

Christ Church, Ipswich
Sunday 22nd December 2024 10.45 am
Family Worship for the Fourth Sunday of Advent

Minister: Revd Neil Coulson

Organist: Mr Stephen Hogger

Hello, I hope you are well.

Let us worship God together:

A prayer as we light our Fourth Advent Candle

As we light this Advent candle,
 may its flame be for us a sign of blessing.
 As Mary and Elizabeth greeted each other,
 and Mary praised God for the blessings
 received,
 may we know God's blessing in our lives and
 community,
 as we offer prayers and praises in Jesus' name.
Amen.

A prayer of approach

Lord God, we come in expectation,
 we come with joy at what is to come,
 we come to worship and centre ourselves.
 We come knowing your greatness,
 your eternal presence, your abiding love,
 your overwhelming generosity.
 We come to rest in this place
 and to see afresh the wonders of your being.
 Lord God, we come, we come, we come.
Amen.

R&S 740

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord

1 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
 Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;
 tender to me the promise of his word;
 in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

2 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!
 Make known His might, the deeds his arm has
 done;
 his mercy sure, from age to age the same;
 his holy name—the Lord, the mighty One.

3 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!
 Powers and dominions lay their glory by;
 proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,
 the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

4 Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!
 Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.
 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
 to children's children and forever more!
 © 1961 Timothy Dudley-Smith.

Prayers of Adoration, Confession and Grace

Our souls cry out in praise and thanksgiving to you O God,
 for all You have done and for all that You are.
 We magnify You as Your servant Mary did so long ago,
 for you have looked on us, in our lowliness,
 raised us up, and made us a little less than the angels.
 Through Your might, seen in weakness, You seek to change our world.
 Discounting the mighty, You lift up the lowly.
 Ignoring the proud, You delight in the humble.
 But more, O God, You want us to do the same -
 leaving behind the imagination of our hearts,
 You call us to join in Your work of turning the tables,
 feeding the hungry, and proclaiming that the world is about to turn.

Yet we so often ignore Your call and Your truth.
 We prefer the glory of the world to the weakness of the Cross,
 the company of the mighty rather than the presence of the lowly,
 pride rather than humility, power rather than passion.
 Forgive us, good God, and give us time to change. Amen.

Like a father who runs to welcome home the estranged,
 like a mother hen who gathers her chicks under her wing,
 like a rock upon which we stand, God is loving and faithful,
 forgives our sins and urges us to forgive others.
 So, we claim the forgiveness on offer, we forgive and we are forgiven
 and we set out to live as whole people. Amen!

A Prayer of Thanksgiving

Father, how can we thank you enough for your Christmas gift to us?
 We give thanks as labour pains intensify, heralding Jesus' birth,
 the empty cradle soon to be filled and overflowing with love –
 a love that touches, convicts, renews and blesses.
 We thank you for the joy that fills us
 as we wait with baited breath to celebrate our Saviour.
 We give thanks for your loving glory which comes down
 this Christmas time. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Family Time

R&S 139 The Angel Gabriel from heaven came

1 The Angel Gabriel from heaven came,
 his wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame;
 'All Hail', said he, 'thou lowly maiden Mary,
 most highly favoured lady.'
Gloria!

2 'For known a blessed Mother thou shalt be,
 all generations laud and honour thee,
 thy Son shall be Immanuel, by seers foretold;
 most highly favoured lady.'
Gloria!

3 Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head,
 'To me be as it pleaseth God', she said,
 'my soul shall laud and magnify his holy name':
 most highly favoured lady.
Gloria!

4 Of her, Immanuel the Christ was born
 in Bethlehem, all on a Christmas morn,
 and Christian folk throughout the world will ever say
 'Most highly favoured lady'.
Gloria!

Basque Carol para. S. Baring-Gould (1834-1924)

The young people go to Junior Church with our love and blessing

Old Testament Reading Micah 5:2-5a**(OT page 790)***The Ruler from Bethlehem*

² But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
 who are one of the little clans of Judah,
 from you shall come forth for me
 one who is to rule in Israel,
 whose origin is from of old,
 from ancient days.
³ Therefore he shall give them up until the time
 when she who is in labour has brought forth;

then the rest of his kindred shall return
 to the people of Israel.
⁴ And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength
 of the Lord,
 in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.
 And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great
 to the ends of the earth;
⁵ and he shall be the one of peace.

Epistle Reading**Hebrews 10:5-10****(NT page 207)**

⁵ Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,
 'Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,
 but a body you have prepared for me;
⁶ in burnt-offerings and sin-offerings
 you have taken no pleasure.
⁷ Then I said, "See, God, I have come to do your will, O God"
 (in the scroll of the book it is written of me).'
⁸ When he said above, 'You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt-
 offerings and sin-offerings' (these are offered according to the law), ⁹ then he added, 'See, I have come to do
 your will.' He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. ¹⁰ And it is by God's will that we have been
 sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Gospel Reading**Luke 1:39-45, (46-55)****(NT page 53)***Mary Visits Elizabeth*

³⁹ In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰ where she entered the
 house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb.
 And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴² and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women,
 and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³ And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to
 me? ⁴⁴ For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she
 who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'

Mary's Song of Praise

⁴⁶ And Mary said,
 'My soul magnifies the Lord,
⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
⁴⁸ for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.
 Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
 and holy is his name.
⁵⁰ His mercy is for those who fear him
 from generation to generation.
⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;
 he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
 and lifted up the lowly;
⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things,
 and sent the rich away empty.
⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
 in remembrance of his mercy,
⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
 to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'

R&S 145 O little town of Bethlehem

O little town of Bethlehem,
 how still we see thee lie!
 Above thy deep and dreamless
 sleep the silent stars go by:
 yet in thy dark streets shineth
 the everlasting Light;
 the hopes and fears of all the years
 are met in thee tonight.

