

Worship at Home—20 December 2020

Fourth Sunday in Advent

Worship Leader Rev Easter Smart

CALL TO WORSHIP

Dreams and angels, prophecies,
mystery and magi, choirs and shepherds,
we make our way to the star-blessed stable,
to the light shining miraculously
in human misery and darkness.
We are almost there.

Lighting of the Advent Wreath

Sunday 20 December—The Candle of Love

Today we light the fourth candle of Advent. After the candles of peace, hope and joy, comes a special candle to remind us of God's special gift of Love.

Such love is wonderful. It reminds us of the nature of God who loves every one of us. There is an intensity about such love which is far higher, deeper and stronger than anyone of us can imagine. God took the initiative by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to be with us every day of life and beyond. Here some verses of the bible speak of God's love.

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love (Exodus 34:6)

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I love you, you also should love one another (John 13:34)

Whoever does not love, does not know Love, for God is love (1 John 4:8)

For God so loved the world that he sent his only Son (John 3:16)



Light the candle and share this Prayer

Loving God, as we approach the day of Christ's birth, can we really understand the love You expressed in the birth of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Bless us now with the hope and of the world that You intended; a world free from fear, free from greed, free from violence, free from want or hunger. May the light of Your Love, symbolised by this candle, be found burning in our hearts and souls. Amen

Opening Prayer

God of Eternity,
Mother of the cosmos,
creation conceived in the Father's womb,
we pause and ponder the birth of space and time, and
the evolution of things seen and unseen.
We wait for the joy and celebration
of a greater birth,
of a life surrendered to You.
We pause and ponder the perspective our faith offers:
the place of prayer and selflessness
in a world of emptiness and excess.
each day we need your love, compassion and forgiveness.

Eternal God,
You know the burdens we carry,
the pain, loneliness and fears.
Bless us anew; restore and refresh us.
May we stand before the Forgiving Father
and feel God's embrace.
grant us Your strength as we journey
through this sacred season;
be our companion as we make our way
to that place of birth, and death and rebirth;
may we encounter Eternity's secret
and in simple silence hear the angels' sing.

Hear us as we share the Prayer Christ taught us to pray . . .

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
 Give us this day our daily bread
 and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.
 Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil;
 for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever.

Amen

Scripture Reading—Matthew 1: 18-24

Joseph Accepts Jesus as His Son

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.



But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.

Sermon

There is a story shared by a Methodist minister-friend of mine. It is called the Two King Christmas story and it was a true experience written by a minister named Eugene Brice about a Christmas Pageant at a big church—probably in Texas where everything likes to be bigger and better, grander and greater.

Dozens of kids signed up to take part in the grand Christmas production that year, and the Sunday School Director had recruited the most talented kids from the youth choir to participate. Amongst the shepherds and sheep, some girls with high voices were to sing, “Glory to God in the Highest!” But the grand finale, the piece de resistance would come at the end when three choir boys, dressed in the finest of fabrics, would enter singing “We three Kings of Orient Are.”

Having spent a few weeks with my Dad, I was reminded that there is a limerick for every situation. The two King Story reminded me of this one. . .

*There once was a girl in the choir
Whose voice rose higher and higher
Til one Sunday night, it rose right out of sight
And they found it next day on the spire!*

You may wonder why the Eugene Brice story is called a Two King Story!. Well, on the night of the Play, as the parents and friends gathered, the Director got a call to say that one of the wise men (the one with the best voice) had chickenpox and could not sing. The Director, a perfectionist, went into a tail spin. What to do now? The whole thing was ruined . . . after all the planning and practising, after all the careful choreography the end wouldn't be the same. He wondered about cancelling the whole thing . . . it would look so foolish if only two wise men sang, “We THREE Kings!”

Eugene Brice tells the story really as a metaphor for life. Isn't it true that sometimes, no matter how well organised, or excited we are—no matter how much effort we put into the planning or preparing, sometimes there is a glitch . . . and we find that things are not going to go to plan. What do we do in those times when things don't go to plan, when we know they are not going to work out as we might have hoped?

I don't think that any Christmas, nor any year in my lifetime, for that matter has been more of a reminder that life doesn't always go as we had hoped or planned than this year 2020.

