

GIVE CLIMATE HOPE THIS CHRISTMAS

**Advent 4 worship and
teaching resources**



***"God's mercy flows in wave
after wave."* Luke 1:50.**

Christian World Service 2024

Prepared by Rev Dr Steve Taylor, AngelWings Ltd, for CWS, 2024.

ADVENT 4 - MARY'S ACTION SONG

The suggested lectionary Gospel reading for Advent 4 is Luke 1:39-45; 46-55. The service ideas below work with the theme of action songs. The Climate candle lighting continues to build the Advent koru out of leaves, flowers and shells from your neighbourhood. Singing the *Pasefika* hymn would continue to give voice to the sharing of Advent with our neighbours in Oceania. For all ages, there is a chance to share in Mary's Magnificat using New Zealand sign in an action song. The sermon outline offers two possible directions in preaching Mary's Magnificat as an action song.

CLIMATE CANDLE LIGHTING – A MODIFIED ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTING

Making an Advent wreath in the shape of koru speaks of new beginnings.¹

¹ For more ideas on the foraged craft that could be woven into Advent or Christmas, including fern spirals (67-70) and twig stars (75-77), see Peter Cole and Leslie Jonath, *Foraged Art. Creative projects using blooms, branches, leaves, stones, and other elements discovered in nature* (BlueStreak Books, 2018).

The Advent wreath could be made from leaves and flowers to connect visually with the environment. Shells gathered from the sea could speak of water connections across Oceania.

Using leaves and flowers will take more time, as items will need to be refreshed. But people could be invited to bring flowers and leaves, which would weave ecological practices into the gathered worship. A sense of unfolding could be enhanced by adding to the unfolding wreath week by week. Families and children could be invited to add to leaves, flowers, or shells as the service starts to encourage all-age participation.

As your wreath grows and unfurls during Advent, you could take a picture on your cellphone and email it to us at cws@cws.org.nz. (Try to avoid pictures with people in them unless they give their written permission). We might be in touch to ask your permission to share them on our social media platforms with other congregations who are also participating.

CLIMATE COLLECT

God of mercy,

We see your compassionate action in the song of Mary, the way of Jesus and the care of community

This Advent, in the face of sea rise and cyclone strike,

May we follow your lead in sharing hope across oceans,

Renew our compassion for our neighbours near and far - people and plants, fish and rocks, land and sea,

In mercy's name, Amen

CWS ANNOUNCEMENT

(We provide a brief (60-second/100-word) introduction to the Give Climate Hope this Christmas appeal each week. The announcement could be read as part of the notices or before or after the Climate Collect).

In Advent 4 - a hopeful faith

In Advent 1, 2 and 3, we met Mrs Mafi, working with local organisations in Oceania to make sure “No one is left behind” in her community. Christian faith powers Mrs Mafi. With a smile, she describes having faith that with “God’s guidance, we will find the right alternative in action.” Mrs Mafi practices a spirituality of compassion, small actions shared in and with her family and community. CWS provides a way for us in Aotearoa to partner with the energy of Mrs Mafi. Our financial resources result in the practical sharing of tools and resources. The CWS 2024 fliers have more information.

SONGS – THAT CONNECT WITH THE SERMON IDEAS INCLUDING YOUTUBE LINKS

Singing the *Pasefika* hymn would continue to give voice to sharing Advent with our neighbours in Oceania this Advent. (We are hoping the music, will be at <https://tinyurl.com/pasefikahymn>). *When Out of Poverty Was Born* (Church Hymnary 291) is a relevant carol. The tune is Kingsfold, with words written by former Head of a sister organisation to CWS, Christian Aid Scotland, and Church of Scotland minister, the Rev Kathy Galloway. An online version features a more traditional choral setting here - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MzwyjnACz0o>. There is also a solo performance by artist Kima Otung - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QCEXKG5F-J4>. The solo performance has an expanded vocal range and is better used as a meditation after a sermon or while an offering is being taken.

