

LATE NIGHT CHRISTMAS EVE 2020

The Weary World Rejoices
(Nativity of Candles)

Angels from the Realms of Glory

Wing your flight o'er all the earth;
Ye who sang creation's story,
Now proclaim Messiah's birth:
Come and worship,
Worship Christ, the new-born King.

Shepherds, in the field abiding,
Watching o'er your flocks by night,
God with us is now residing,
Yonder shines the infant Light:

Sages, leave your contemplations;
Brighter visions beam afar;
Seek the great Desire of nations;
Ye have seen his natal star:

Saints before the altar bending,
Watching long in hope and fear,
Suddenly the Lord, descending,
In his temple shall appear:

Though an infant now we view him,
He shall fill his Father's throne,
Gather all the nations to him;
Every knee shall then bow down:

James Montgomery (1771-1854)

And it came to pass that a proclamation was issued by Caesar Augustus that a census should be taken. And everyone went to his own town to register. So Joseph went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem, the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.

(Pause as we Light the Joseph candle.)

He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

(*Pause as we Light the Mary candle.*)

"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 to-night.

O morning stars, together
proclaim the holy birth,
and praises sing to God the King,
and peace to all the 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 Emmanuel.

Phillips Brooks (1835-1893)

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to a son, whom they named Jesus.

(Pause as we Light the Christ candle.)

She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

"Away in a Manger"

no crib for a bed,
the little Lord Jesus
laid down his sweet head;
the stars in the bright sky
looked down where he lay,
the little Lord Jesus
asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing,
the baby awakes,
but little Lord Jesus
no crying he makes:
I love you, Lord Jesus
look down from on high
and stay by my side
until morning is nigh.

Be near me, Lord Jesus;
I ask you to stay
close by me forever
and love me, I pray;
bless all the dear children
in your tender care,
and fit us for heaven
to live with you there.

John T McFarland (1851-1913)

And there were shepherds
living out in the fields nearby,
keeping watch over their
flocks at night.

(Pause we Light the shepherd candles.)

Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared to them ...

(Pause & light the tallest angel candle)

... and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly a great company of heavenly host appeared with the angel ...

(Pause we light all of the angel candles),
... praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests."



"Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"

'Glory to the new-born King,
peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled.'

Joyful, all ye nations rise,
join the triumph of the skies;
with the angelic host proclaim,
'Christ is born in Bethlehem'

*Hark! the herald angels sing,
'Glory to the new-born King.'*

Christ, by highest heaven adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord,
Late in time behold Him come,
offspring of a Virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the God-head see!
Hail, the Incarnate Deity!
Pleased as man with man to dwell,-
Jesus our Emmanuel.

*Hark! the herald angels sing,
'Glory to the new-born King.'*

Hail, the heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Hail, the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings,
risen with healing in His wings.
Mild He lays His glory by,
born that man no more may die,
born to raise the sons of earth,
born to give them second birth.

*Hark! the herald angels sing,
'Glory to the new-born King.'*

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

The shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen

him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We have come to worship him."

(Pause, we Light the wise men candles.)
The star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw Jesus with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold, incense and myrrh.

Song: Mary did you know?



*We prepared the prayerful space
of the nativity scene.*

Loving God, I have come to worship you.

Help me to remember that you are here with me. May I pray to you in faith, praise you with gratitude, and read your word with eagerness; in Jesus' name. Amen.

Spend some time in reflection with the visitors in the Nativity. Where they had come from, their circumstances, hopes and expectations. Maybe you want to reflect on these days and on people who are on your mind:

-
- What are you thankful for?
 - Where in our lives do we seek (*or need*) God's forgiveness?
 - What can you leave to God?
-

Eternal God, in Christ you make yourself a guest. Amid all my cares and concerns make me attentive to your voice and alert to your presence, that I may know your love surpasses all else; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Pray for the church, the world and all people in need ...

The Lord's Prayer.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

Now, spend a few moments in quiet reflection on Jesus' life, death and resurrection, before praying:

Jesus my brother, who brought divine Life out of human death, you are meeting me here and now in this place, in this moment.

I pause to remember that the one thing I desire above all others is for you to be with me. Though I cannot receive you in bread and wine today, come into my heart and show me you were already there within me, by your love lighting my darkness from within.

Open my eyes to your sacred presence in each thing you have

created and in every moment you give. As each of your followers does their part where they are, may we all grow together in love and in richer, fuller communion.