This week I listened to a Thought for the Day on BBC Radio 4. Rhidian Brook is a writer whose reflection moved me with its honesty. He described a feeling of elation now that his 2021 Diary had arrived. It is a special Faber and Faber diary with a poem for each week. I will just quote a little of what he said:

"My Desk Diary for 2021 has arrived. And for a moment I think all will be well. The clean slate is so appealing. Like the unused exercise book at the start of a new term, it promises productive days ahead. Its colour coded symmetry and tastefully curated poems set alongside the seven days of the week suggest an ordered world. It's filled with potent blank spaces. There are pages of notes at the back for ideas as yet unhatched . . . It invites me to write in some things that might happen. It's calling me to make plans.

Then I look at this year's Desk Diary. And I think you didn't see that coming did you? It's a brave person who makes any plans in such times. The only things that happened as expected were the Bank Holidays and Saint Days. It is an itinerary of the Crossed out, the Cancelled and the Postponed . . . Reviewing this year's diary entries is to be confronted with the full meaning of Robert Burns' line about the best laid plans of mice and men going awry."

What Brooke said was stark and true. I was moved by his words because they reminded me of the diaries sitting on my Mum's desk in Maryland (still). Like all diaries, Mum's diary was packed up until March when the pages either went blank or the entries were crossed out. The only other dates written down in 2020 were Sam and Breanna's Exam dates. Even when Mum found she couldn't fly over, she had been looking at Sam's French and reading all the books for Breanna's Advanced English. Then exams were cancelled, and all our planned chances to see her cancelled too. (*I give thanks that we have many happy memories of seeing Mum and Dad in 2019.*)

I know my family is not unique at all. Listening to the news, speaking to you, 2020 did not go to plan, and painfully so. The world suffered floods and forest fires and then, the curse of Covid. For some of you, weddings were cancelled or postponed. For others, holidays, special celebrations, birthday parties went out the window . . . for some of you, important hospital scans, which might have made all the difference, were abandoned. Perhaps you've a loved one in a nursing home and it has been hard to see them. Others whom you love have gone down physically or emotionally because of the isolation.

Perhaps your family has children who have suffered from missing too much school—who worry about the learning lost, the anxiety from cancelled exams. Many people are uncertain of employment, and many businesses have closed. The self—the isolation for those on their own is hard . . . especially if it will be someone missing as we come up to Christmas, either because you cannot see them, or because they have died, and you've had to adjust to life without them. The familiar festive music and feel-good films, can make the ache of their absence heavy. In 2020, we will all know the symbolic meaning of a "Two King Christmas."

In today's scripture we remember Joseph. So often we talk about Mary at Christmastime, but this book by Adam Hamilton, *The Journey* has a very insightful chapter about Joseph. In Matthew's Gospel, life didn't go as Joseph had planned. Joseph who came from Bethlehem was engaged to marry Mary when he heard she was visiting her cousin Elizabeth near Bethlehem. But when he visited, he learned some news which must have been hard to hear. His fiancée and love was pregnant and that the child wasn't his.

I have never really reflected before on how difficult that must have been. Joseph would have felt betrayed, bewildered, humiliated and hurt. When he took the journey home, he had time to think. It must have been an agonising, as if all his plans for a happy wedding and life were ended.

Joseph faced a choice—he could report her but then, according the law, she could be punished or stoned to death . . . or he could just seek a private annulment and then he would suffer the indignity. Matthew’s Gospel tells us, “*Joseph, being a righteous man, and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly.*” That must have been a painful decision for him. After such a difficult journey home Joseph had a vivid dream in which an Angel tells him, “Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived is from the Holy Spirit and you are to name him Jesus.”

When Joseph awoke he had a whole new perspective on his changed plans. He believed God and when he returned to Mary, he told her he believed her too. He felt within himself that God was at work, and that God was calling him to take part in that work.

Adam Hamilton writes, “When life gets hard and even painful, we do well to remember Joseph. Just as it seems to be going wrong, it could be that God is doing something remarkable that you or I simply cannot yet see. God can take our deepest disappointments, heartache and pain and use them in profound ways.”

CS Lewis used to say “suffering is God’s megaphone.” Often when things are hard we are more aware of the presence of God to comfort us and the power of His Spirit to hold us. Prayer is never passive—it is powerful and it draws us into God’s energy and love. Just as in 2020, so too, the world was not an easy place in Joseph’s day. Then, as now, there was poverty, hunger and injustice, fear. Joseph’s call to adopt and parent the Christ child did not mean an easy life . . . he had to walk to Bethlehem for a Census when Mary was due to give birth. Shortly afterwards, he chose to flee with Mary and the baby to flee to Egypt to protect the child from infanticide.