CREATIVE IDEAS THAT ENGAGE A RANGE OF GENERATIONS (CAN BE USED AS A CHILDREN’S TALK)

There is a Magnificat Song with Sign Language Motions (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E3ESNS6kYQA&embeds_referring_uri=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F&source_ve_path=Mjg2NjY) that has lyrics based on Mary’s Magnificat and makes a great action song. There are a range of ways to utilise this resource:

- Sing along - Play the video as an all-age children’s moment. There is a Magnificat Song Lyrics Only - There is a music and lyrics video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=892_QGpU2U0

- Background music – The song could be played before or after each of the four Advent services to help the congregation learn.
- Learning the actions (a) - You could send the video to children connected to your congregation during Advent and ask them to learn the actions.
- Learning the actions (ab - If you have people in your congregation who know sign, they could be invited to lead people.
- Learning the actions (c) - You could have the actions on a handout for folk to follow.
- Learn the song as a congregation - Lyrics and guitar cords are at <https://restorationarlington.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Magnificat.pdf>.

The YouTube video

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E3ESNS6kYQA&embeds_referring_uri=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F&source_ve_path=Mjg2NjY) comes from Highland Oaks, which is a Church of Christ in the United States. It is titled "Magnificat Song with Sign Language Motions. From Highland Oak Kids and Ms Deb." Ms Deb is a sign language interpreter. The music features songs featuring Flo Paris and Rain for Roots. On the Youtube video, from 3:49-7:53 the signs are explained. There are 12 signs in American Sign Language that are explained: (We are working with Christians involved in sign language to see if we can provide NZ signs for this activity. When we source this, we will replace the section below, which is in American sign language).

- *My/mine/me – open hand on the chest.*
- *Soul – hand makes a circle and touches the heart.*
- *Magnify – left hand as a mirror, right-hand reaches out to grab and touch the mirror.*
- *Spirit – thumb and pointer finger of the left hand placed above the heart, while the right-hand reaches in and pulls out God's Spirit.*
- *Rejoices – waving movement using the tall finger, the finger which has to do with feelings.*
- *Before – right hand raised higher than left hand.*
- *God – right hand pulling down.*
- *Mighty – both hands raised in a fist.*

- *Done – hands back and forth.*
- *Great things – open palms down and outward.*
- *Holy – one palm out and open, the other hand above with two fingers pointing, followed by a circle and wiping the open palm.*
- *Name – two fingers crossed.*

Note re copyright – each church is responsible for copyright. An original music video is available at

https://music.youtube.com/watch?v=RG0SIDiKjK0&list=RDAMPLOLAK5uy_m4ORMC_e0GUN0fb2XQ1OxdXTnMHhmhWYs

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Magnificat is from Waiting Songs by Rain for Roots, featuring Flo Paris. Rain for Roots is a collective group of musicians and songwriters who write singable Scripture songs for kids and grown-ups alike. For more, see <https://rainforroots.com/>. The song can be purchased for \$1.50 US from <https://rainforroots.bandcamp.com/track/magnificat>. The lyrics are available at <https://rainforroots.bandcamp.com/track/magnificat>.

SERMON ADVENT 4

(A sermon that engages Mary's Magnificat as an action song could go in two directions).

A sermon using the signs

Direction one could be to choose three of the sign actions from the "Magnificat Song with Sign Language Motions From Highland Oak Kids and Ms Deb." The result could be a three-point (three "sign" sermon). Invite the congregation to make the sign. Explore the sign, drawing from Luke 1:39-45, 46-55 and other places in the Biblical story. Conclude by inviting the congregation to make the sign with you again.

For example, choosing the sign for the word Spirit

Spirit – Let's make the sign for spirit together - in New Zealand, one hand reaches in and pulls out spirit.

(<https://www.nzsl.nz/signs/search?s=spirit&hs=&l=&lg=&tag=&usage=>).

When Mary “pulls out her spirit” to rejoice in Luke 1:46, she is not pulling out herself. Rather, she is pulling out what God has done. What God has done inside her at the Angels Visitation in Luke 1:35. What God has done in times past in the lives of her ancestors, from generation to generation (1:50).

Biblically, the Spirit is a theme that occurs throughout the Gospel of Luke. The angel promises the Spirit to Mary in Luke 1:35. In Luke 3:22, the Spirit descends on Jesus at his baptism, offering God's love and pleasure. In Luke 4:14 and 18, Jesus returns from the wilderness in the power of the Spirit, who has anointed Jesus to preach good news to the poor. God's Spirit is promised to empower the disciples' witness in Luke 24:48-49. So we Give climate hope this Christmas as witnesses empowered by the Spirit.

An action of reaching and pulling out is activating something that is becoming visible. We are not pulling out our own thoughts and ideas. We are not making our own (Kiwi) culture visible and giving our attitudes to others (in Oceania) – preaching our own news. How presumptuous! Rather, we are pulling out and making visible the work of the Spirit. First, God's love and pleasure in us. Second, God's passion for the poor, those in prison, blind and oppressed, is seen in the mission of Jesus.

