

South Warwickshire Methodist Circuit Carol Service
(complete text. A video version is also online)
Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.

Welcome & Notices

Call to Worship

Isaiah 9: 2, 6-7 (NRSVA)

² The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.

⁶ For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onward and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Prayer

Loving God, we praise you
for fulfilling your age-long purpose
through the birth of Jesus.

We thank you that your promises are not
simply empty words
like so many of ours,
but pledges we can rely on,
knowing they will always be honoured.

Teach us, then, to read the Scriptures,
hearing your word revealed in Christ
and trusting in the promise of new life
you have given us through them.

StF 212 - O come all ye faithful

- 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:
*O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the
Lord!***
- 3. See how the shepherds,
summoned to his cradle,
leaving their flocks, draw nigh to gaze;
we too will thither
bend our joyful footsteps:
*O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the
Lord!***

4. Lo, star-led chieftains,
Magi, Christ adoring,
offer him incense, gold, and myrrh;
we to the Christ-child
bring our hearts' oblations:
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the
Lord!

5. 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,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the
Lord!

Latin, 18th century, possibly by
John Francis Wade (c. 1711–1786)
and others

I didn't know what to think (Joseph)

I didn't know what to think,
not when she first told me –
my sweet innocent Mary, pregnant!

I suppose I should have been angry,
and I was later,
extremely!

But that wasn't my first reaction;
it was shock, more like,
disbelief.

She started chattering on about this angel,
about being with child by the Holy Spirit,
do you know what?

I listened!
No, honestly, I really did!

Maybe that sounds daft,
but I just couldn't believe she was making it all
up,

inventing an excuse to get her off the hook.
And, let's face it, if it were an excuse it was a
pretty lame one;
I mean, when's the last time you saw an
angel?
Precisely.

I took it calmly at first,
it wasn't long before the doubts set in,
the questions that couldn't be answered,
the niggling voices that wouldn't go away.

I'd have called off the engagement,
there's no doubt about that;
much as I liked the girl,
there was simply no way a man in my position
could countenance going through with it,
not if I wanted to keep any semblance of
respectability.

So that was it.
My mind was made up.
It was just a question of finding the right
words and the right time,
breaking it to her as gently as I could.

Only then I had this dream,
almost a vision you might say it was, looking
back,
so powerfully did it speak to me.
Suddenly it was *me* seeing angels, not Mary,
it was *me* hearing the voice of God instead of
her;
and it was the same message,
the same story –
this child she carried,
born of God,
his gift to humankind,
the one who would at last redeem his people.

Did I believe it?
Well, I suppose I must have done, in a way.
I married her after all,
despite the snide remarks,
the wagging tongues.

Maybe, of course, I wanted to marry her anyway,
or just didn't want to hurt her.
Maybe I simply liked the thought of being a dad,
wanted to believe the story of hers,
incredible though it seemed.

To be truthful
there were probably all kinds of reasons
behind my decision;
yet perhaps it's through such things as those,
our everyday thoughts and feelings,
just as much is through dreams and visions,
that God chooses to speak to us.

Perhaps through those most of all.

Prayer

Living God,
there are times in our lives,
all too many,
when our prayers don't seem to be answered.

There are times when
for all our striving
we do not hear your voice
or understand your will.

Yet you do respond,
if only we have ears to hear and eyes to see –
through the people around us,
through the events of life,
through the voice of conscience.

In a whole variety of ways
you prompt us,
not dictating every step,
not mapping out the future,
but inviting us to share
in the work of your kingdom
and the fulfilment of your purpose.

Living God, help us to listen –
help us to hear.