Imagine if Joseph had rejected or abandoned Mary—he would not have participated in the life with Jesus. Matthew’s Gospel describes him as a *righteous man*. He was righteous because he loved God and he became a good earthly father to Jesus. We don’t know a lot about Jesus’ childhood, but Joseph must have raised him in faith, and taught him the truths of scripture. Joseph and Mary took him to the Synagogue for the festivals and once at Passover, they panicked when they lost him in the temple. Joseph spent many hours teaching Jesus the skill of carpentry. Throughout Jesus’ Ministry, he called God, *Abba*—which means Daddy. Jesus told parables describing God as being a forgiving, loving Dad. Joseph must have influenced Jesus’ ideas of what it means to be a good father.

You might be wondering what happened at the end of the *Two King Story*. . . well the Director took advice from his minister and they changed the words of the song. Two boys processed down the aisle singing, “We two kings of Orient Are . . . bearing gifts we travel afar.” After all—the minister reminded him—the bible doesn’t actually tell us *how many* wise men came bearing gifts.

I don’t know if you have seen some of the humorous cartoons depicting Christmas 2020. On one, the wise men are socially distanced, standing six feet apart outside the stable. In another the donkey approaches the stable door saying, “I’m sorry you can’t come in—we are already two families.” There is another one where the wise men are carrying gifts of toilet paper, nappies and pasta and they say to Mary and Joseph, “Sorry but only essential shops were open!”

This Christmas might not be the one you had hoped for or planned. We can’t sing Christmas Carols in the Kirk. We miss seeing the children sharing the Christmas Story through a Nativity Play. We can’t meet and hug, and some people will be missing and deeply missed. However, we can keep one another in our prayers and we can try to keep laughing and we can still, share love whether across miles or phone lines or screens. Let us celebrate the real meaning of this birth of a different kind of King, the Son of God, our Saviour, Immanuel, God with us. Let us draw near to Him, our Comforter and Strength for now as ever, we need Him and our world needs Him.

Pastoral Prayer

God made flesh through the birth of a vulnerable baby, born to parents of meagre means, into a society plagued with division and buckling under the strain of oppression be with us in our world today and in every contemporary circumstance of our lives.

Emmanuel, God With Us.

We have known your love in the presence of others, in hugs given and words spoken, in rituals shared, songs regaled and stories recounted. We have known your love in the meals and merriment and all the things of Christmas that seem so far away –

In the midst of our want, in the hurt of knowing all the things that we are missing,

Emmanuel, God with us.

We need your love as we remember that person in our midst who is absent. We need your love in our worry for others, and in concerns. God be with us in the isolation, in the longing for the ordinary and the normal. Help us to find you in the spiritual gifts as well as the physical ones—and help us to know the real gift is given to us.

Emmanuel, God with us

As we think on the gift of love given to this world through the birth of the Christ child, as we hope and pray, for those suffering, for those hungry or homeless or lost or lonely . . . as we remember—the good and the bad and all those bits in between—we are blessed with the presence of Your Spirit.
Blessed, because no matter the circumstance, Our God goes with us, behind and before, around and within.

Emmanuel, God with us.

Blessing

In the midst of pandemic and post COVID-19,
God's ear to hear our prayers,
God's eye to look before us to a hopeful future,
God's hand to guard and to guide,
God's presence in each and every circumstance.
God of all our yesterdays, todays and tomorrows,
made real in our gathering and our distancing,
bring you hope,
bring you peace,
bring you joy,
bring you love,
bring you light,
AMEN

Easter will be delivering a Christmas Day Message—on YouTube

Christmas Day Candle Lighting

The candles of Love, Hope, Peace and Joy are lit. Now we light our candle to celebrate the birth of Jesus, the Christ-child, the Saviour of the world.

For unto us a child has been born, a son has been given; authority rests upon his shoulders: and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6)

Light the Christ-candle and share this Prayer

Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, on this day we step away from the wrapping paper and the gifts to remember your great gift to our world. Keep us focused on the one born to Save us and the world, The Prince of Peace. May the baby in the manger remind us today that we may sing for joy that Jesus Christ is born.

Heather's link to the videos for Sunday: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/uv8jmDNBsKpo1Uct5>

Prayer

Psalm 27:13-14 "I know that I will live to see the Lord's goodness in this present life. Trust in the Lord. Have faith, do not despair. Trust in the Lord."

Let's pray. Father God, we thank you for your steadfastness. You never fail. You are our strength in time of need. Thank you that you walk with us through every day, never leaving our side. Help us to be more aware of your presence and to seek you day by day.