So this Christmas, we are invited to pull out God's Spirit inside us, making visible our identity formed in God's love, sharing it as Good news with those who are vulnerable. Let's make the sign for spirit together, this Christmas.

(That is one example of one sign. It gives you some ideas as you look at the other 11 signs from the action song. Choose signs that seem relevant to you and your congregation. Doing things with our bodies helps us remember, and doing things with others creates connections. So, a three-sign sermon could be memorable and create ongoing "signs" of connection).

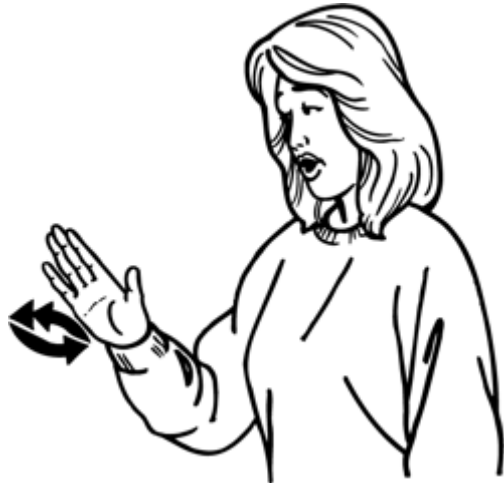
Sermon as action song

(A second direction for a sermon could be to work with action songs as a genre. This approach is offered in the sermon outline below. As with all

sermon outlines, feel free to adapt it by using your own way of saying things and examples from your own life and that of the congregation).

Introduction

As we begin, I want to introduce the sign language sign for mercy
(<https://www.nzsl.nz/signs/769>)



Theme 1 - Mary's Magnificat is an action song.

Mary's Magnificat is song. In my Bible, the text is set out differently. There is more space around the words. The different layout helps me realise that Mary's words are poetry. Like most Hebrew poetry in the Bible, parallel lines draw our attention to words that resonate and phrases that harmonise with each other.

Biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann, describes how poetry-as-song works in the Bible.² Brueggemann observes that in the Bible, poetry-as-song works quite differently from long lists of names – like the genealogies in 1 Chronicles; quite different from various laws that govern behaviour – like Leviticus or Deuteronomy. Poetry-as-song is art. It is subversive. It works outside current ways of thinking and behaving. It describes alternative social realities, "a social model which believes in radical social change, so that what is not yet, will surely be, by the power of Yahweh."³ Songs invite expression and they gather energy. So Mary's

² Brueggemann, Walter A. "The Bible and Mission: Some Interdisciplinary Implications for Teaching." *Missiology* 10(4), 1982, 397-412, esp 403-405.

³ Brueggemann, *Missiology*, 403.

Magnificat is a song that gathers energy around alternative ways of being and acting in the world.

Theme 2 –Strong actions begin with God

Mary's Magnificat is action because, in the Greek text, many of the lines of the song begin with a strong action word. Verbs like "exalt" in verse 47, "look" in verse 48, "bring down" in verse 52, "help" in verse 54. These action words at the start of sentences give punch and drive. There's energy and change.

What's remarkable is where the action comes from. The energy and drive in Mary's song comes from God. Almost all of the actions are done by God. God looks in verse 48, God brings down in verse 52, and God helps in verse 54. God is the central actor in Mary's action song. One commentary calls Mary's Magnificat a remarkably theological statement.⁴ It's a song about the actions of God.

Theme 3 - The most important action in Mary's Magnificat is the action of mercy.

Remember that sign language sign for mercy I taught you (<https://www.nzsl.nz/signs/769>). Let's do it together.

The word mercy is repeated twice in Mary's Magnificat. In verse 50, God's mercy is extended. In verse 54, God helps Israel remember to be merciful.

In the New Testament, the Greek word for mercy means "compassion in action."⁵ Mercy as "Compassion in action" appears five times in Luke chapter 1 (50, 54, 58, 72, 78) to describe God going above and beyond.

In Luke 1:78, the word mercy is paired with the word "bowels". Literally, through the bowels of mercy, God will visit us.

Bowels evoke inner stirrings that are felt physically as an emotion. So in 1:78, God has "bowels of mercy," inner feelings that are felt physically toward visiting us.

