

ORDER OF SERVICE – Worship at Home 20/12/20
Carol Service

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Reading John 1: 1-5 + 14 ¹

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of humankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Carol

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.

God of God, Light of light,
Lo, He abhors not the virgin's womb;
Very God, begotten, not created:

O come, let us adore Him,

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

O come, let us adore Him, Latin, 18th Century possibly by John Francis Wade
(c1711-1786) and others,

Advent Candle lighting

The fourth candle shines bright like Mary's willing heart.
She thought herself weak, and yet she obeyed, was strong and brave to play her part.
Jesus, help us to allow You to dwell in our lives; **O come, O come Emmanuel.**
Make us obedient to respond in love, **O come, O come Emmanuel.**

Reading – Isaiah 9: 2-7 ¹

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and for ever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

Prayer of praise

Lord God You invite us to come in faith, to come and see, to come and worship and to come and adore. So we come to proclaim that Jesus Christ is the One true light of the world.

He is the everlasting God, always existing not created, without end or beginning.

He is the King of all, over all and in all.

Born in time and place, laid in a manger.

Born in weakness, poverty and humility.

Sought and found by shepherds and wise men.

Acclaimed and glorified by hosts of angels. This is Jesus.

Jesus we offer You our praise, our thanks and worship.

May the silent wonder of our hearts express something of our devotion as we rejoice again to remember and celebrate Your birth amongst us.

Glory be to God in the Highest. All praise be to our Great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

Lord's Prayer

Reading – Luke 1: 26-38 ¹

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.'

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants for ever; his kingdom will never end.' 'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.'

Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail.' 'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May your word to me be fulfilled.' Then the angel left her.

Carol

In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan;
earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
snow had fallen, snow on snow,
snow on snow; in the bleak midwinter, long ago.

Our God, heaven cannot hold Him, nor earth sustain,
heaven and earth shall flee away, when He comes to reign.
In the bleak midwinter a stable bed sufficed;
God, the Lord Almighty, Jesus Christ.

Angels and archangels may have gathered there,
cherubim and seraphim filled the air;
but His mother lowly, in her maiden bliss,
worshipped the Belovèd with a kiss.

What can I give Him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb.
If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part;
yet what I can I give Him: give my heart.

Christina Georgina Rossetti (1830-1894)

Reading – Luke 2: 1-7 ¹

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also 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. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Carol

1. 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.
2. For Christ is born of Mary,
and gathered all above,
while mortals sleep, the angels keep
their watch of wondering love.
O morning stars, together
proclaim the holy birth,
and praises sing to God the King,
and peace to all the earth.
3. 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.
4. 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)

Reading – Luke 2: 8-18 ¹

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, 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 that will cause great joy for all the people.'

Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.' When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, 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, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

Carol

What child is this, who, laid to rest
on Mary's lap is sleeping:
whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
while shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King,
whom shepherds guard and angels sing:
haste, haste, to bring Him laud,
the babe, the Son of Mary.

Why lies He in such mean estate,
where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian fear: for sinners here
the silent Word is pleading.
This, this is Christ the King,
whom shepherds guard and angels sing:
haste, haste, to bring Him laud,
the babe, the Son of Mary.

So bring Him incense, gold and myrrh,
come peasant, king to own Him,
the King of kings salvation brings,
let love and heart enthrone Him.
This, this is Christ the King,
whom shepherds guard and angels sing:
haste, haste, to bring Him laud,
the babe, the Son of Mary.

William Chatterton Dix (1837-98) altered

Christmas Decoration stories

Carol

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King,
let every heart prepare Him room,
and heaven and nature sing, and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.

Joy to the world, the Saviour reigns!
Let all their songs employ.
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains,
repeat the sounding joy, repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

He rules the world with truth and grace
and makes the nations prove
the glories of His righteousness
and wonders of His love, and wonders of His love,
and wonders, and wonders of His love.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

Thought for Christmas

This has been a year of darkness, the whole world engulfed in the oppressive, clawing night of pandemic. This year has seen over 1.6M deaths from the disease, 73M cases detected and according to the IMF a cost to the world economy of an unimaginable 22,000 billion dollars. It has at times also been a year of quiet as we have limited social contacts and travel.

In the quiet we heard sounds which were always there but which were drowned out by our noise and activity. We heard birdsong, the breeze in the trees and perhaps the whole planet breathing a huge sigh of relief. We also heard darker sounds too, the cries of those near and far who continue to live with the pernicious scourge of racism which discriminates and kills in cold blood. We heard the voices of those who lack food and shelter and heard and met our neighbours too. Just as the quiet enabled us to hear what had been missed so too the darkness does the same. Only in the darkness can we see the faint light from the stars, light that has travelled for millions of miles. The stars and planets are always there but are hidden by the stronger lights of the sun by day, or our own light pollution by night. Tomorrow, Monday 21st December, there is a close alignment of Jupiter and Saturn which makes them appear to be in the same space. It is the closest for nearly 400 hundred years and some suggest that such a phenomenon in 6BC would account for the star of Bethlehem that guided the Magi to the house where Jesus was in Bethlehem.

It is in the darkness and in the quiet that we are most likely to see the Christ-light shining - shining in the darkness of our night, in the darkness of this world, 'the light of all people, that shines in the darkness and which the darkness cannot overcome.' Only when the clamour of our noise is stilled for a while can we pick out the sound of a tiny baby's first cries. Only when we set ourselves aside long enough can we catch again the wonder of this event, this life-changing, calendar-changing, quiet arriving.

When you visit the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, built on the site believed to be Jesus' birthplace, you need to enter that church through a low door called the Door of Humility. You then proceed down the steps to the crypt which is part of an ancient cave system below the altar and there is the Grotto of the Nativity marked by a 14 point star. To enter and see it an adult must stoop, although tellingly a small child can easily enter. This marks the birthplace of Jesus. Humility is the required attitude in the place of Jesus' birth and when faced with the truth of his birth too. Humility marked his coming and must mark our attitude as well.

As Charles Wesley says in one of his hymns of the incarnation, 'Stand amazed ye heavens at this! See the Lord of earth and skies, humbled to the dust he is and in a manger lies.

Or as Paul writes in his letter to Christians in Philippi, 'Christ Jesus made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself', and he goes on to say it is in Jesus' obedient death on a cross that the humility is seen again.

The audacious wonder of this action by God is so easy to miss in the noise and the bright lights. We need to humble ourselves laying aside pride in our abilities, our human achievements and our focus on self-centred pleasures and needs, to notice the Christ child. For, he is helpless and homeless in the cattle feeding trough which even by the standards of his own day was not a place to put a new born baby. All this says so much about God's power and love.

So the invitation as always is to come and to bow the knee before Him who heaven and earth adore. Come once more, come for the first time to worship Christ the Lord; to worship and adore and wonder. What else can we do in the presence of such a glorious wonder? Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Carol

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 Godhead see!
Hail the incarnate Deity!
Pleased as Man with man to dwell,
Jesus, our Immanuel.
*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.'

Final Blessing

May Christ the hope of glory guide our way.
May Christ the prince of peace give us His peace.
May Christ, God with us, fill our lives.
And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit
be with us and all those we love this Christmas and into 2021. Amen

Acknowledgements

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