We rejoice God that you never change, you are the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. You are our source of comfort, of hope, of peace, of joy and of love. So, we pray for the coming days that we would experience you and the gifts that you give us. Although this Christmas will be different, we pray that we would enjoy time spent together, whether in person or virtually. We pray that we would take time to reflect, to remember past memories and to look forward to the future.

God we pray for rest for all in our community. We pray for those who have been and continue to be on the frontline. We pray for your protection and stamina. We pray for our children, young people and families—may they enjoy time spent together and a break from the day by day routines. We pray for the older members in our community, and for those who are alone, scared, sick or in need—may they feel your presence and your love through us. Help us to look out for those around us and demonstrate your love to them.

Most of all we pray we would take time to reflect on the gift you gave us, the gift of Jesus. The nativity story is one so familiar that sometimes we miss the wonder and the awe of what you did, help us this year to marvel anew at the story. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

An Update from Heather

I wanted to give you a little update on what I've been doing recently. Although I haven't been doing it alone I hasten to add. In fact much of it wouldn't have been possible without other people, so a huge, huge thank you to them. Firstly, the Sunday Club has been meeting on Zoom throughout this term—we've looked at the life of Moses and last week had our Christmas celebration where we played some games, had a quiz, crafts and a story. It's been really lovely to see them although we can't wait until the day we can meet together properly.

Secondly, we put out Messy Church bags in both October and the beginning of December. In October we put out 70 bags with a harvest/autumnal theme and they were gone in a few hours. In December we put together 100 bags and they went very quickly as well. We've been grateful to provide something for families and delighted and amazed they've been so welcomed and gone so quickly.

The final thing I want to share is about stockings. I'm sure many of you will recognise these as the ones that Gina Shepherd has made for the Christmas Fair in the past so we asked her if she would make some and share her pattern with us so we could put one in each of the Messy Christmas bags. She generously agreed to do so and we were able to put 100 out in the bags. However, the idea also grew and we wondered if we could give one out to every primary school aged child in Currie through the schools. I got in touch with the schools and after a few weeks we finally had a response to say they were happy for us to do that. That meant some furious stocking-making began as we needed a total of 689! So many people were knitting or sewing so we could reach our goal and reach it we did. In fact we had more than enough so we were able to give one out to each staff member as well. So a massive thank you to everyone who made stockings for us, I am so grateful we were able to make this happen and delighted that we're able to spread a little bit of cheer and joy and generosity this Christmas when it perhaps feels like we can't do much. A thank you to the headteachers of Nether Currie and Currie Primary too who were willing to let us give these out through their schools.

News of a baby

These resources are designed to help you explore the Bible as a family together at home while we can't go to church. Be as creative as you want to be and enjoy spending time with each other and with God.

Prepare yourself...

Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent. The fourth candle represents love. You may want to light a candle in your home as you say this prayer together, then leave it lit as you do the rest of the activities together. (Remember to blow it out at the end!)

It is almost here,
only a few more sleeps to the big day,
we are excited,
we are waiting,
we want to know what is going to happen,
but we have to be patient.
We hear the story of Mary,
how excited she must have been,
how scary it must have seemed.
Thank you, God, for sending
your son Jesus to be with us,
the real gift at this time of year.
Thank you for your unending love for us.
Amen.



Question...

Have you ever been given a surprise?
What was it like? How did you feel?
Are there different kinds of surprises?

Challenge...

In 1 minute how many names and words can you think of to describe God?



Read the Bible...

Today's verses are found in Matthew 1:18-24. You can read them in a Bible or find them here:
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+1%3A18-24&version=GNT>

You could try reading the verses in different versions to see if it adds to your understanding of the passage. Watch a video of the story here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XkEypzmHwCI&t=75s>

Talk together...



What stands out to you most from the story?
How do you think Joseph felt when he heard Mary was going to have a baby?
If you could choose a name for yourself what would you choose?
Do you know what your name means?
What was the baby to be called? What does his name mean? Why was this important?
How do you think Mary and Joseph felt about having a baby with such a special task?
Imagine you're a friend of Mary or Joseph's, what would you think on hearing the stories of what happened to them and the news they were told?
How would you feel if you were the angel who got to give the good news to Mary and Joseph?

Do together...

Have a look at some Christmas cards you have. How many show pictures of something from the biblical Christmas story? You could also try counting how many contain animals/snowmen/Christmas trees etc. Which do you like best?

Make together...

Create your own nativity scene. You could use playdoh, dolls/figures/stuffed toys, draw, make a cartoon strip. If you want to make one out of Lego, here's a link to some instructions on how you could create one: <https://frugalfun4boys.com/lego-nativity-set-instructions/>

Praise together...