⁴ Robert Tannehill, *Luke*, Abingdon: Nashville, 1996, 57.

⁵ *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, IVP:Downers Grove, Ill., 1992, 542.

Later in the Gospels, the words for "bowels" and "mercy" are used to describe Jesus, who has bowels of mercy, inner feelings that are felt physically toward the helpless in Mathew 9:38.

Remember that sign language sign for mercy I taught you (<https://www.nzsl.nz/signs/769>) – do it together.

Mercy – compassionate action, inner emotions felt physically - are not feelings we often consider when we think about bringing change. We don't often think that mercy can scatter the proud (verse 51) and bring down rulers from their thrones (verse 52).

We are more likely to think about change coming through voting and elections. Or the use of loud voices to shout for our rights. Or, in the worst case, actions that use force, our physical strength.

But voting, shouting, and forcing have no place in Mary's action song. She's singing about mercy. She's placing her trust in compassionate action, God's inner feelings that are felt physically toward creation.

Theme 4 - Action songs start small.

Mary's Magnificat is 9 verses. 98 words in the Greek, to be precise. About 1 minute of talking. What can a 60 second action song do?

Mary is a young teenager, not yet married, a woman in a culture that elevates men. What can one young woman singing a 60 second action song do?

Mary is Jewish, in a culture living under Roman rule. Her life, and the life of her people, is governed by external forces – Emperors making unhelpful decrees such as a census or the power hungry actions of Herodian kings. In the midst of foreign empires and external powers, what can one young woman singing a 60 second action song do?

Mary's action song reminds me of Mrs Mafi, who is part of the Christian World Service Christmas appeal 'Give Climate Hope this Christmas'. Mrs Mafi lives on the Eastern side of Tonga. A woman, like Mary, who is living with the external forces. Not Roman rule but rising sea levels and environmental degradation.

Mrs Mafi, like Mary, is responding with small actions. Practical, hopeful action like moving gardens further inland. Finding local plants that are more resilient. Mrs Mafi describes her faith in God's action. "With God's guidance, we will find the right alternative in action to our resilient needs."

Theme 5 - Action songs work best in community.

So what do we do with an action song? We could fold our arms. Pretend action songs are for kids. I mean, we're adults, after all. All grown up.

Another approach is to join the action song. What's the worst that could happen? We could look silly for the first time or two. We could get our lefts and rights mixed up. If we're not used to mercy, we could make the wrong move. Say the wrong thing. But that's part of the fun of the action song. Having a go. Joining together. Sharing with others.

Conclusion

Mary's Magnificat is an action song. It's a song that invites us to the compassionate action of mercy.

Whether we're a pregnant mum like Mary or a courageous Tongan woman like Mrs Mafi, we can join in, have a go, and learn the compassionate action of mercy together.

Practically, as we think about Christmas celebrations with family members, friends and community what does it mean for us to act with mercy.

Practically, as we think about giving Climate hope this Christmas as part of the Christian World Service appeal.

It's all part of being a community, joining Mary's action song of mercy (<https://www.nzsl.nz/signs/769>). Would you join me as we do it together? Now and in the days to come.

PRAYERS FOR THE CLIMATE AND ALL THINGS

There is a beautifully sung refrain called *For the world and all its people* (*Church Hymnary* 262). This could be used as a hymn, but the chorus would also work as a sung response for intercession.

You could work through Mary's Magnificat, using the verbs as a frame, with petitions focused on climate hope in Oceania, and offer the chorus as a sung response (<https://music.churchofscotland.org.uk/hymn/262-for-the-world-and-all-its-people>).

- **"exalt"** - God the creator, who hovers over the waters of Oceania, bringing waves of mercy, gifting beauty, resilience and local wisdom, inviting us to share love with neighbours – land neighbour, water neighbour, tree neighbour, plant neighbour, bird neighbour, fish neighbour, next door neighbour, Oceania neighbour.
- **"look"** - with mercy on the organisations and people working for climate hope across Oceania, including Tonga Community Development Trust, the Pacific Conference of Churches and the "Green Apostles" in Melanesia (<https://www.acom.org.sb/environmental-observatory-project/>)
- **"bring down"** - the industries and peoples that exploit lands, sea and people for greed, particularly those contributing to bottom trawling and the Great Pacific Garbage Patch
- **"help"** - those directly impacted by climate-related disasters, researching, seeking innovative local solutions and the younger generations God is raising up to advocate for positive change across all God's creation in both people and planet.