Make us one with you and with all who love you in every time and place. Help us to feel and to know that we are united as members of your body. With all your people, may I share your risen life, which renews all creation. I offer myself to you in service, as an act of spiritual worship. Amen.

And having let go and Let God

Then, having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, the wise men returned to their country by another route.

(Extinguish the wise men candles.)

And the shepherds returned to their work, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen.

(Extinguish the shepherd candles.)

And the angels returned to heaven.

(Extinguish the angel candles.)

And many years later, Mary and Joseph, being flesh and bone, came to the end of their lives on earth.

(Extinguish Mary and Joseph candles.)

But the Light that began in Bethlehem was life. And this life, Jesus Christ, was the Light of all humanity. The light still shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out. And it all began on a silent, holy night... long ago...

"**Silent Night, Holy Night**"
sleeps the world; hid from sight,
Mary and Joseph in stable bare
watch o'er the child belovèd and
fair - sleeping in heavenly rest.

Silent night, holy night:
shepherds first saw the light,
heard resounding clear and long,
far and near, the angel-song:
'Christ the Redeemer is here!'

Silent night, holy night:
Son of God, O how bright
love is smiling from your face!
Strikes for us now the hour of
grace, - Jesus, Lord at your birth.

Joseph Mohr (1792-1848),
translated Stopford A Brooke (1832-1916)

We finish with a prayer:

Loving God, be with me and all your people in these days when we cannot gather in person and help us to hope in that great day when we will all gather at your heavenly banquet;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

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

CHRISTMAS MORNING – 2020

(A blessed Christmas to you all)



The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; Those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

Our Advent journey is now complete. The darkness is gone. The Light of the World is here. Our hope has been met. Our preparations are done. Our joy has been made perfect. The love of God as come to live among us. And so, today, we light the candle of Christ. (*Centre candle is lit.*)

**GOD
IS WITH** US

The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all. The long-awaited Christ has come. Celebrating the birth of our Saviour, we light this candle. Together, we will shine with the radiant light of Christ.

*Sacred Infant, all divine,
what a tender love was thine,
thus to come from highest bliss,
down to such a world as this!
Hail, thou ever-blessèd morn,
hail, redemption's happy dawn!
Sing through all Jerusalem,
Christ is born in Bethlehem!*

(*Superintendent Revd Dawn*)

A warm welcome to everyone on this Christmas morning. It is a pleasure to be able to welcome you to our online service. It is an unusual season like the rest of the year has been and an

ever changing one at that. There is a constant in our lives. The love of God brought to us in flesh in the birth in his Son Jesus Christ.

Immanuel!

Let us pray.

Mary gave birth to a son and wrapped him in swaddling bands. We marvel, loving God that you came as a tiny baby. How could you, the mighty God come in such a humble form? You came to be like us, to know our joys and our sorrows

The angels praised God and announced peace on earth. We rejoice, loving God that through the child, born in Bethlehem and laid in a manger, you brought peace to a suffering world, a mysterious peace which transformed history and changes our lives

The shepherds ran to see for themselves what had happened. We thank you loving God, for the good news of a saviour welcomed with joy by the shepherds, proved in our own experience and intended for the deliverance of all humankind.

We gather here to worship at the manger. We wonder loving Lord at the mystery of your presence in Jesus and at the love that you revealed through his life and teaching, his death and resurrection.

As we treasure all these things and ponder them help us to learn, to grow to live in the knowledge that you are with us - Amen

"O Come All Ye Faithful"

joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
come and behold him,
born the King of angels:
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
Christ the Lord!

True God of true God,
light of light eternal,
lo, he abhors not the virgin's womb;
Son of the Father,
begotten, not created: *Chorus*

See how the shepherds,
summoned to his cradle,
leaving their flocks, draw nigh to gaze;
we too will thither
bend our joyful footsteps: *Chorus*

Lo, star-led chieftains,
Magi, Christ adoring,
offer him incense, gold, and myrrh;
we to the Christ-child
bring our hearts' oblations: *Chorus*

Sing, choirs of angels,
sing in exultation,
sing, all ye citizens of heaven above:
'Glory to God
in the highest:' *Chorus*

Yea, Lord, we greet thee,
born this happy morning,
Jesus, to thee be glory given:
Word of the Father,
now in flesh appearing: *Chorus*

*18th Century Latin, possibly by
John Francis Wade (1711-1786) and others*

- St Mary's School Nativity
- Messy Children reading

THE FIRST CHRISTMAS

From The Lion Storyteller Bible by Bob Hartman

SYLVIE & ELLA: 'Good news!' said the angel to a girl named Mary. 'God is sending Someone Special into the world. He will be a great king. His name will be Jesus. And guess what? God wants you to be his mother!'