[When love was born](#) by Mark

Pray together...

Sometimes I say yes,
and sometimes I say maybe,
and sometimes I say no,
and sometimes I am too distracted
to know what I'm being asked.
Help me, O God of time,
to find and make time for all the demands
that come my way,
so that I might say yes with joy,
when I can.
Amen.

Play together...

Guess the gift - You'll need: an empty box, something to be a blindfold, some random items from around the house. Take it in turns to wear the blindfold. One random object is placed in the box. Just using your sense of touch, hearing and smell can you guess what is in the box?

"Don't forget you can join us on Christmas Eve at 5.30pm on Zoom! Make a Christingle, wear your pyjamas, bring a hot chocolate and join in our service. All ages welcome.
Email Heather at familyworker_jvp@outlook.com for details on how to join."



Just a little reminder!

Although much has changed due to Covid19—two things haven't! I still collect milk bottle tops (for a Cancer charity) and used postage stamps (which go to a different charity each year via the Church of Scotland, since Christian Aid stopped collecting them). This is the time of year when most of us receive a few Christmas cards that still have 'real' stamps' rather than the brown envelopes with franking! Although the church office is closed, both items can be posted through the Church Office letter box, but please put them in a wee bag first so that Nina does not have to run around the office picking them up!



None of these items are going anywhere at present, but I am housing them safely until such time as I can make the appropriate deliveries.

Thank you all for continuing to support these charitable causes—it really is much appreciated. May I wish everyone a peaceful Festive period and a much brighter 2021.

Ishbel Massie

Kirk Christmas Tree



Michael's Christmas Carols on CD

It's a long time since we were in the Church enjoying the music played by Michael. The MOF Committee has asked him to compile a CD of Christmas Carols playing in the Church. The CD will cost £5 with all profits going to Currie Kirk. Order yours today from the Kirk Office.





Currie Kirk Guild 65th Edinburgh Company—The Boys' Brigade



On Tuesday morning I delivered 45 selection boxes/advent calendars—34 of which came from the BB—41 cartons of custard—again some from the BB—40 cans of vegetables, 6 boxes of mince pies and some assorted toiletries. Guild/BB also donated £60 cash to the foodbank. Angela at the Foodbank was delighted and asked me to pass on her thanks and blessings. It will be into the New Year before deliveries resume so, if you have anything, please hang on to it. Thank you to all our members and to the Boys and Officers of our BB Company.

I also delivered many little stockings to Heather and have a few more to take down. So many thanks to all of you who knitted.

I do hope you all enjoyed yourselves on Tuesday afternoon if you managed to join us for our “slightly different Guild Christmas party”. We may not have been meeting in person but the warmth and fellowship was radiating from the screen. Thank you to those of you who have emailed saying what good fun it was. As I said, I’d feel a bit daft sitting here draped in tinsel, imbibing Prosecco and talking to myself on screen. I was so pleased that I managed—finally—to get the music to work. Easter has asked that I let those of you not on line have copies of the quiz—I will publish this next week.

Shona has been very busy and has set up our next two speakers. On 19 January Heather McHaffie will be talking about “Changes at the Botanics” and on 2 February Tom Baldwin from Life and Work will be speaking to us. So something to put in your 2021 diaries.

When I agreed to take over from Isobel as Guild president, I never dreamt it would be like this. None of us expected the 2020 we’ve had and all we can do is pray that 2021 and the vaccines can bring us back to some kind of normality. Back in September I was determined that the Guild would continue in some form or another. Like many of you, I live on my own and it is wonderful to see so many cheerful faces on screen and chat to people. Where would we be without Zoom, video calls and everything else that is here to enable us to stay in contact with each other?

So I just want to close by wishing you all a Merry Christmas and a much improved Happy New Year. Look forward to seeing you on 19th January or possibly before that.

Louise Lamont
Guild President

Office Christmas Holiday

Nina will be on holiday from Tuesday 22 December to Wednesday 30 December.

If you have an urgent query please contact Easter on 449 4719 or
Gordon 449 2313

Kirk Office 451 5141; email: currie_kirk@btconnect.com

And the link to the website: //www.curriekirk.org

You Tube: search Currie Kirk for all the Sunday Services and Easter’s Christmas message

CHRISTMAS PHOTOS FROM OUR CURRIE KIRK FAMILY





**Currie Kirk
takes this opportunity to wish you a
Happy Christmas and hoping that 2021 will be a
time when we can all meet again.
In the meantime stay safe.**

.... And to remind you of better times—our lovely Kirk in the snow!!