StF 190 - Angels from the realms of glory

- 1. Angels, from the realms of glory,
wing your flight o'er all the earth;
you who sang creation's story,
now proclaim Messiah's birth:
*Come and worship,
Christ the new-born King,
come and worship,
worship Christ, the new-born King.***
- 2. Shepherds in the field abiding,
watching o'er your flocks by night,
God with us is now residing,
yonder shines the infant Light:
*Come and worship,
Christ the new-born King,
come and worship,
worship Christ, the new-born King.***
- 3. Sages, leave your contemplations;
brighter visions beam afar;
seek the great Desire of nations;
you have seen his natal star:
*Come and worship,
Christ the new-born King,
come and worship,
worship Christ, the new-born King.***
- 4. Saints before the altar bending,
watching long in hope and fear,
suddenly the Lord, descending,
in his temple shall appear:
*Come and worship,
Christ the new-born King,
come and worship,
worship Christ, the new-born King.***
- 5. 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:
*Come and worship,
Christ the new-born King,***

**come and worship,
worship Christ, the new-born King.**

vv. 1-4 James Montgomery (1771–1854)
v. 5, unascribed text in *The Christmas Box*, 1825

I felt sorry for that couple, I really did
(The Innkeeper)

I felt sorry for that couple, I really did.
They were at their wits' end, the pair of them.
But it was the lady who concerned me most;
fit to drop she was,
and hardly a surprise given her condition.

As for him, he was beside himself,
frantic with worry,
almost abusive in his frustration;
and I can't say I blamed him –
I'd have been the same in the circumstances.

Yet what could I do?
There wasn't a room to spare, that was the
fact the matter.
We were packed already,
bulging at the seams,
and I could hardly throw someone else out
just to fit them in,
could I?
I mean - be reasonable –
that would have caused a right-old to-do.

So I offered them the stable, if they could
make use of it.
Not much of a prospect I agree,
but it was a roof over their heads,
a shelter from the worst of the wind if nothing
else.

All right, so I still feel bad about it,
wish now I'd taken the wife's advice
and given up our room for them.
But to be honest we were both whacked,
with all the extra custom to see to.
We were longing only for a good night's sleep
ourselves.

So we gave them the stable and that's the end
of it –

But when I heard the baby crying,
that's when it got to me –
out there in those conditions!

I felt ashamed,
disgusted with myself.
So we hurried out, the wife and I,
anxious to help,
not sure what we might find.

But what a surprise!
There was no panic,
no sign of confusion.

Quite the contrary –
they seem so peaceful,
so full of joy,
utterly content.

And the way they looked at that child –
I mean, I've heard of worshipping your kids
but this was something else –
they were over the moon,
absolutely ecstatic!

And that wasn't the half of it,
for suddenly there in the shadows
I spotted a bunch of shepherds –
God knows where they came from.
They just stood there gawping into the
manger,
wide-eyed with wonder,
almost as though they'd never seen a baby
before!

And then they walked away,
joy in their faces,
delight in their steps.

It's all quiet now, the inn and the stable,
as if that night had never happened.
And so far as I know both mother and child are
well.

You could say that's down to me in part,

for at least I did something to help if no one else did.

Yet I can't help feeling I should have done more,
that I let everyone down somehow –
that it wasn't finally them I left out in the cold
– it was me.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
you came to our world,
to your people,
yet among so many you found no welcome.

From the very beginning the majority shut you out,
and of those who did accept you
many did so half-heartedly.

Forgive us that sometimes we do the same.
Help us to make room for you,
and to give you not just a token place,
but to put you at the very centre of our lives.

StF 193 - Born in the night

- 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)

What a day it's been! (Mary, Mother of Jesus)

I'm shattered, exhausted,
and yet I'm over the moon!
Does that sound strange?

Well, let me tell you what happened, then
you'll understand.

It could hardly have started worse,
arriving in Bethlehem like that to find the
place packed.
My heart sank.

I knew we wouldn't find anywhere, not a
chance,
but Joseph wouldn't have it.
'Next time,' he kept saying, 'you'll see.'
Next time indeed!

A stable, that's what we ended up with –
hardly the accommodation I had in mind!
It wouldn't have mattered, mind you,
not in the usual run of things,
but I was nine months pregnant.

I was in agony by the end, can you imagine,
just about desperate by then,
not bothered where we stopped
just so long as I could rest.

That's why we accepted the innkeeper's offer,
makeshift though it was.
I didn't care about anything by then,
just wanted the baby to be born.

Poor Joseph, he was beside himself.
No idea how to cope or what to do next,
but thankfully one of the women from the Inn
took pity on us.

You never know how good it was
to see her kindly reassuring face,
a confident smile beaming down at me
through the haze of pain.

