



Worship@Home

24th December 2023

Advent 4 – Christmas Eve



A Carol Service

If you have an advent wreath or tealights, you may like to begin by using the liturgy on the leaflet.

Call to Worship

Lay aside your thoughts about cooking the turkey tomorrow.
Lay aside any worries about whether you've got everything.
Lay aside concerns about visitors or visits.
And instead...
fill your mind with the story of the stable,
feel the peace the Christ child brings,
experience the joy of heaven at the birth of God's Son,
and open your heart to the Lord.

Hymn StF 212: O come, all ye faithful (vss 1,2,5&6)

Sing/pray/read the words or listen to it here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q8dgl4-bVPU>

- 1 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!*
- 2 True God of true God,
Light of Light eternal,
lo, he abhors not the Virgin's womb;
Son of the Father,
begotten, not created:
- 5 Sing, choirs of angels,
sing in exultation,
sing, all ye citizens of heaven above:
'Glory to God
in the highest:'

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

Let us pray

Father God,
as we gather together this Christmas Eve,
help us to look beyond the familiar
to find something new in the ancient stable story.
Help us to see the real people in the nativity scene,
people full of hopes and fears,
filled with questions and uncertainties,
experiencing joy and pain.
People who loved you, listened to you,
and took risks for you – people like us. **Amen.**

First Lesson: Micah 5:2-5

StF 213: O little town of Bethlehem

Sing/pray/read the words or listen to it here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-X-XhCVOKzU>

- 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 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.
- 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 (1835–1893)

Second Lesson: Luke 1:47-55

Hymn StF 187: The Angel Gabriel from heaven came

Sing/pray/read the words or listen to it here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Sp3fU7-5XQ>

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 !

'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 !

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 !

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 !

Sabine Baring-Gould (1834–1924)

To ponder...

When God reached out to us that first Christmas, he didn't hold back. He didn't, as it were, send a message. Rather, he took the ultimate step...he became one of us...born as a baby in Bethlehem.

And when God became one of us,
he did not do it gingerly..safely, self-protectively,
selectively. No, God placed himself right in the thick
of it...right in the thick of human life. He embraced
the frailties of being a baby at a time when medicine
was still pretty primitive. God's cot was a feeding
trough. The maternity suite was an animal shed. His
parents were inexperienced and under pressure.
Later he knew the turbulence, the hormones, of
adolescence, and grew to adulthood. This was no
aloof, detached God.

In adult life, God, in Jesus, experienced the richness of
human solidarity. He enjoyed companionship and
laughter. But the world he embraced also contained
much that was brutal. It was a time of corrupted
politics and divisive religion. Yet Jesus never
remained on the social fringes. He did not stay in
secure places. He lived his life right in the eye of the
human storm. He was constantly surrounded by the
dangerous and the contagious. These were violent
times and he eventually died a violent death.

Third Lesson: Luke 2:1-7

Hymn StF 193: Born in the night

Sing/pray/read the words or listen to it here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PRyOaoMo6CA>

- 1 Born in the night,
Mary's Child,
a long way from your home ;
coming in need,
Mary's Child,
born in a borrowed room.
- 2 Clear shining light,
Mary's Child,
your face lights up our way ;
light of the world,
Mary's Child,
dawn on our darkened day.
- 3 Truth of our life,
Mary's Child,
you tell us God is good ;
prove it is true,
Mary's Child,
go to your cross of wood.
- 4 Hope of the world,
Mary's Child,
you're coming soon to reign ;
King of the earth,
Mary's Child,
walk in our streets again.

Geoffrey Ainger (b. 1925)

Fourth Lesson: Luke 2:8-20

To ponder...

In Northern climes, Christmas is loved by many as a
season of cosiness – of warmed and brightly lit
interiors set against the winter dark and dank. This is
part of the magic...and light in the darkness is what we
are celebrating. But while there was joy in God's
experience of human life, it was never cosy. For God
also opened himself up to the chill of our dark side to
our meanness and our menace.

Hymn StF 197: Cradled in a manger, meanly

Sing/pray/read the words or listen to it here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sqeXbhw17qE>

- 1 Cradled in a manger, meanly
laid the Son of Man his head ;
sleeping his first earthly slumber
where the oxen had been fed.
Happy were those shepherds listening
to the holy angel's word ;
happy they within that stable,
worshipping their infant Lord.

- 2 Happy all who hear the message
of his coming from above ;
happier still who hail his coming,
and with praises greet his love.
Blessèd Saviour, Christ most holy,
in a manger thou didst rest ;
canst thou stoop again, yet lower,
and abide within my breast ?
- 3 Evil things are there before thee ;
in the heart, where they have fed,
wilt thou pitifully enter,
Son of Man, and lay thy head ?
Enter, then, O Christ most holy ;
make a Christmas in my heart ;
make a heaven of my manger :
it is heaven where thou art.
- 4 And to those who never listened
to the message of thy birth,
who have winter, but no Christmas
bringing them thy peace on earth,
send to these the joyful tidings ;
by all people, in each home,
be there heard the Christmas anthem :
praise to God, the Christ has come !

George Stringer Rowe (1830–1913)

Fifth Lesson: John 1:1-10

To ponder...

Christmas is God being born as a baby and living among us., because by living among us, God could demonstrate the depth of his desire to befriend us.

And by living among us, God could feel what we feel... the full range of our emotions: God could understand, from within, what it is like to be a person.

And by living among us, God could show us how to live; because Jesus did not only show us what God is like, he also showed us what human life could be like.

By choosing to live among us, as one of us, God could enter right into the heart of humanity – right into the depths of its glory and its grubbiness. For only from there, only from within the very pulse of human life, could the story of renewal begin.

A time of prayer

As we have heard again the Christmas story and have pondered its messiness,
let us bring to mind the messiness of today's world.

We remember young Mary,
carrying a baby, facing so many challenges.
We think of people today
for whom life is especially challenging,
particularly at a very young age:
those who are carers,
those who are abused,
or overlooked by 'the system', and...
God with us,
be with them.

We remember Joseph,
caring for Mary and Jesus in difficult times,
fleeing with them to a place of safety.
We think of those who face similar difficulties today,
those who have to choose between heating and eating,
those who live in places of conflicts, and in fear of their lives,
and many others...
God with us,
be with them.

We remember the shepherds,
working through the night to look after their flock.
We think of those who work through the night today,
those in the health and emergency services,
those who do jobs that we take for granted,
or that we may find undesirable.
God with us,
be with them.

We remember the wise men with their expensive gifts,
and the long journey they took in search of a king.
We think of the wealthy and influential of today,
praying that you will give them wisdom and compassion
to use what they have or control for the good of all.
God with us,
be with them.

God with us,
help us to be part of the answer to our own prayers
as we involve ourselves in the messiness of this world.
We pray this in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father....

StF 202: Hark! The herald angels sing

Sing/pray/read the words or listen to it here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=COZgBeAvuA8>

- 1 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.*
- 2 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 men to dwell,
Jesus, our Immanuel :
- 3 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 :

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

A sending out prayer

God made flesh, God with us,
long after our singing is over,
may we continue to share the good news of Jesus,
knowing that you are with us here and now,
and you go ahead of us into the coming week and new
year. **Amen.**

Materials provided by Rev.Helen Harrell

Prayers taken from rootsontheweb.com

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