

Sermon preached by Archbishop Sarah Mullally at her installation as Archbishop of Canterbury on 26th March, 2026

For nothing will be impossible with God, may I speak in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I am delighted to be with you today. Over the last week I have walked the ancient pilgrim path from St. Paul's Cathedral in London to Canterbury Cathedral. Each day my heart and spirits were lifted immeasurably by the people young and old we encountered, even though my aching feet and limbs tell a different story.

As I walked, I have been made aware that I make this journey both on a personal level, as my ministry moves from being the bishop of London to the archbishop of Canterbury, but more significantly, I make this journey with others and in the footsteps of the past. Thomas Becket, one of my predecessors as archbishop of Canterbury, made this same pilgrim journey over 850 years ago.

Today, I think of the many thousand unknown Christians who have trodden these same paths since, and not just on this ancient land, but all across the world. People walk the pilgrim paths of faith each and every day.

Of course, even if you're following a path, the way can be unknown. Where it leads isn't always clear, but we can trust in God's hand guiding us, and in God's promises. In the prayer that was written for my pilgrimage by student chaplains at the archbishop school here in Canterbury, they prayed that God might strengthen us in faith, grant us a heart like Christ, gentle, humble and devoted to the truth, so that we may share the Gospel with joy.

Pretty good, isn't it? And it reminds us that we can all learn from the faith of our young people.

For Mary, perhaps the same age as those student chaplains, following God's invitation to trust in his promises meant trusting in a future she couldn't yet see, a future she could never have imagined. Mary was invited to put her faith in God and to trust in the angel's words of reassurance, "for nothing will be impossible with God."

This resonates with me. As I look back over my life at the teenage Sarah who put her faith in God and made a commitment to follow Jesus, I could never have imagined the future that lay ahead, and certainly not the ministry to which I am now called. Mary followed in the footsteps of the faithful. Her story resonates with the beautiful stories of women, like Hannah, in the Scriptures. Mary put her hope in God's future. She trusted that he was with her, and through Mary, God did a new thing.

As we approach Holy Week and Easter, we also know that Mary's journey wasn't easy, and that she faced unimaginable challenges. The sword of grief and pain pierced Mary's soul, just as Simeon had foretold, most of all on the cross, yet even that was transformed into the joy and hope of the resurrection.

But here, in this moment of encounter with the angel, before any of the story unfolds, Mary is invited to open her heart, to offer herself and say, "Here I am," and to put her hope in the angel's words, "for nothing will be impossible with God."

Some of our Anglican brothers and sisters are unable to be here today due to the war in the Middle East and the Gulf. We pray for them without ceasing, and for all those in worn-torn areas of the world, in Ukraine, in Sudan and Myanmar, that they would know God's presence with them, just as we pray for peace to prevail.

And in a world already torn by conflict, suffering and division, we must also acknowledge the hurt that exists much closer to home. We must not overlook or minimize the pain experienced by those who have been harmed through the actions, inactions and failures of those in our own Christian churches and communities. Today and every day, we hold victims and survivors in our hearts and in our prayers,

and we must remain committed to truth, compassion, justice and action.

As a church, we are a pilgrim people, and like Mary, we are called to trust that nothing will be impossible with God, even when we see so much in the world that makes hope seem impossible. But there is hope, because we make this journey with God. We do not bear the weight of this calling in our own strength, but only in the grace and power of God. We walk with God, trusting that God walks with us, trusting that in all that we face. In the sorrow and the challenges as much as in the joy and the delight, we do not walk alone.

There is hope, because we are invited to trust that God will do a new thing.

The moment of encounter between Mary and the angel Gabriel announces the mystery of the incarnation, the definitive moment that reveals God with us, Emmanuel.

In the Incarnation, we see God becoming one of us, and this gives me such hope for the church. In the ordinary and the extraordinary life of the church, we see God's hand at work, the church rolling up its sleeves and getting stuck in where God is already at work, in the local and the global. The church through the ordinary lives of its people continues to do so many extraordinary acts of love. God's people, offering a listening ear, a word of encouragement or a prayer of healing, offering food, shelter, sanctuary and welcome in a world that so often seeks to divide us, tables to sit at, conversations to be shared, and being a simple loving presence, like the salt of the Earth, a light on the hill, the treasure of the kingdom, a church for the whole nation and for the world, which looks for ways of joining in with people of all faiths and of none in acts of service which will transform, a church which extends around the world with our sisters churches in the Anglican Communion, as part of the one holy, catholic and apostolic church to embody Christ's love.

God is at work in the good news of the Gospel and in the hearts and lives of ordinary people who, like Mary, have the audacity to believe that with God we can do extraordinary things.

For me, this trust and hope in God began as I committed my life to Jesus. And God has been with me, each at every step of my pilgrim path, and I trust he walks with me now.

Maybe, as you are listening, you are thinking about your own journey. Perhaps it is smooth, perhaps it is hard. Knowing God is with us on our journey makes a real difference. I'd encourage you to visit a church or a chaplaincy for a quiet prayer, for a conversation. If you want to talk, you will be heard. And you can respond to God's invitation with words as simple as those of Mary: "Here I am."

As I begin my ministry today as archbishop of Canterbury, I say again to God, here I am. May we have the audacity to believe in the promises of God, for with him, nothing will be impossible.

Amen.