

## What is that Bell?



Three times a day at 9.00am, 12 noon and 6.00pm the bell at St Andrew's rings in what may seem a rather odd way. The bell strikes three groups of three, and then a group of nine. This is the Angelus. It is a form of prayer, and calls the parish to pause for a moment to remember the incarnation of Christ. That is, to ponder the fact that in Jesus Christ God became man and so that we human beings can be reunited with God. It is like a little Christmas three times a day.

There are prayers to go with the bell.

It is called the Angelus because the prayers begin with the statement that *The Angel of the Lord brought glad tidings to Mary* and the response *And she conceived by the Holy Ghost*. This recalls Luke 1:26-37.

This is followed with the "Hail Mary", the prayer that uses the Angel's words (Luke 1:28) as we ask Mary, to pray with us and for us: *Hail Mary full of grace the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus*. In this prayer we assert the resurrection of the dead, and the continued union of the church living and departed. Just as we may ask one another to pray with and for us, so we ask those who have gone before us in the faith to do so.



The prayer continues, *Holy Mary Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death*. Christians do not pray to saints - that would be idolatrous blasphemy since only God can be the recipient of our prayers - but we ask Mary, and with her the whole company of heaven, to join their prayer with ours. The ancient title 'Mother of God' (*Theotokos*) is an assertion about Jesus, that he is indeed God incarnate, Emmanuel, the word made flesh, and not simply a great (even the greatest) man, or merely a significant teacher.

The second set of three bells recalls the response of Mary to the call of God, and invites us to imitate her "yes" to His call in our lives: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word*. (Luke 1:38) The Hail Mary is then said again.

The third set of three bells recalls the fact that because of Mary's "yes" to God's call Jesus was born, and reminds us that when we do His will, He is born again into the world and His mission is extended: *And the Word was made flesh; and dwelt among us*. (John 1:14)



Finally, the bell rings nine times while we collect for the Feast of the Annunciation from the 1662 Prayer Book is said: *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.*

If you hear the bell, pause in your busy day and remember what God has done for us in His incarnation and how He is calling us to share His work in the world.



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