It seemed like an eternity for all that,
but it wasn't long really.

And then that sound,
that wonderful exhilarating sound,
my son, Jesus, crying!

I didn't want to let go of him,
but I had to, of course, eventually.
I was exhausted.

So I wrapped him in strips of cloth
and laid him in a manger.

Sleep came easy after that,
blissful peace at last,
but a moment ago I woke with a start,
remembering those words in that vision I had

—
'And they shall name him Emmanuel,
God with us'.

My child, Emmanuel?
Can it really be true?
God come to his people?
He is everything to me, I admit that,
I could gladly worship him.

But others? I wonder.
Time alone will tell, I suppose.

Anyway, no more time for talking, I need my
sleep.

Prayer

Almighty God,
you are greater than our minds can fathom,
higher than our highest thoughts,

sovereign overall,
worthy of praise and honour.

Forgive us that all too often
we have lost a sense of awe and wonder
before you.

Speak to us, as you spoke to Mary,
and help us to catch a new sense
of who you are and all you have done through
Jesus.

Help us to magnify your name,
singing your praises
and telling of your greatness.

StF 216 - See him lying on a bed of straw

- 1. See him lying on a bed of straw;
draughty stable with an open door,
Mary cradling the babe she bore;
the Prince of Glory is his name:**
*O now carry me to Bethlehem
to see the Lord of love again;
just as poor as was the stable then,
the Prince of Glory when he came.*
- 2. Star of silver, sweep across the skies,
show where Jesus in the manger lies;
shepherds, swiftly from your stupor rise
to see the Saviour of the world:**
*O now carry me to Bethlehem
to see the Lord of love again;
just as poor as was the stable then,
the Prince of Glory when he came.*
- 3. Angels, sing again the song you sang,
sing the story of God's gracious plan;
sing that Bethl'em's little baby can
be the Saviour of us all:**
*O now carry me to Bethlehem
to see the Lord of love again;
just as poor as was the stable then,
the Prince of Glory when he came.*

**4. Mine are riches from your poverty,
from your innocence, eternity;
mine, forgiveness by your death for me;
child of sorrow for my joy:**

***O now carry me to Bethlehem
to see the Lord of love again;
just as poor as was the stable then,
the Prince of Glory when he came.***

Michael Perry (1942–1996)

It was just an ordinary day (Shepherds)

It was just an ordinary day, that's what I can't
get over;
nothing special about it,
nothing different,
just another ordinary day.

And we were all just ordinary people,
that's what made it even more puzzling;
not important,
not influential,
just plain ordinary shepherds at working in the
fields.

Yet we apparently were the first.
The first to know,
the first to see,
the first to celebrate,
the first to tell!

I'm still not sure what happened –
one moment night drawing in,
and the next bright as day;

There just aren't words to express what we
felt,
but we knew we had to respond,
had to go and see for ourselves.

Not that we expected to find anything mind
you,
not if we were honest.
Well, you don't, do you?

I mean, it's not every day the Messiah arrives,
is it?

And we'd always imagined when he finally did
it would be in a blaze of glory,
to a fanfare of trumpets,
with maximum publicity.

Yet do you know what?
When we got there
it was to find everything just as we had been
told,
wonderfully special,
yet surprisingly ordinary.

Not a palace but a stable,
not a prince enthroned in splendour
but a baby lying in a manger.

We still find it hard to believe even now,
to think God chose to come
through that tiny vulnerable child.

But as the years have passed –
and we've seen not just his birth but his life,
and not just his life but his death,
not just his death but his empty tomb,
his grave clothes, his joyful followers –
we've slowly come to realise it really was true.

God had chosen to come to us,
and more than that, to you –
to ordinary, everyday people,
in the most ordinary, everyday of ways.

How extraordinary!

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
it wasn't those important in the eyes of the
world
who first heard the Good News;
it wasn't the religious elite although specially
gifted.

It was shepherds - ordinary, everyday people
like each of us.

Teach us, through their story,
that whoever we are,
however insignificant we may feel,
you value each one of us
and want us to know you for ourselves.

