

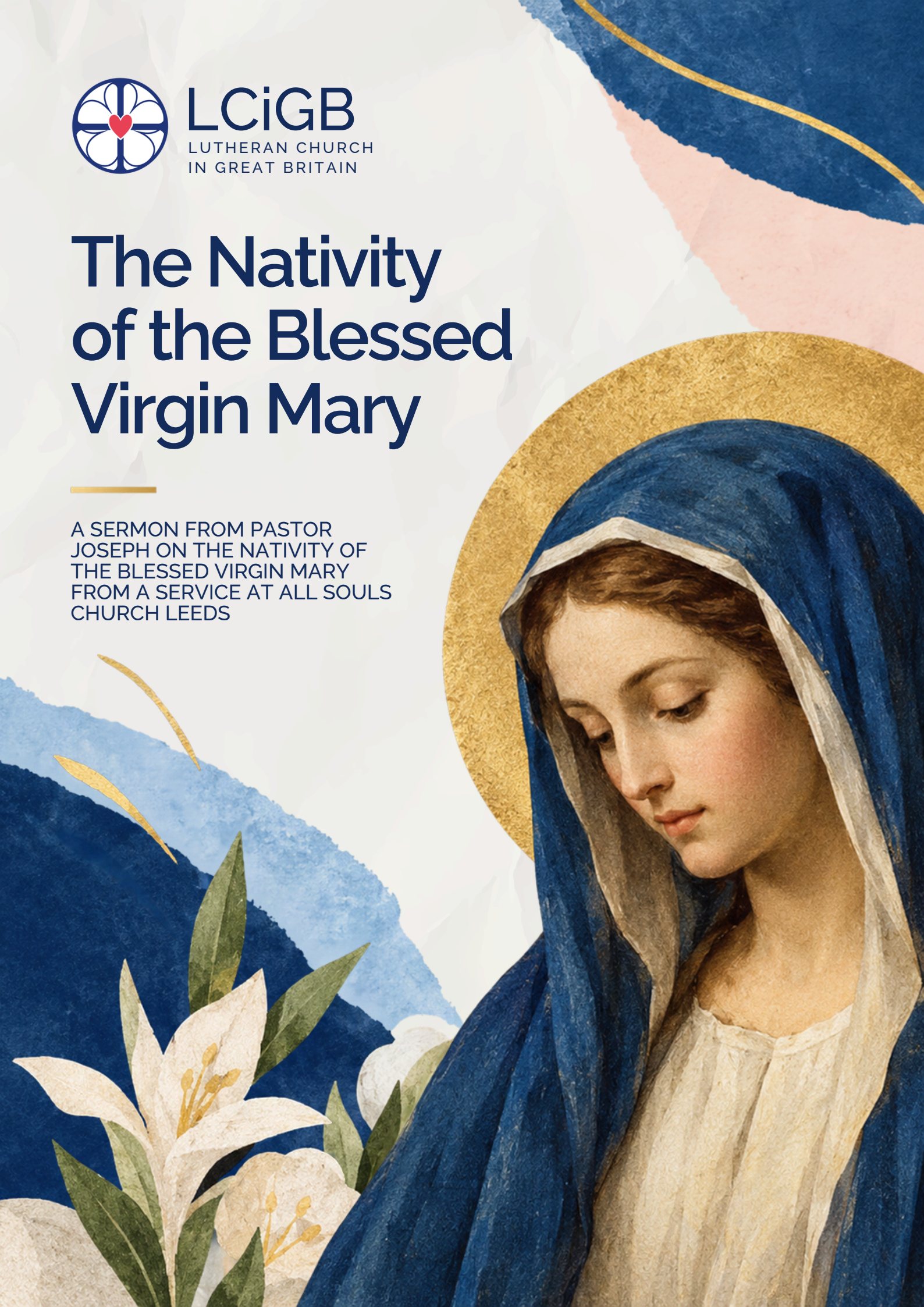


LCiGB

LUTHERAN CHURCH
IN GREAT BRITAIN

The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

A SERMON FROM PASTOR
JOSEPH ON THE NATIVITY OF
THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY
FROM A SERVICE AT ALL SOULS
CHURCH LEEDS



Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

In one of Martin Luther's Christmas sermons on this passage of the annunciation; Luther speaks of three miracles that happen in this gospel passage. Firstly, the miracle of the incarnation where God becomes flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, but as Luther says this is not the greatest. Secondly, the miracle of the virgin birth as foretold of old, yet again a great sign from God but not the greatest. And lastly the third and this surely is the greatest - that Mary - a young woman should believe and trust in the words of an Angel.