O morning stars, together
 proclaim the holy birth,
 and praises sing to God the King,
 goodwill and peace on earth.
 For Christ is born of Mary;
 and gathered all above,
 while mortals sleep, the angels keep
 their watch of wondering love.

How silently, how silently,
 the wondrous gift is given!
 So God imparts to human hearts
 the blessings of his heaven:
 no ear may hear his coming;
 but in this world of sin,
 where meek souls will receive him, still
 the dear Christ enters in.

O Holy Child of Bethlehem,
 descend to us, we pray;
 cast out our sin, and enter in,
 be born in us today.
 We hear the Christmas angels
 the great glad tidings tell:
 O come to us, abide with us,
 our Lord, Immanuel.

Phillips Brooks (1835-93)

Talk, reflecting on Today's readings

A moment for reflection as we listen to some music

R&S 178 Who would think that what was needed

1 Who would think that what was needed
 to transform and save the earth
 might not be a plan or army
 proud in purpose, proved in worth?
 Who would think, despite derision,
 that a child should lead the way?
 God surprises earth with heaven,
 coming here on Christmas Day.

2 Shepherds watch and wise men wonder,
 monarchs scorn and angels sing;
 such a place as none would reckon
 hosts a holy, helpless thing;
 stabled beasts and passing strangers
 watch a baby laid in hay:
 God surprises earth with heaven,
 coming here on Christmas Day.

3 Centuries of skill and science
 span the past from which we move,
 yet experience questions whether
 with such progress we improve.
 In our search for sense and meaning,
 lest our hopes and humour fray,
 God surprises earth with heaven,
 coming here on Christmas Day.

John Bell (1949-)
 and Graham Maule (1958-)*
 © Iona Community/Wild Goose Publications

Our prayers of intercession

Heavenly Father, we pray today that we may know in our lives the quality of peace that Mary knew as she accepted God's will. May we also rest serene in the knowledge that God has a plan for us and is guiding our lives.

Our souls rejoice in you, O Lord, and we seek your peace in our hearts.

Father, may your house be a haven of peace for those who struggle at this season; for those who slip in at quiet times when the carols are silent, because they long for the blessing of peace without the jollity; for those who lack the energy to rejoice because of bereavement or illness, but who desperately seek peace to still their souls and renew their strength.

Our souls rejoice in you, O Lord, and we seek your peace in our hearts.

Lord of all, we pray that all members of our community will feel included and involved in the events of this season; may the peace of the Christ-child enfold our neighbourhood and our town. And we pray for peace in a world where so many wars and conflicts continue; may the warmongers fail, and the peacemakers prevail.

Our souls rejoice in you, O Lord, and we seek your peace in our hearts.

Heavenly Father, we pray for peace among people who may not get along with the company they are obliged to keep at Christmas. We pray for the peacekeepers, those who work hard to maintain the façade of family peace when it may be lacking. Father, please heal all divisions and let true peace be known among families and friends gathered round the table. As we ponder these thoughts, we pray for all who will be alone this Christmas, in a society in which extended families are fewer, and relationship breakdowns more numerous. May they know that you are with them and find peace in the knowledge of your presence.

Our souls rejoice in you, O Lord, and we seek your peace in our hearts.

Finally, Lord, we rejoice with Mary in the unfolding of your will for her, and for the world, in the birth of Jesus Christ. May we all know the peace of that moment when your love became flesh on earth, for every year we can replay the miracle in our hearts and minds. Come to us again in this season of hustle and bustle; revisit us with the true meaning of Christmas, so that we may know your peace, the peace that surpasses all understanding.

Our souls rejoice in you, O Lord, and we seek your peace in our hearts.

Amen

R&S 138 Come, thou long-expected Jesus

1 Come, thou long-expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us;
let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear Desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

2 Born thy people to deliver;
born a child, and yet a King;
born to reign in us for ever;
now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal Spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all-sufficient merit
raise us to thy glorious throne.

Charles Wesley (1707-88)

Sending out Prayer

God, who blessed the earth with life and love,
thank you that you greet us in the person of Jesus,
and pour your blessings on us by the power of your Holy Spirit.
Empowered by the same Spirit,
send us out to be signs of greeting and blessing
to a world so in need of your peace,
and people in need of your love.
Help us serve and bless in your name,
and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

The Blessing

Look forward in hope
to the coming of your Saviour,
prepare the way for Christ your Lord;
welcome him with love and faith
when he comes in glory.

And may the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be among us and those we love,
this day and always. **Amen.**

The Grace

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all evermore. Amen.**