

A Service for Lady Day, the Annunciation of our Lord 2015

This service has been written to appeal to all ages. If a more formal service is required then the various suggestions for prayers, readings and talk can be adapted and inserted into a suitable framework.

The liturgical colour for festivals of Mary is white, but as blue has been traditionally associated with the Blessed Virgin Mary, white vestments that include blue would be suitable. This might also be reflected by using blue and white flowers in decorations. You could even ask everyone to wear something blue to the service.

You will need

- A crown and/or a cloak
- A prayer shawl and scroll
- A money bag and/or cloak
- A fishing net and/or a spade and/or a toy lamb
- A blue cloth or headscarf
- A wooden toy
- Someone to represent the Angel Gabriel
- A baby doll wrapped in blankets
- A pointing finger angel wing printed on card, and cut out, for everyone

The Gathering

As people arrive, give them an angel wing

Today we remember Mary and the angel who came with a life-changing announcement – she had been chosen to give birth to Jesus, God's Son. It is the Annunciation, Mary's Day, and used to be known as Lady Day

Hymn

Exploring the Word

If we could travel back in time to Lady Day three hundred years ago, many of us here would be involved in farming. Some of us would own our own farms, but many more of us would earn a living by working for local farmers. Even the children work at harvest time! Today – Lady Day – is a very important occasion, because it is when farmers hire their workers for the following year. Soon, those of us who are labourers will gather in the market place and the farmers will pick the ones who look strongest and most experienced. If you aren't chosen for a job on Lady Day, your family might starve.

Imagine standing there in the crowd, waiting and hoping to be picked. Nowadays many of us may have experienced something similar. Here's something to jog our memories. Can I have two volunteers?

Invite two volunteers to stand at the front

Here are my team captains. I would like them to pick teams for a rounders match. Who are they going to pick? Let's give them a moment to decide...

Invite your volunteers to examine the congregation

Don't worry – I'm going to stop them there! *Ask the volunteers to sit down again* We aren't going to pick teams today, but who has had an experience like this at school?

Invite responses to this and the following questions

- How do you feel when you're waiting to be picked?
- How do you feel if you're the last person to be picked?

Our story today is about God picking the most important member of his team – the person who would bring his Son into the world

Gospel Reading Luke 1:26-38

Hymn

In today's story, the angel came to tell Mary that God had chosen her to bring his Son into the world. In order to explore God's choice, let's think back to the team-picking activity we began with today. Can I have some more volunteers?

Invite six volunteers to come and stand at the front, facing the congregation

Let's imagine that these volunteers represent the people God has to choose from in the Holy Land, two thousand years ago. God has a job for one of them which couldn't be more important. God wants to save the world – and he needs to pick someone to help make this happen.

First of all there are the kings and princes – they are clearly important, so perhaps he should pick one of them.

Place a crown (and cloak) on the first volunteer

Then there are the religious leaders. They already know a lot about God, so maybe he should choose one of them

Place a prayer shawl on the next volunteer and hand them a scroll

Then there are the other important people – decision makers who have power and influence. Many of these live in Jerusalem and they are all men. Should God pick one?

Give a cloak and money bag to the next volunteer

Then there are the ordinary workers. There are lots of strong men here

Give a fishing net and/or a spade and/or a toy lamb to the next volunteer

Now we're getting to the people who, two thousand years ago, were among the last and the least. Here are the women and the children. Nobody thought they were very important, especially if they lived in an ordinary little village out in the countryside.

Give the next volunteer a blue cloth to cover the head. Give the last volunteer a wooden toy. The Gabriel enters and walks down the line, starting with the king

Here comes the angel, carrying news of God's decision. Who has he picked?
Gabriel walks past the whole line and hands Mary a baby doll wrapped in blankets

He bypasses all of these important people and entrusts the task to Mary, a poor woman from the country. And her child will be God's Son, who came to save us all and give us eternal life.

This is how God chose Mary. And this is how he still chooses people today. He doesn't pick his team the way sporty people do, and he doesn't choose his workers as a farmer on Lady Day might. The Bible shows that God often picks the most unexpected people to do his work, and he can single out any one of us and say to us, as he did to Mary, "I choose you." If we reply, "Who me?" we need to remember what the angel told Mary. "Nothing is impossible with God."

Hymn

Reading Luke 1:39-55

The Magnificat

My soul sings in gratitude.
I'm dancing in the mystery of God.
The light of the Holy One is within me
and I am blessed, so truly blessed.

This goes deeper than human thinking.
I am filled with awe
at Love whose only condition
is to be received.

The gift is not for the proud,
for they have no room for it.
The strong and self-sufficient ones
don't have this awareness.

But those who know their emptiness
can rejoice in Love's fullness.
It's the Love that we are made for,
the reason for our being.
It fills our inmost heart space
and brings to birth in us, the Holy One.
Joy Cowley, 2012

Prayers

Collect

We beseech thee, O Lord,
pour thy grace into our hearts,
that, as we have known the incarnation of thy Son Jesus Christ
by the message of an angel,
so by his cross and passion
we may be brought unto the glory of his resurrection;
through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Heavenly Father,
You hold all possibilities in your hands and nothing is impossible with you.
Make known your will for each one of us, though we may ask, "Who, me?"
Take us as we are and accept all we have.
Let it be with us according to your word. **Amen**

Lord, thank you for all the ways you break into our lives with your message of love
and hope for the future.
Thank you for your angels,
who come to us in so many different ways.
May we be open to recognise and welcome them. **Amen**

Remembering the work of our organisation, unified in lifting the humble high across
the world, we say together our Mothers' Union prayer

Loving Lord

We thank you for your love so freely given to us all.

We pray for families around the world.

Bless the work of the Mothers' Union

as we seek to share your love

**through the encouragement, strengthening
and support of marriage and family life.**

Empowered by your Spirit,

may we be united in prayer and worship,

and in love and service reach out as your hands across the world.

In Jesus' name Amen

*If the service is a service of the word, it may be appropriate to end the prayers with
the Lord's Prayer, before sharing the peace together.*

*If the service is a Eucharist, continue with the peace followed by the offertory and
the Eucharistic prayer*

Sharing the Peace

United in prayer, we join together to commit ourselves to lifting the humble high,
as Mary did.

The sign of peace is a model for the way we should seek to live. We are offering
affirmation, lifting each other up with love. As we exchange a sign of peace, let us
dedicate ourselves to lifting the humble high in the world at large in our daily lives.

God is our peace.
May we embrace each other in God's peace,
holding divine love within our clasped hands.
The peace of the Lord be with you now and always.
And also with you!

We exchange a sign of peace.

The Conclusion

At the beginning of this service you were given an angel wing which looks as though it is pointing. The wings ask the question, "Who?" as if God's messengers, the angels, are searching for someone. God picked Mary, an unlikely candidate, for his most important job, so he may pick any one of us to do his work.

Please take these wings home as a reminder of Mary's visit from an angel. And if you ever notice something that needs doing, just ask yourself the question, "Who has God picked for this job?" and remember, "it could be you!"

Hymn

Closing prayer

May the love of the Holy Family surround us.
May the joy that was Mary's refresh us.
May the faithfulness that was Joseph's encourage us.
May the peace of the Christ Child fill our lives.

Amen

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

In the name of Christ.

Amen!

