

Worship for Christmas Day (complete text. A video version is also online)
Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.

Carol: StF 214 – Once in Royal David's City

- 1. Once in royal David's city
stood a lowly cattle shed,
where a mother laid her baby
in a manger for his bed:
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ her little child.**
- 2. He came down to earth from heaven
who is God and Lord of all,
and his shelter was a stable,
and his cradle was a stall;
with the needy, poor and lowly
lived on earth our Saviour holy.**
- 3. And our eyes at last shall see him,
through his own redeeming love,
for that child so dear and gentle
is our Lord in heaven above;
and he leads his children on
to the place where he is gone.**
- 4. Not in that poor lowly stable,
with the oxen standing by,
we shall see him; but in heaven,
set at God's right hands on high;
there his children gather round
bright like stars, with glory crowned.**

Cecil Frances Alexander (1818 – 1895)

Welcome & Opening Prayer

Welcome to this service for Christmas from the South Warwickshire Methodist Circuit – whether you choose to use it as a carol service, on Christmas Day, or any other time over the Christmas period. Thank you to all involved in putting this service together.

Let us pray

Loving God, from the safety and comfort of our own homes, we gather to worship you. From the turmoil and uncertainty of the world, we withdraw to worship you. From the busyness and chatter of our minds, we seek stillness to worship you.

As we listen once again to the familiar story, as we sing those words we know so well to tunes which have been etched in our bones since childhood, we pray that your Holy Spirit will shed new light on ancient truths. May the Christ child creep afresh into the manger of our hearts. We ask this in the name of Immanuel, God With Us.

Amen

In silence, we recall our sins, and offer them to God's mercy.

Lord, receive us as we are; cleanse us from all that troubles us and offends you; make us what you intend us to be. Through the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. **Amen**

Reading: Isaiah 9:2, 6-7 (NIVUK)

A birth is foretold

²The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
a light has dawned.

⁶For 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.

⁷Of 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.

Carol: 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!
Please 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)

Reading: Luke 2:1-7 (NRSVA)

The Birth of Jesus

¹In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Carol: StF 217 – Silent Night

- 1. Silent night, holy night:
sleeps the world; hid from sight,
Mary and Joseph in stable bare
watch o'er the child beloved and fair
sleeping in heavenly rest.**
- 2. 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!'**
- 3. 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 by

Stopford Augustus Brooke (1832 – 1916)

Reading: Luke 2:8-20 (NIVUK)
Angels and shepherds

⁸And there were shepherds living out in the fields near by, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

¹¹Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'

¹³Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴'Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.'

¹⁵When 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.'

¹⁶So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

¹⁷When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Carol: StF 221 – While Shepherds Watched

**1. While shepherds watched their flocks by night,
all seated on the ground,**

**the angel of the Lord came down,
and glory shone around.**

- 2. 'Fear not,' said he (for mighty dread
has seized their troubled mind),
'glad tidings of great joy I bring
to you and humankind.**
- 3. 'To you in David's town this day
is born of David's line
a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord;
and this shall be the sign:**
- 4. 'The heavenly babe you there shall find
to human view displayed,
all meanly wrapped in swaddling bands,
and in a manger laid.'**
- 5. Thus spake the seraph; and forthwith
appeared a shining throng
of angels praising God, and thus
addressed their joyful song:**
- 6. 'All glory be to God on high,
and to the world be peace;
goodwill henceforth from heaven to earth
begin and never cease.'**

Nahum Tate (1652 – 1715)

Reading Matthew 2:1-12 (NRSVA)
Wise men visit Jesus

¹In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ²asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.' ³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

⁶“And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of
Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.”

⁷Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, ‘Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.’ ⁹When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Reflection

Our Carol service began with those words from Isaiah:

*‘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’.*

And many times this year we may have felt as though we’ve been in a land of darkness: the darkness of Covid and lockdown; of not being able to go out and see people; of being afraid even to go shopping, maybe worried about our jobs or the jobs of our families; unable to meet even to worship together.

Yet the prophet Isaiah isn’t simply talking about a time that is hard and difficult, but pointing to the hope of a new future.

‘On those who walked in darkness, a light has shined.’