StF 206 - It was on a starry night

**1. It was on a starry night when the hills
were bright,
earth lay sleeping, sleeping calm and still;
then in a cattle shed, in a manger bed
a boy was born, King of all the world.**

*And all the angels sang for him,
the bells of heaven rang for him;
for a boy was born, King of all the
world.*

*And all the angels sang for him,
the bells of heaven rang for him;
for a boy was born, King of all the
world.*

**2. Soon the shepherds came that way, where
the baby lay,
and were kneeling, kneeling by his side.
And their hearts believed once more, for
the peace of all;
for a boy was born, King of all the world.**

*And all the angels sang for him,
the bells of heaven rang for him;
for a boy was born, King of all the
world.*

*And all the angels sang for him,
the bells of heaven rang for him;
for a boy was born, King of all the
world.*

Joy Webb (b. 1932)

We knew it would be worth it (Wise Men)

We knew it would be worth it the moment we
saw the star,
worth the hassle, the effort, worth the

sacrifice.

But there were times when we wondered.

As we laboured over those dusty barren
tracks,

And watched for bandits in the mountains,
as the sun beats down without a break,
and still no sign of an end to it,
we wondered.

Had we got it wrong,

Misread the signs.

We argued over whether we'd taken the
wrong turning
somewhere along the way.

Finally we got to Jerusalem
only to find his own people had no idea what
was going on.

Quite astonishing – the biggest event in their
history,
and they didn't even realise it was happening!

Thankfully they found it somewhere in one of
their old prophets.

It was all there in writing if only they taken the
trouble to look –

God knows why they couldn't see it!

Anyway, we made it at last,
tired, sore and hungry,
but we made it.

And it was worth it, more than we had ever
imagined,

for in that child was a different sort of king,
a different sort of kingdom,
from any we'd ever encountered before.

As much our ruler is theirs,
as much our kingdom is anyone's.
So we didn't just present our gifts.

We fell down and worshipped him.

Can you imagine that?

Grown men,
respected,

wealthy,
important,
kneeling before a toddler.

Yet it seemed so natural,
the most natural response we could make,
the only response that would do!

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
you have told us to seek we shall find.
Yet that search is not always easy.

As we look for meaning in our lives,
there is so much that puzzles and perplexes.

The more we discover
the more we realise how little we have
understood.

Give us the determination of the wise men
to keep on looking,
despite all that obscures you,
until at last we find the journey rewarded
and discover you ourselves.

H&P 115 - On Christmas night all Christians sing

- 1. On Christmas night all Christians sing
to hear the news the angels bring,
on Christmas night all Christians sing
to hear the news the angels bring,
news of great joy, news of great mirth,
news of our merciful King's birth.**
- 2. When sin departs before his grace,
then life and health come in its place,
when sin departs before his grace,
then life and health come in its place;
angels and saints with joy may sing,
all for to see the newborn King.**
- 3. All out of darkness we have light,
which made the angels sing this night,
all out of darkness we have light,**

**which made the angels sing this night:
"Glory to God and peace to men,
now and forevermore. Amen."**

Luke Wadding (1628 – 1691)

John 1:1-14 (NRSVA)

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was in the beginning with God. **3** All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being **4** in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. **7** He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. **8** He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. **9** The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. **11** He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. **12** But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, **13** who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Address

Prayers

StF 202 - Hark! The herald-angels sing

- 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:
*Hark! The herald-angels sing
glory to the new-born King.***
- 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:
*Hark! The herald-angels sing
glory to the new-born King.***

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

Blessing

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Meditations

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Hymns

StF 212 – O come all ye faithful

Latin, 18th century, possibly by John Francis Wade (c. 1711–1786) *and others*

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StF 190 – Angels from the realms of glory

vv. 1-4 James Montgomery (1771–1854)
v. 5, unascribed text in *The Christmas Box*, 1825

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StF 193 – Born in the night

Geoffrey Ainger (*b.* 1925)

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StF 216 – See him lying on a bed of straw

Michael Perry (1942–1996)

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StF 206 It was on a starry night

Joy Webb (*b.* 1932)

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Hymns & Psalms 115 – On Christmas night all Christians sing

Luke Wadding (1628 – 1691)

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StF 202 Hark! The herald-angels sing

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

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