MILLIE: 'Good news!' said the angel to a carpenter named Joseph. 'God is sending Someone Special into the world. He will rescue everyone from the wrong things they have done. He will be God's own Son! But guess what? God wants you to take his mother Mary as your wife, and raise Jesus as your own.'

ISAAC: 'Bad news!' sighed Joseph to Mary. 'The rulers of our country want to count us, to see how many of us there are. And to make it easier for them, we have to go back to our home town. That means a trip all the way to Bethlehem! And with the baby due so soon!!!'

RORY: 'Bad news!' sighed the innkeeper, shaking his head. 'There's not one room left in Bethlehem. But seeing as the young lady's expecting and all, why don't you spend the night in my stable?' 

ELSIE: ‘Good news!’ smiled Joseph, handing the baby to Mary. ‘It’s a boy, just as God promised. God’s own Son, there in your arms - Jesus.’

ROBYN: ‘Good news!’ called the angel to the shepherds on the hill. ‘God has sent Someone Special into the world. The someone you have been waiting for. If you hurry into Bethlehem, you can see him for yourselves. He’s just a baby now, wrapped up warmly and lying in a manger. But one day he will save you from all that is wrong. One day he will bring you peace!'

ELEANOR: Then the angels filled the sky with a good news song. The shepherds went to Bethlehem and made a good news visit. And, on that very first Christmas Day, Mary just watched, and rocked her baby, and smiled a good news smile!

Angels from the Realms of Glory
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v5mdybeyLVC> (See page 1)

‘GOOD NEWS’ (Katie Norman)

Happy Christmas everyone! I hope you enjoyed that amazing rendition of ‘Angels from the Realms of Glory’ – isn’t it wonderful! It always gives me goose bumps when I listen to it. The Piano Guys and their many friends share the good news of our Saviour’s birth so beautifully and we certainly need some ‘good news’ right now, don’t we! What a year it’s been, with Covid shaking the whole world to its very core, so much so, that sometimes it’s been hard to hear ‘angels from the realms of glory’ speaking into our lives, hasn’t it? Yet, angels there have been for sure, appearing in the very midst of this awful pandemic –



doctors and nurses working tirelessly to save lives; shop workers and delivery personnel ensuring that essentials are readily available; teachers and friends keeping a weathered eye open, or offering a listening ear; food banks reaching out to those whose cupboards would otherwise be empty and the list of angels lighting up even the darkest of our days could go on and on, and yet, how easy it is for them to sometimes go unnoticed!

We're going to be thinking about some angels who didn't go unnoticed in a moment. But first, a big thank you to the children from Philadelphie Messy Church for their brilliant reading of The First Christmas ... well done guys!

It's that version of the nativity story that we're going to look at briefly now, using some beautifully knitted characters which were made by our very special Messy Doreen.

I had hoped that some of the children would be able to come along and build the scene as the story unfolds, but sadly that can't be, so we'll just have to use our imaginations as we gaze upon the completed picture.

The first angel we encountered this morning was the Angel Gabriel, not mentioned by name in the family friendly version we heard from this morning but named in the gospel of Luke; and it was to the very young Mary that He came - totally out of the blue leaving no possibility of

remaining unnoticed! Wow, how scary that must have been! I don't know about you but I'd have been pretty shaken up, and clearly Mary was too, for in the more in-depth biblical account of the annunciation, we hear the angel reassuring Mary that this is 'good news' and not to be afraid. 'Do not be afraid, you are going to have a very special baby, the Son of the Most High'. Mary needed to hear those words 'do not be afraid' before she could fully understand what God was saying to her; and maybe you need to hear them right now too.... 'Don't be afraid, you are in safe hands in your illness', 'don't be afraid I will provide for you'; 'don't be afraid, there is someone close by to help you'; 'don't be afraid, there will be an end to this awful pandemic' whatever, your 'don't be afraid' may be, this is the day, above all days, to trust God with it, just as the young Mary did. For this is the day of the best news ever! The next time we hear of an angel appearing with 'good news' is to Joseph, which, according to the gospel of Matthew, happened in a dream. That will have woken him up - what a shock to the system! Not the news Joseph expected at all, but 'good news' it was for sure, because God had chosen him to take Mary as his wife and bring up His Son, Jesus, with her. What a blessed family they were to be indeed. But wait, there's some bad news to get through first. There often is -

