**Able to show joy like Mary**

‘The first good joy that Mary had,

It was the joy of one;

To see the blessed Jesus Christ

*When he was first her son, good man:*

*And blessed may he be,*

*Both Father, Son, Holy Ghost,*

*To all eternity.’*

The traditional carol tells us of seven joys which Mary had, starting with seeing her son born and finishing with seeing him wear the crown of heaven. They include seeing his healing power at work and his death on the cross. We get the sense that she experiences joy despite the deep sorrow which she surely also knew.

In mediaeval literature and art there is a slightly different list of the seven joys of the virgin which also includes the annunciation. I suspect that if we were to think about when Mary was joyful our minds might turn to the words which Luke tells us she sang and which are referred to as the Magnificat. We echo these words in the modern hymn ‘Tell out my soul, the greatness of the Lord! Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice; Tender to me the promise of His Word; In God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice!’

The original may have been a Jewish hymn which Mary knew and was moved to sing, or they may be words through which the gospel writer expresses the emotions that Mary later said she remembered feeling.

***46****And Mary said:*

*“My soul glorifies the Lord* ***47****and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,****48****for he has been mindful   of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,****49****for the Mighty One has done great things for me—    holy is his name.****50****His mercy extends to those who fear him,   from generation to generation.****51****He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;*

*he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.****52****He has brought down rulers from their thrones  but has lifted up the humble.****53****He has filled the hungry with good things   but has sent the rich away empty.****54****He has helped his servant Israel,  remembering to be merciful****55****to Abraham and his descendants forever,  just as he promised our ancestors.” Luke 1:46-55*

This is what we are given as Mary’s joyful response to the news which an angel has given her that she is going to become pregnant with and give birth to the son of God (Luke 1:26-38). It never fails to amaze me that Mary’s response was so positive. Obviously, God knew the character of the person he was calling to bring his child into the world, but she seems to be not at all phased by the news. I recall being overwhelmed with a sense of extreme inadequacy and concern when I realised that I was going to have a child and that was when we had planned it. Here was Mary at probably about half the age I was, unmarried, pregnant, totally unprepared and yet she gives such a positive response. Mary’s only question to the angel is to ask how it is going to happen and maybe the answer to that is also the answer as to how she could seem so OK with the idea. The angel tells her that the Holy Spirit will come upon her and the power of the Most High overshadow her, basically she will conceive through the power of the Holy Spirit. And it seems that the Spirit working in her also helps her to joyfully accept the role to which she is called.

**Have there been times when we have found ourselves at peace or even full of joy about what we feel God has given us to do and be in our lives, even though we may see that it could be a difficult road ahead?**

Mary’s child was born (Luke 2:6-7) and then she had the joy of some interesting visitors descending from the hills to come and see him (Luke 2:16-20). As we read the passages from Luke, we get the sense of excitement surrounding this birth and the recognition that God was doing something new and different and world changing. When Jesus was presented in the temple (Luke 2:21-40), Mary was warned by Simeon that a sword would pierce her soul. She would know the pain of loss.

After Jesus’ childhood we discover no more about Joseph, Mary’s husband, but Mary does continue to appear through the accounts. We are told how she and his brothers and sisters came to see Jesus (Luke 8:19-21), it may seem that Jesus does not welcome her but maybe he was just making a point about the family of God being those who do the work of God. John’s gospel tells us about Mary being at the crucifixion and about Jesus thinking to give her and his beloved disciple into each other’s care (John 19:26-27). In Acts, Luke tells us that Mary the mother of Jesus was there with the others, praying as they waited for Pentecost and the birth of the Church. I always like the idea that Mary was around at the time of the early Church sharing her memories of Jesus with the new believers.

**Do you feel like your faith makes you part of a family, the family of God?**

**As Mary received the comfort of being part of the group of early believers, what comfort do you think she might have given them?**

The song of Mary, which we are given at the beginning of Luke’s gospel, glorifies God because he is acting to make a difference in the world, he is turning things upside down and helping us see what the values of God’s kingdom are rather than the values of the world. These upside-down kingdom values are referred to by Revd Richard Teal in his President’s address to which you can find the link on the Methodist Church website. Mary’s joy comes from the Spirit being at work in her life and from her seeing how God is working to bring change.

**What brings you joy? And how do you find yourself able to show joy – do you sing, dance or…?**

**What changes would you like to see in the world around, changes which might bring the possibility of God given joy into other people’s lives?**

**As Mary sang for joy when she recognised what God was doing, how do we see God at work right now? Are there changes we can be part of? Do we see the possibility of our Church being part of the change?**