



Thought for the Fourth Week in Advent by Rev'd Stella Mills, Associate Rural Chaplain

As we near Christmas our thoughts turn to the birth of the Christ Child and the Saviour who was born over 2,000 years ago. But Advent is not so much about preparing for Christmas but preparing for Jesus' Second Coming, prophesied in the book of Acts Chapter 1, verse 11. The Christian Church has designated the Fourth Sunday of Advent for a focus on Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

For many Christians across the world, Mary is seen as one to be worshipped in her own right. Since the early medieval times, there have been cults based on Mary's life and her position as the (human) Mother of the Son of God (Jesus). But whatever the theology is for each of us, there is much we can learn from Mary for our active lives today.

The story of Mary's calling to serve God as she did can be found in Luke Chapter 1, verses 26 to 38. Here was a young lady working in the temple who was chosen by God to do something which would change her life for ever. Mary had a choice when she realised that God wanted her to bring a young baby into the world. First of all, she obeyed God's calling; she could so easily have said 'no' to God. As a consequence, her life was changed and she knew that it would never return to the peaceful routine she had known until this time. But as the Gospel stories unfold, we catch glimpses of Mary through the activities of Jesus, usually in a typical parental role, even though by this time, Jesus was a young man! But the most moving part of the story of Mary on earth for me, is her being at the crucifixion. Mel Gibson's film, *The Passion of the Christ* about the life of Jesus, catches this wonderfully as it shows Mary behind a pillar watching the proceedings, for fear of course, of being captured too. But her grief went further as she attended the tomb after the death of Jesus. It all seemed so sad.

Perhaps, wherever we are on the journey of faith or whatever position we find ourselves in today, with Mary, we can reflect on our calling. As farmers and rural workers especially, we have a calling to produce food, to keep the countryside (which many will acknowledge as God's creation) in the best condition possible. Of course, we also have a responsibility to the livestock who depend on humans for safe keeping. But in addition to our calling, we live our lives in situations which may be far from ideal or even happy. Like Mary who lived with fear and grief, we can lean on God and stay close to (the now spiritual) Jesus as we work through these situations. Christmas is a time of unhappiness for many people and we can reach out to them with support and care.

But, as Mel Gibson's film portrayed so well, there is a resurrection which Christians celebrate at Easter. Mary knew of the empty tomb, which for Christians is a source of hope and eternal life beyond judgement and the unhappy things of this life. We, too, in faith, can be part of that same resurrection today – the Baby Jesus as King of our lives and, indeed, the Son of God. This Christmas, then, as we walk the land or attend to our stock, let us ponder, like Mary, on our calling and who this Jesus is for us.

May every blessing be yours this Christmas and in 2022 from all at the DRC.