isn't there! At the very time when the baby is due, Mary and Joseph have to leave Nazareth and travel to Bethlehem where they are required, by edict, to register. What a blow! Not only would it be an unimaginably arduous journey for the heavily pregnant Mary but she has to leave the support of her family and friends, just when she needs them so much. I wonder if, as they waved their goodbyes, Mary and Joseph felt as overwhelmed as I would have been. And, if that were not enough, there's more bad news to come. When they do finally get to Bethlehem, after what must have been the most awful of journeys, the town is bursting at the seams, all the accommodation is full, not a room to be had anywhere! I recall Reverend Jenny telling us a few weeks back that she'd have been mad at Joseph for not booking ahead, and maybe that's how Mary felt too, or maybe like me, she'd have had tears running down her cheeks as Joseph unsuccessfully knocked on one door after the other. We all react in different ways in the face of bad news, don't we; there's no 'one size fits all' with our emotions. I wonder, how Mary was dealing with her emotions when, at last, good news comes again to turn her despair to joy? The news not delivered by a heavenly angel this time, but by way of a compassionate innkeeper. He offers, nothing flash, not the best room in the house, but a humble, smelly stable where the only

heating would have come from the proximity of animals. Yet, it must have felt 5* to Mary and Joseph, I feel sure. And it is here, in this most humble of places, we get to the most wonderful, the most glorious, 'good news' of all! God fulfils His promise and all the bad news drifts into insignificance for Mary as she tenderly gazes upon her baby Jesus, the Son of God gifted to her, a lowly maiden, to bring peace to His hurting world. How precious. So beautiful is this moment that you want to linger and savour it, don't you; but move on we must for there is more 'good news' afoot. The heavenly angels are out and about again and this time perhaps in the most unexpected place of all. For it takes place on a hillside where shepherds, (the most frowned upon and considered the very lowest of society) are tending to their sheep, keeping them safe from thieves and predators. It is there, to those most down trodden of folk that God chooses to share the good news of the Saviour's birth for the very first time, as He sends His angel to burst into their midst in a blaze of glory that absolutely terrifies them, but also reassures them too when they hear those familiar words "do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord". And, as a great host of angels

filled the skies praising God and singing, I feel sure the shepherds bowed their heads in utter amazement before rushing down to Bethlehem to share in the good news of 'The First Christmas' – A Christmas that was to bring joy, not just to them; not just to you; not just to me; but to the world.

"Joy unto the World"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nu018_9wF7k sung by "The Afters"

It was a silent night, a holy night
When all the world was sleeping
In a little town, on lowly ground
No one knew what was coming

*In a manger we would find
Our humble King
All creation held its breath
When suddenly*

Your light came breaking through the darkness Waking every heart with Heaven singing joy unto the world Our long awaited Saviour You will reign forever
We are singing joy unto the world

*Hope is here, so lift your eyes
And see His glory and splendour
Son of God, love's pure light
We come before You in wonder
In a manger we have found
Our humble King
All the worlds forever changed
When suddenly*

Your light came breaking through the darkness Waking every heart with Heaven singing joy unto the world Our long awaited Saviour You will reign forever
We are singing joy unto the world.

Prayers and blessing

God of outreach, we thank you for coming amongst us in Jesus. We marvel at your humility, emptying yourself "of all but love". We recognize our privilege and pray for those with no home, those who have had to travel to foreign lands, those who flee persecution. Emmanuel, God with us, be with them.

God of the familiar, we thank you for the familiar scriptures at Christmastide.

Speak through them of hope renewed, of steadfast love, of faith that flows full and free within and beyond the familiar carols and services. May your spirit call out goodness from all who feel tired and estranged from the familiar today. Emmanuel, God with us, be with them.

God of the strange, we pray for all those who today miss familiar rituals and traditions - both family and religious. We pray for all those today who are sad or lonely, all those who feel cut off from loved ones. Emmanuel, God with us, be with them.

God of good will, we pray that these difficult times may call out goodwill from all who are made in your image. Bless, we pray, all those who reach out with Good News, with practical help, with simple friendship. Where we become caught up in ourselves, break in with your message that "it is in giving out to all that we receive" Thank you for love and hope made known to us in our Saviour, Christ Jesus. Amen

May the wisdom of the Wonderful Counselor,
The peace of the Prince of Peace,
The love of the everlasting Father
And the blessing of our mighty God rest
on us and all those we pray for this
Christmas Day and always. Amen

Original Materials by Phil Challis

Good news, good news

to you we bring Alleluia!
News of great joy that angels sing
Alleluia!

