



## The Parish Churches of S Philip and S Augustine and S Matthew with S Mary the Virgin Newcastle

### Homily for Advent IV (21<sup>st</sup> December) 2025

It is probably quite difficult for us to put ourselves in Mary's situation in trying to understand how she might have felt as she considered the life-changing moment of her encounter with the Angel. The circumstances of her times were so different in many ways from those of our own day that we struggle to construct an accurate picture of the issues, which would have weighed on her mind in that moment and subsequently.

Never-the-less, the care of a child in any generation makes - or should make - one of the profoundest impacts on life. For a protracted period of time - maybe longer now than used to be the case - hardly a decision is made or an action taken, which does not have to take into account the presence of that child and the responsibilities that are owed to her or him. Moreover, we shall doubtless become different from the people we would have otherwise have been.

When we contemplate the events of the Annunciation, we can easily ignore these practical impacts on Mary as our contemplation is distracted by the unique elements both of the Conception and also the identity of the Child that was to be born. However, much of the impact of being the Mother of God would not have centred on these supernatural aspects of His Life. Mary would have had to ensure that He was fed, clothed and protected as she saw Him progress through the various stages of childhood towards adulthood and, so we might infer, the world of adulthood and work. Somewhere along the line, we can infer, He received a significant degree of education: maybe more than many of his contemporaries.

If, as seems to be the case, Mary had the care of other children, whose exact relationship to Jesus is much debated, triangulating all their different needs will have made unremitting demands on her: it will have been the principal purpose of her life.

In focusing on the unique factors of Mary's role, we can distance ourselves from her experiences, theologising into the eternal realms, as it were, the part that she plays in God's unfolding Purpose. At the same time, we often speak of Mary as the model of the Church here in earth; and over the next few days, our attention will be drawn to a particular focus of this truth.

During the Christmas celebrations, in the words of Philip Brooks, the prayer will put on our lips that the, "Holy Child of Bethlehem ... be born in us today." In other words, the life of faith and discipleship embraces something of Mary's motherly role.

In the first place, whilst we do not, of course, have to arrange for Him to be fed, clothed and protected, His teaching makes it clear - not least in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats - that we should see Him in those who do need such attentions and care; and we owe it them as much as we would owe it to Him.

Secondly and more profoundly, every decision that we make, every action that we take is - or should be - affected and influenced by the fact of our discipleship. Being a Christian furnishes us with a set of perspectives and attitudes, which inform the choices we should make.

As the Christmas story unfolds over the next few days, we should remember that we are not spectators of the events, but participants in them. They speak of the framework of the lives that we fashion for ourselves as we respond to the responsibilities inherent in being Christian disciples.