In the last year, there has not been a single moment where God has not been with us; where God’s light has not shined amongst us. In the deepest, darkest of times, God has been present with us, holding us, caring for us, loving us. We have seen that love and care in so many ways: through services going online; letters sent to those unable to be amongst us. New ways of being; new ways of talking about God, and yet the same God. Perhaps, this is summed up best in the words that in the darkness we have had grounds for hope. Hope in a new future – not simply a return to the pre-Covid past, but a new future with new ways of hearing the message of God and worshipping him.

Hopefully Covid has changed us for the better. Maybe in the dark times this year, you have hoped for a vaccine or a treatment. Maybe, like me, you have spent time googling Oxford vaccine, Pfizer vaccine – anything to find good news. For Isaiah and for us the people of God, that good news is not in a syringe with a needle; but with the gift of a baby boy, born that first Christmas. That gift of God becoming one of us, calling us into a new future a new hope, a new way of being.

In a few moments we will hear the reading from John’s gospel where we hear that this child who is human and divine creates a situation where we are known as the Children of God. Not because we were born into it, or because we have wanted it but because God has determined we are his children.

We have a new hope for the future, that isn’t simply a new vaccine, but that God has been

present with us throughout this year and will be present with us into the new future. We will be changed forever, but the world has already been changed forever that first Christmas, for this child will be born unable to feed himself, unable to care for himself, unable even to change his own nappy; dependent on us. This child will be born not to simply help us but to show us the very love of God present even in the deepest, darkest of times. This child will grow, grow in to the man who will hang on a cross to die for us. Offering us not simply hope, not simply life, but life eternal.

Over the past few weeks, we have heard of a light of a vaccine and a way out of lockdown and tears, a way back to being together and with our families. Yet when we are back together, when this Covid is no more, the world will still need to hear the Christmas story, one not of life given that we may live and die, but life given that we may live life to all its fullest and when we die, we die in to the deeper presence of God that is eternal life.

As you reach under your Christmas tree, finding presents to unwrap, I hope you find a new present, - a present that is the good news; the news that Christ, the one and only son of God, is amongst us, born to raise us from being the children of the earth into being the children of God. Born to bring life eternal, born to bring hope even in the darkest of times.

May you be richly blessed this Christmas time.

Carol: StF 204 – In the bleak midwinter

**1. 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.**

- 2. Heaven cannot hold him,
nor earth sustain;
heav'n and earth shall flee away
when he comes to reign.
In the bleak midwinter
a stable-place sufficed
God, the Lord Almighty,
Jesus Christ.**
- 3. Angels and archangels
may have gathered there,
cherubim and seraphim
thronged the air –
but his mother only,
in her maiden bliss,
worshipped the Beloved
with a kiss.**
- 4. 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)

Prayers of intercession

We pray for your Church – separated in body, but united in spirit. We pray for those who always struggle to meet for worship, because of time pressure, shortage of leaders, lack of facilities, health and mobility issues, or persecution. May they know your presence in their hearts.

Lord, in your mercy, Hear our prayer.

We pray for our families, friends and neighbours. We think especially of those who we would like

to be with, but can't. We lift to you those for whom this season is a trial and not a joy.

Lord, in your mercy, Hear our prayer.

We pray for the world and its leaders facing so many challenges: economic and political, as well as pandemic-related. Give them wisdom, energy and good will towards all in this Christmas season.

Lord, in your mercy, Hear our prayer

We pray for those who are ill, lonely, anxious or desperate. May they find the support and healing they need, and a brighter future. May we be part of bringing that to them, according to our ability.

Lord, in your mercy, Hear our prayer

We pray for ourselves, asking you to bring us strength, peace and the knowledge of your grace. We ask this and all our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

**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 trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the
glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen**

The Offering & prayer

Gracious God, we offer to you our gifts of money, our time and talents, whether through our local church, through charities we support,

or simply through our prayers – all for the growth and grace of your Kingdom. In the name of Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Reading: John 1:1-14 (NIVUK)

The Word became flesh

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. ⁸He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

⁹The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. ¹¹He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹²Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – ¹³children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

¹⁴The 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: StF 212 – O come all ye faithful (v 1,2,5)

**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!*

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, 19th Century, possibly by
John Francis Wade (c1711 – 1786)
and others*

Blessing

May our prayers and our lives be a light shining
in the darkness this Christmas time. And may the
blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy
Spirit, be with us all, now and for ever.

Amen.

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Cecil Frances Alexander (1818 – 1895)

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