Tender mercy He has shown us
Joy to all the world
For us God sends his only Son
Alleluia!

Let earth's dark shadows
fly away - Alleluia!
In Christ has dawned
an endless day - Alleluia!

Now God with us
on earth resides - Alleluia!
And heaven's door
is open wide - Alleluia!

Graham Kendrick
Copyright © 1988 Make Way Music,
www.grahamkendrick.co.uk



Have yourself a very merry Christmas...
Sung by Heather Ford from the Biarritz Hotel.

1st Sunday of CHRISTMAS – 2020

27th December

Opening Prayer

Gentle, nurturing God,
Breathe your still calm voice
into this time and this space.
Enfold me in your loving embrace
as we share in this, your holy fellowship.
In the name of Jesus, born amongst us,
I pray. Amen.

Advent/Christmas Candles Lighting.

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.

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 (1707-1788)

Children's Reading from page 7 & 8

Silent Night, Holy Night, see page 5

THE WISE MEN'S VISIT

(The Lion Storyteller Bible by Bob Hartman)
Read by Ella and Shelley

The sky was black. The night was clear. The stars were bright as diamonds.

'Perfect,' said the star-watcher. 'Just as it should be.' But just then God nudged the brightest star and sent it floating like a kite across the night sky.

'Quick' called the star-watcher to his friend. 'Come and see. There's a new star and that means' '.... a new king!' said the second star-watcher. 'Somewhere a new king is about to be born!'

'I'll tell you what,' said the third star-watcher, 'let's follow the star and see.' So, the three star-watchers climbed onto their camels and set off after the star. When it zigged, they zagged. When it zagged, they zigged – across deserts and mountains and rivers. Until they reached the land of God's people, the Jews.

'We have come a long way,' explained the first star-watcher to King Herod.

'We have followed a remarkable star,' explained the second star-watcher.

'So, can you tell us where the baby is?' asked the third star-watcher.

'The baby born King of the Jews?'

'King of the Jews? King of the Jews?' King Herod repeated, trying hard not to look upset. 'Let me speak with my advisers.'

And so King Herod called a meeting. A meeting that was not very happy. 'King of the Jews?' the king shouted. 'King of the Jews? I AM THE KING OF THE JEWS!' 'Y-yes, Your Majesty,' his advisers mumbled. 'But God has always promised that one day he would send us a special king. P-perhaps he is the one the star-watchers are looking for.'

'Hmm,' Herod muttered. 'And where does God say this special king will be born?' In Bethlehem, Your Majesty. 'The city of David.' 'Send for the star-watchers,' King Herod ordered. 'I have decided what I shall do.' 'Gentlemen,' said the king, 'the child you seek is somewhere in Bethlehem. Go to him. Find him. Then come and tell me where he is, so that I can visit him, too.'

The king said this with a smile, but his heart was black, black as a night without stars. And he had already determined to kill the child, so no one would take his place as king. The star-watchers didn't know that when they left, but they soon found out. For the same God who had nudged the star visited them in a dream and told them the king's dark plan.

So, they went to see young Jesus, and gave him gift of gold and frankincense and myrrh. And then they went straight home, with stars in their eyes and God in their hearts.

Reflection: Zigging and zagging our way to Jesus

Those of you who shared in our Christmas Day online service will have heard the 'Good News' story of Jesus' birth, as we journeyed with Mary and Joseph and set the scene using our Nativity display, and today we are going to continue on that journey, not delving deeply into the story of the Wise Men, (or star-watchers as they were referred to in our family-friendly version of the Bible) for that is a story that will, no doubt, be explored next week – Epiphany Sunday. But, today, as we

complete our Nativity scene in the familiar, albeit not chronologically correct order, I would like us to think briefly about the way we have zig-zagged our way to Jesus this Christmas and perhaps, even more importantly now that Christmas Day has passed – how we can secure the stable door open so as to keep Jesus central in our life.

I doubt that there is anyone sharing in this service this morning who wouldn't say that it has been a very different Christmas this year.

Nursery and school plays have been videoed; Christingles have been zoomed; carol singing has been hummed behind masks; staff parties have been 'virtual'; and though sadly for some there has been deep, deep sadness, trials and loss; amidst all this, preparations for celebrating Christmas day still survived.

