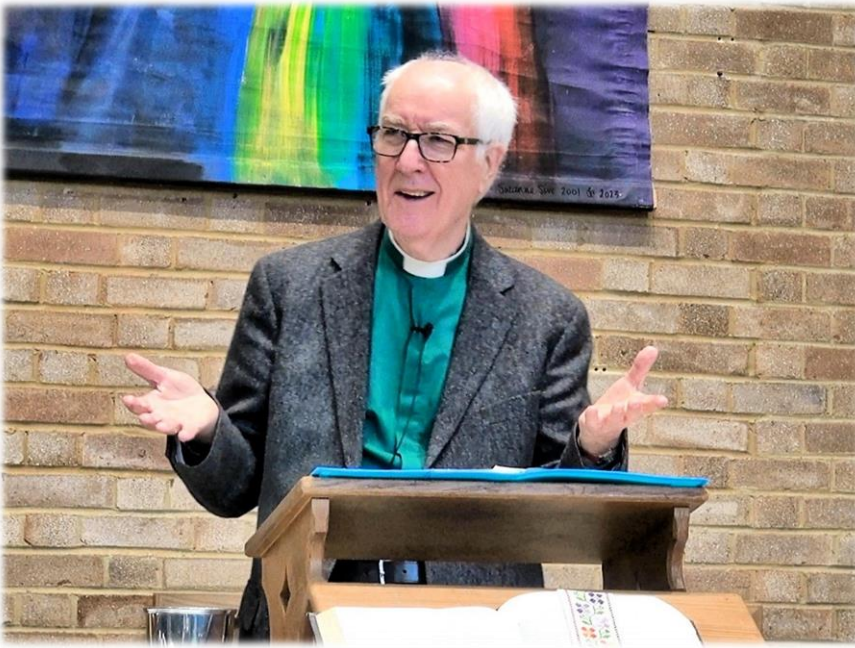


Communion Service Sunday 21st December 2025 – led by Revd John Steele



Good to have John and Mary back with us again – the first time, John said, that they'd seen our church decorated for Christmas. And we had more Christmas trees than their church (*well done ladies!*). But not to be outdone, and to get us in the mood for Christmas, John had brought his own tree in the form of a special tie in the shape of a Christmas Tree. And that provided the lead into a Christmas story.

The Song and the Vision: two pictures of hope and transformation.

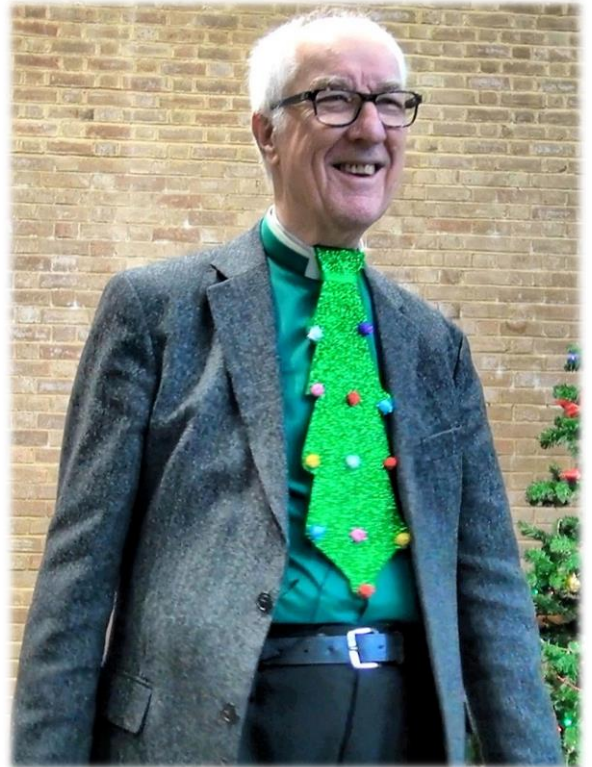
The readings from Luke 1 and Revelation 21 had presented us with two vivid and contrasting pictures.

Luke's picture was of Mary, a young woman from many years ago, who had just received news that she was to become a mother. At first glance, it might appear that Mary had had little choice in the matter; she was simply told by an angel what was about to happen. The child she would bear would be no ordinary child but be conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and he would be the Son of God. Yet Mary did have a choice. She could have chosen to be a passive participant, merely the vessel through which the Christ child entered the world, or she could embrace God's message wholeheartedly.

Her situation had been one of great upheaval, filled with fear and uncertainty, surpassing even the usual anxieties of pregnancy. She faced loneliness, a sense of dishonour, and the possibility of being ostracised, as she was pregnant and the man responsible for her care was not the father. All these circumstances might have seemed indecent or improper to the society of the time. However, God's ways were not bound by human perceptions of propriety; those had been the circumstances God had chosen, with Mary playing a vital role in His plan.

Mary's response had been to praise God. She'd recognised that God was on her side and on the side of people like her—those who were small and overlooked. She'd believed that God was literally overturning the order of the world with the birth of this child and reversing the values of societies like hers - and ours.

The consequences of listening to Mary's song were profound, John thought. God worked through small, unusual, and unlikely people - like Mary, and like us. In the hymn we were to sing, there was a line about God being at war with human wrong. And when we thought about the day and age in which we were living, the things that were happening in our country and across the world, not a great deal had changed. Mary's song had declared: "He has stretched out his mighty arm and scattered the proud with all their plans. He has brought down mighty kings from their thrones and lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty hands."



The second picture was a vision given to an old man, John, a Christian leader who had found himself banished to a remote island, far from everything and everyone he knew and loved. Though he could do little to help them directly, John believed that the pen was mightier than the sword and had written to encourage and instil hope in his people, convinced that things would not improve on their own, but that God was preparing to wipe the slate clean and begin anew.



John's vision had been of God building a new creation - a new heaven, a new earth, and a new city, the new Jerusalem, where God Himself would dwell among His people. All that had marred and ruined human life would be destroyed. In his view, this renewal had already started. His words served as both a warning and a promise: the coming of Jesus Christ could happen at any moment.

Though John's prediction about the immediate coming of Christ had not come true, he'd been right about God's intent to rescue His people. God's kingdom had already begun in the person of Jesus Christ, and the New Jerusalem was being established on earth. God already knew the name

of the Son to be born of Mary—He would be called Jesus, and Immanuel, meaning “God is with us.”

Some of the Apostle John's imagery might perplex us, but it was important to remember that John was a man of his time, seeking, like us, to look beyond the rise and fall of political powers, and the social, economic, and environmental challenges of his day. He'd tried to see what God's answers would be for the world's troubles and hinted that God had a plan for the universe, a plan that was ultimately good, and that in Jesus Christ the outcome was secure. This remained true for us today—the outcome was secure because Jesus Christ was on His way.

And John hoped that Mary's song and John's vision would provide us with inspiration and hope. As we served in our community, looked at the world, and prayed, we were to remember that small and seemingly insignificant people like ourselves had a role to play in God's work. We were to participate in the fulfilment of God's kingdom in Jesus Christ, trusting that God's purposes were good and would ultimately prevail.