this he **identifies** with us humans and

**Dalit:** I still feel **terrified** of some fanatics who will still **threaten** us. I am **terribly** worried about the consequences of our march and that our **trust** in the government will be in vain. Thank you, Lord, for the support of the international community in raising awareness of our situation. Help me to **trust** that you will help us and that the government is **telling the truth** and will keep their word.

**Leader :** So can we identify the Mary of the Incarnation with the hope of a new life for the Dalit woman of today? Mary could so easily have become the target of injustice just as the Dalit women, in spite of all the promises, probably still suffer today. Mary's fears were unfounded where Joseph was concerned and so, presumably she was still an accepted member of her society. As we have seen in the poem 'I am the Mary of your Christmas cards', this didn't mean all her troubles would be over but she knew in her heart what Jesus life on earth was all about. He had been sent by God to redeem the world. You and me, the Dalit women and the whole of the human race.

The Christian Dalit women will, no doubt, hear once again this Christmas the words of the Magnificat as we have done today. Let us try to imagine what significance they must have for them as we sing the wonderful words in the hymn version which begins with the letter **T** - 'Tell out my soul, the greatness of the Lord!'

Singing the Faith 186: Tell out my soul

Offering and prayer of dedication

**Leader** invites the congregation to think of words to describe God and his Son Jesus beginning with the letters of the word DALIT? Words on which we base our faith and hope, the characteristics we express in words. These can be called out and incorporated into the following (or other) prayers in intercession.

After the bidding 'Let us remember' we respond by singing:

And yet, Lord, so often we forget about you and shut you out of our lives, preferring to go our own way. Forgive us and help us to be still and receptive to your Holy Spirit through our worship today. Amen

Singing the Faith 169: Come, thou long-expected Jesus

## D

**Mary:** I could be having second thoughts, becoming **disillusioned**. I did say I would bear God's Son, the One we had been hoping for, but what now? I'm engaged to Joseph but he'll never believe my story. He'll **disown** me or worse. In my society single women who get themselves pregnant are **discriminated** against. Oh, I **dread** what will happen to me. My parents are kind but so **disappointed** in me. My friends are **disgusted** with me. I am in **despair**. I will become like **dust**, blown about like the wind and with nowhere to hide.

**Dalit:** I have a loving husband and 2 darling children so I should be happy but I am a **Dalit** from India. I am treated like **dust** and we are the **dregs** of society because of our caste. I am poor and a woman, that makes it worse. I am **discriminated** against by the rest of Indian society, I am **downtrodden** and **disowned**. The only work I can find to do is clearing up other peoples' **dirt**, and I mean **dirt**. It's so **disgusting**. Many of my women friends have been **dishonoured** by those from higher castes, sexually exploited, some forced to eat obnoxious substances, including excrement. You can understand my wanting a better life for my children but I **despair** for them.

Reading Luke 1: 26 - 38

Singing the Faith 187: The Angel Gabriel

Reading Matt. 1: 18 – 25

## A

**Mary: Abuse**, that's what I'm getting now. Those with whom I grew up, neighbours, my father's work colleagues all shunning me. One man I thought was going to **attack** me - he raised his fist shouting **abuse** for our family. We will all sink into poverty. Who will want any of us then?

**Dalit: Abuse**, yes that's what I get daily. I am frightened of being **abducted** like some of the young girls from our village. This caste system started with the Hindu religion but it has infected the Christian Church yes, I am a Christian. I try to hold my head high when these **attacks** come because I know Jesus loves me and cares about what I go through every day. I try to turn away and not hear the words of scorn. I try to pray for my **abusers** but it is hard when nothing seems to improve for us.

Singing the Faith 180: O come, O come Immanuel

## L

**Mary:** Well, I had to pluck up courage and tell Joseph what the Angel said. I didn't think he would **listen** to me **let alone** hear me out. I was sure he wouldn't **love** me anymore. My **life** won't be worth **living** without him. I feel utterly **let down** and it's all God's fault!

**Dalit:** We've been so **let down** in the past. The government has promised us land, forests and access to water but every time we've been **let down**. There are **laws** to protect us but they are not enforced. Last year we took action; so many Dalits and landless people determined to get ourselves **listened** to in a way we've never done before. We decided to march on Delhi from all parts of the country where we live. We gave a handful of grain whenever we could - like food banks - so that we could be fed along the way. The **logistics** were mind-boggling but we did it. We started walking to Delhi, thousands of us. We hoped and prayed that we would be **listened** to and be given

these basic human rights so that we could have a better standard of **living**.

Singing the Faith 183: Praise to God who clears the way

Poem I am the Mary of your Christmas cards

By Katie Baker, from Hay and Stardust compiled by Ruth Burgess, Wild Goose Publications, 2005

## I

**Mary: Injustice**, that's what my society is full of. When the neighbours and my childhood friends won't even listen let alone believe my story it feels so unjust. They are supposed to be good Jews, too, waiting for the Messiah but now He is promised - that's different. I am to blame for my situation. But I have to believe that I am going to bear God's Son, He is to be **Incarnate** through me.

**Dalit:** I believe I have some good news to tell you. I believe our prayers may have been answered. **Injustice** to some degree may be over for us. Yes, we walked a long way but before we reached Delhi the government promised that we would be given land on which to make a living, some forest land and access to water. We will need to help them keep us in mind but it sounds more hopeful. **Inequality** is so wrong for, as Christians, we believe we are all made in the **image** of God.

Reading Luke 1: 46 - 55

## T

**Mary:** I am just **terrified** of the consequences of those words I uttered in the emotion of the moment - 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word'. All those **threatening** words being hurled at me. Let me continue to **trust** the Lord to see me through.