

He hath exalted the humble and meek (from the *Magnificat* BCP cf Lk. 1.52)

The *Magnificat*, said or sung daily at Evening Prayer, could be described as “the Gospel according to Mary”; it reminds us above all of God's goodness and favour towards the poor, the hungry, the humble and the helpless. That really is gospel - good news - for us all. It is precisely at our points of weakness, when our defences are down and we recognise how utterly dependent on God we are that he is able to break in and raise us up. In doing so he chooses and uses us - in other words just like Mary, we are raised up to be his agents in the world.

We remember the littleness of Mary, “the slave-girl of the Lord”; God chose one who was, in her own words “humble and meek” to be the door through which he would himself enter this world and begin the new age. We remember Mary's own obedient response to the angel; “Behold, the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy will”.

Humility and obedience. It is important to understand these words properly. Humility does not mean self-contempt or being a doormat; it involves rather a realistic assessment of who and what we are; it also means recognising that it is through the poor and humble parts of our world, and of ourselves, that God can enter in. To be truly humble means to know that we are utterly dependent on God; it requires worship, which is both the cause and the result of humility.

Obedience does not mean reluctant, grim jawed dutifulness, it means joyful assent to the will of God. In order to obey we need first to hear; I have already spoken about the importance of worship in relation to humility, and part of worship is scripture, from which we know and celebrate God's mighty acts. The *Magnificat*, Mary's song during her visit to her cousin Elizabeth, is full of Old Testament echoes. Mary was steeped in the scriptures, as the expression of God's graciousness to his people. Mary's vocation was to bring the Word of God into the world. Her visit to Elizabeth is an expression of this, in anticipation of the birth of Jesus. In other words, Mary is called to be an **evangelist** and she hurries to share the good news with Elizabeth in obedience to God.

No wonder “all generations call her blessed”. Mary typifies two characteristics which are essential for every Christian: **humility** and **obedience**. Humility arises from **worship**, and prepares us for **obedience**. Obedience in its turn requires not only hearts humbled by worship, but also ears attuned by **attention to scripture**.

We must allow these characteristics to grow in us if we are to begin to share in the greatest of all the examples of Mary: intimacy with the Lord.