



SUNDAY 1 JANUARY 2023

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

**The Parishes of:** Bishop Auckland || Newton Aycliffe & Shildon || Willington  
Crook, Tow Law & Wolsingham || Tudhoe || Coundon, Ferryhill & Windlestone

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## ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

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### Feast of Mary, the Mother of God (A) Luke 2:16-21

The world has changed a lot in the lifetime of all of us and it continues. The Church that is here to serve the world has changed too. It must. The Second Vatican Council of the early 1960's talked of the necessity of reading and discerning the signs of the times. We learn on the move.

We're celebrating Mary, the Mother of God today. A wonderful way to begin this next year. We'll all have personal thoughts about Mary, the extraordinary woman we call Our Lady - a very distinctive title. We're used to the name. Have you ever sat down and unpacked what it means, how much does the word Our mean to you?

The Old and New Testaments reveal more men than women to us. Those times and cultures were much more a man's world than ours. That marks the women in the Scripture stories incredibly outstanding - many of them changed the course of history.

Mary - or Miriam to give her her Jewish name first appears to us as a teenager, amazingly in conversation with Gabriel, one of God's super messengers. St. Luke's annunciation story in a rather matter of fact way tells us she was deeply disturbed by Gabriel's hello - what an understatement! She questions the angel over the news that she is to conceive and bear a son. She's not yet married, but God has other ways of making things happen. Stop, if you will, to be hit by the enormity of what's going on here. Presumably there's more not shared with us, but maybe God sees that only a youth's idealism, unaware of problems, has the nerve to say yes to a life-changing experience unlike any in history.

We can only speculate about the day to day home life in Nazareth once Joseph had likewise accepted his role. They must have lived with rumours, enjoyed the life experience of mature family members, learnt on their feet and cherished so many unique memories. We know that once the adult Jesus began making headlines, they wanted to take him in hand, thinking he was losing his mind! (*Mark 3:21*). It wasn't plain sailing. Fears came true when Jesus was brutally put to death after alienating powerful factions in religion and state. The senseless cruelty and shattering grief was matched by the mindbending experience of his resurrection and the energy of Pentecost.

No matter what upheavals you or your family endure, here is a mother given to us to accompany us through and beyond all that life demands. God lives in the mystery, pain and movement of our unfolding years. Enjoy this new one. Happy new year.



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### **Pope Francis: A church which goes forth**

The word of God constantly shows us how God challenges those who believe in him 'to go forth'. Abraham received the call to set out for a new land (*cf Genesis 12: 1-3*), Moses heard God's call: 'Go, I send you' (*Exodus 3:10*) and led the people towards the promised land (*Exodus 3:17*). To Jeremiah God says: 'To all whom I send you, you shall go' (*Jeremiah 1:7*). In our day Jesus's command to 'go and make disciples' echoes in the changing scenarios and ever new challenges to the Church's mission of evangelization, and all of us are called to take part in this new missionary 'going forth'. Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the 'peripheries' in need of the light of the Gospel.

The Gospel joy which enlivens the community of disciples is a missionary joy. The seventy two disciples felt it as they returned from their mission (*cf Luke 10:17*). Jesus felt it when he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and praised the Father for revealing himself to the poor and the little ones (*cf Luke 10:21*). It was felt by the first converts who marvelled to hear the apostles preaching 'in the native language of each' (*Acts 2:6*) on the day of Pentecost. This joy is a sign that the Gospel has been proclaimed and is bearing fruit. Yet the drive to go forth and give, to go out from ourselves, to keep pressing forward in our sowing of the good seed, remains ever present. The Lord says 'Let us go on to the next towns that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out' (*Mark 1:38*). Once the seed has been sown in one place, Jesus does not stay behind to explain things or to perform more signs; the Spirit moves him to go forth to other towns.

God's word is unpredictable in its power. The Gospel speaks of a seed which, once sown, grows by itself, even as the farmer sleeps (*Mark 4:26-29*). The Church has to accept this unruly freedom of the word, which accomplishes what it wills in ways that surpass our calculations and ways of thinking.

- *The Joy of the Gospel - paras 20-22*