It is by faith that Mary receives God's favour. It is by faith that Mary is made righteous and it is by faith that Mary can receive the Word of God not just into her mind but into her very body in Jesus the Word made flesh.

Mary is in many ways the greatest model of a Christian.

She says yes to God...
She acknowledges him as her saviour and Lord,
She attributes all to him and nothing to herself,
She seeks justice and righteousness,
She cares for the poor and the weak,
She recognises that God will fulfil his promises...

As she says: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour".

When the angel declares that Mary is to give birth to a son... How does she respond? Unlike the disbelief of Zechariah, Mary responds in faith... she says yes...
"You see before you the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said"
She accepts the call of the Lord and trusts in him. She recognises God for who he is - her saviour. Not counting her own righteousness but rather trusting upon him who will liberate her. It is God who is Mary's saviour... And she is his servant.

She says later in Luke 1:

"For he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed".

Mary recognises that what she has, her salvation, her justification, her liberation, her child... are from God. She is blessed because God has called her... she is blessed because God has justified her... she is blessed because God has glorified her...

The grace that Mary is filled with is not of her own but of God. It is pure gift.



I am a Lutheran pastor, and I know full well how uppity Protestants can be when people, both Roman Catholic and Orthodox, talk about the sinlessness of Mary. And they come up with all sorts of ways of explaining this like the Immaculate Conception of Mary...

And yet they do have a point to some degree even if it is at times taken too far... What I would, to some quarters controversially argue, is that Mary stands before God in this moment not in a righteousness of her own, but clothed entirely in the righteousness that comes by faith.

Not because there is anything special about her but because at the moment that she says yes to the call of God in Christ by the message of an angel... she is justified by her faith in the coming Messiah... Just as Abraham was justified by his faith. Mary believed in God and trusted in him... and because of her faith God saves her and makes her new. It is her faith that prepares her to be the ark of the new covenant and to bring Christ into the world – the fulfilment of the law.

And therefore, rightly do we call Mary blessed and most holy virgin: the Mother of God. She is the greatest model of the Christian life... the greatest prophet, for she proclaims the coming kingdom of God... the greatest martyr, for the sword that pierces Christ's heart pierces her soul too (Luke 2:35)... the greatest mother... the proto-priest, for she knew most intimately what it means to say, "This is my body, given for you"... the greatest apostle... and the greatest teacher, for she teaches us how to respond to the Word of God and how to treasure all these things in our hearts (Luke 2:19).

It is a great sorrow to me that so many Christians do not honour Mary. It is a great tragedy that the abuses of some have led others to de-emphasise the role of the Mother of God. I believe Martin Luther felt the same. When writing this sermon, I remembered this passage from his sermon on the Magnificat:

"Thus they make us timid and afraid and hide the Virgin's comforting picture. For they deprive us of her example, from which we might take comfort; they make an exception of her and set her above all examples. But she should be, and herself gladly would be, the foremost example of the grace of God, to incite all the world to trust in this grace and to love and praise it, so that through her the hearts of all men should be filled with such knowledge of God that they might confidently say: "O Blessed Virgin, Mother of God, what great comfort God has shown us in you, by so graciously regarding your unworthiness and low estate. This encourages us to believe that henceforth He will not despise us poor and lowly ones, but graciously regard us also, according to your example."

Mary is blessed... but she is blessed above all because she heard the Word of God and believed it... And you too can be blessed... you too can be saved... you too can be justified... Just as Mary was... by placing your trust in her son... By believing in Jesus Christ, by listening to him in the Word... and by receiving him, in the flesh into your flesh in the Eucharist...

Let us pray

O Lord, as we have known the incarnation of Your Son, Jesus Christ, by the message of the angel to the virgin Mary, so by the message of His cross and passion bring us to the glory of His resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