Presents were bought, Amazon got richer! Attics and cupboards were relieved of their hidden treasure as brightly shining baubles were hung on Christmas trees; Turkeys and crackers festooned tables; and it seems to me, when I look out of my window, that even more people than ever arrayed their homes with twinkling lights, no doubt in an attempt to shed some brightness in this Covid Christmas that has restricted and constrained so many of our usual celebrations.

Yes, it's been an unexpected journey in many ways this year, one that's 'zigged and zagged' as we've sought

out new routes and ways to get to Bethlehem, for that is where we were heading but did we get there, or did we succumb to distraction along the way? And, if we have been distracted, what have been our 'Herods' as we journeyed to the manger? Busyness? Or maybe having no work at all? Home schooling; loneliness; shielding; confusion? It's been a tough journey and one that may easily have resulted in us getting distracted and loosing focus on the way.

I wonder if the star-watchers felt like that sometimes as they travelled mile after mile, encountering all that life would have thrown at them, not least of all the schemes of the treacherous Herod.

How did they get through everything? What kept them so focused?

Well, to my mind, it was because they were eyes wide open to God's Holy nudge. **They didn't miss His sign, or let anything get in the way of it, because they were seeking Jesus, not just fitting Him in, on their journey.**

So, where does that leave us, how can we seek Jesus with that same zeal that keeps us on track?

Revered James East's in his famous Epiphany hymn 'Wise men, seeking Jesus' puts it very simply like this 'Wise men seeking Jesus, Travelled from afar, Guided on their journey By a beauteous star.'

'But, if we desire Him,
He is close at hand;
For our native country
Is our Holy Land.'

'Desire' that's a strong emotion isn't it? To desire is to crave; to long for; to set one's heart on; to yearn. Is that how you prepared for the coming of Jesus' birth? Is that how you are preparing now as we continue on our journey toward Epiphany and beyond. Are you, am I, aware of how near Jesus is? We don't have to go wandering miles to find Him – that journey has been done for us; He is here, in your living room; on the road where you live; in your school; in your workplace; supermarket; hospital bed; prison cell. He is everywhere that you place your foot or lay your head for, because of His birth and the journey He made to the cross for you; for me we stand on Holy ground. Right where we are, right now, in this moment.

Does that not cause you to want bow your head, in wonder and amazement as You realise that whilst you have been seeking Jesus He has been seeking you!

The more I seek You,
the more I find You;
the more I find You,
the more I love You.

*I wanna sit at Your feet,
drink from the cup in Your hand,
lay back against You and breathe,
feel Your heart beat;
this love is so deep,
it's more than I can stand;
I melt in Your peace,
it's overwhelming.*

Zach Neese

© 1999 Gateway Create Publishing/Integrity's
Praise! Music
Used By Permission. CCL Licence No. 284784

A time of prayer

We long for justice
for the poor of the world;
we long for deliverance
for those in need;
we long to hear the voice
of those made dumb by injustice.
*Forgive us for ignoring the needs of
others; Lord, have mercy.*

*Forgive us for failing to act for justice;
Christ, have mercy.*

*Forgive us for our complacency;
Lord, have mercy.*

Lord, we are made in your image;
change our hearts, reshape our minds,
stir our imaginations, have pity on our
frailties, and inspire us to hope
for a world renewed by your love.
Amen.

*The more I seek you
The more I find you
The more I find you
The more I love you*

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father

**Deep in the cold of winter,
Darkness and silence were everywhere;
Softly and clearly,
there came through the stillness
A wonderful sound to hear:**

*All bells in paradise I heard them
ring, Sounding in majesty the news
that they bring; All bells in paradise I
heard them ring, Welcoming our
Saviour, born on earth a heavenly
King. - All bells in paradise I heard
them ring: 'Glory to God on high'
the angel voices sing.*

**Lost in awe and wonder,
Doubting I asked
what this sign might be:
Christ our Messiah revealed in a stable,
A marvellous sight to see.**

Refrain:

**He comes down in peace, a child in
humility, The keys to his kingdom
belong to the poor; Before him shall
kneel the kings with their treasures,
Gold incense and myrrh.**

Refrain:

John Rutter 2012

Sending Prayer:

God of the journey,
give us grace
to travel onwards hopefully;
give us patience
to overcome each obstacle;
give us boldness
to speak of you as our companion;
give us hope,
that we will see you at our journey's end;
in Jesus' name.
Amen.

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