



CHRISTMAS DAY 25th DECEMBER 2020

Our Christmas service will be at 10am today but for those who are still keeping to your homes here's our festival [Worship@Home](#).

Today you'll need your Advent wreath, a nativity set if you have one - or a Christmas card with the nativity scene - your Bible and cross. Use this service to focus your hearts and minds on God on the day we celebrate his Incarnation.



INTRODUCTION

Even at the last minute, arrangements have changed. I'm sorry for all of you who now have relatives in Tier 4, and so no longer able to be together for Christmas, but I hope you can keep it as a special day anyway.

So many things have gone this year; so many stored up for when we're back to whatever will pass for normal after the pandemic has lost its power.

For today's service I've chosen pictures of the Nativity from around the world. As with last week's pictures of Mary and Gabriel it's good to see how other cultures portray these foundational stories. It reinforces for us the fact that Christianity is a worldwide religion, practiced all over the globe. And theologically it reminds us that Christ came to save the whole world.

As we rejoice in a diverse world and a diverse church so God rejoices in all his children celebrating the birth of his Son.

Revd Jan

ADVENT WREATH DEVOTIONS

Reflection

There's so much to say about the birth of Jesus. But all that needs to be said is that it stemmed from the deep love of God for his creation. The life and death of this child, whose birth we celebrate, opened the way to God's heart.

So love is the source of all our faith, hope, peace and joy, expressed forever in this birth.

*Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, love divine;
Love was born at Christmas,
Star and angels gave the sign.*



Today we light all the candles of the Advent wreath.
Each candle has a meaning. The first candle is FAITH,
the second candle is HOPE, the third candle is PEACE,
and the fourth candle is JOY.
The middle candle is LOVE, the Christ candle.

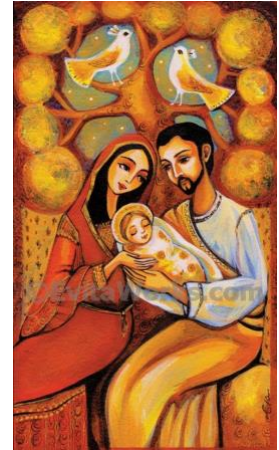


Scripture Isaiah 9:6

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.

Prayer

O God of faith, hope, peace, joy, and love,
As Mary and Joseph welcomed you into the world,
now help us welcome you into our lives.
Give us courage to hope; strength to seek peace.
Fill our spirits with joy; and our hearts with love,
through Jesus Christ, the Lord of all. Amen



**Do I not fill heaven and earth?’ says the Lord.
Now the Word is made flesh and laid in a narrow manger.
From eternity to eternity you are God,
and now we see you as a newborn child.**

Invitation to confession

Christ the light of the world has come to dispel the darkness of our hearts.
In his light, let us examine ourselves and confess our sins.

PRAYERS OF PENITENCE

God our Father, you sent your Son full of grace and truth:
forgive our failure to receive him. Lord, have mercy.

Jesus our Saviour, you were born in poverty and laid in a manger:
forgive our greed and rejection of your ways. Christ, have mercy.

Spirit of love, your servant Mary responded joyfully to your call:
forgive the hardness of our hearts. Lord, have mercy.

ABSOLUTION

May the God of all healing and forgiveness draw us to himself,
that we may behold the glory of his Son, the Word made flesh,
and be cleansed from all our sins, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

GLORIA

Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to his people on earth.

Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.

Lord Jesus Christ, only son of the Father,
Lord God Lamb of God,

you take away the sins of the world have mercy upon us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father receive our prayer.

For you alone are Holy One, you alone are the Most High,
Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen



THE COLLECT

Lord Jesus Christ, your birth at Bethlehem
draws us to kneel in wonder at heaven touching earth:
accept our heartfelt praise as we worship you,
our Saviour and our eternal God. **Amen.**



OLD TESTAMENT READING ISAIAH 9.2-7

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.

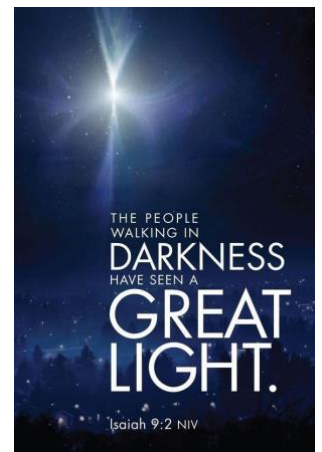
You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.

For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.

For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

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.

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 onwards and for evermore.

The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

This is the word of the Lord – Thanks be to God

NEW TESTAMENT READING TITUS 2.11-14

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

This is the word of the Lord – **Thanks be to God**

GOSPEL READING

Alleluia, alleluia. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory. Alleluia.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke

Glory to you O Lord

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered.

Joseph 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. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.

While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And 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.



In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.'



And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'

REFLECTION

I want to do something different today. Instead of the usual reflection I want to give you a full length sermon. This day is the day of days and deserves something to think about. You'll find it at the end of this service, so you can leave it now if you want and come back to it later. I shall preach it in church too so you won't be able to avoid it!

For now, I pray a blessing on you and whoever you're with, for the rest of today, however you're spending it.

Revd Jan

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION



In peace, let us pray to the Lord.

Father, on this holy day your Son our Saviour was born in human flesh.

Renew your Church as the Body of Christ.

Holy God hear our prayer.

On this holy day, there was no room for your Son in the inn.

Protect with your love those who have no home and all who live in poverty.

Holy God hear our prayer.

On this holy day, Mary, in the pain of labour, brought your Son to birth.

Hold in your hand all who are in pain or distress.

Holy God hear our prayer.

On this holy day, your Christ came as a light shining in the darkness.

Bring comfort to all who suffer in the sadness of our world.

Holy God hear our prayer.

On this holy day the angels sang, 'Peace to God's people on earth.'

Strengthen those who work for peace and justice in all the world.

Holy God hear our prayer.

On this holy day shepherds in the field heard good tidings of joy.
Give us grace to preach the gospel of Christ's redemption.
Holy God hear our prayer.

On this holy day, strangers found the Holy Family,
And saw the baby lying in the manger.
Bless our homes and all whom we love.
Holy God hear our prayer.

On this holy day, heaven is come down to earth,
and earth is raised to heaven.
Hold in your hand all those who have passed through death
in the hope of your coming kingdom.
Holy God hear our prayer.

On this holy day Christians the world over celebrate Christ's birth.
Open our hearts that he may be born in us today.
Holy God hear our prayer.

Father,
On this holy day angels and shepherds worshipped at the manger throne.
Receive the worship we offer in fellowship with Mary, Joseph and the saints
through him who is your Word made flesh, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.



THE LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the Kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.**

THE BLESSING

May the Father, who has loved the eternal Son from before the foundation of the world, shed that love upon us his children.

May Christ, who by his incarnation gathered into one things earthly and heavenly, fill us with joy and peace.

May the Holy Spirit, by whose overshadowing Mary became the God-bearer, give us grace to carry the good news of Christ.

The blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, rest upon us, now and always. Amen.

CHRISTMAS DAY SERMON

Today we're celebrating the birth of a baby in a stable.

Can you remember what a new born baby is like? And how we respond? 'Aah' is probably what most of us do! I think that's how we are programmed. The sight of a tiny baby arouses a strong urge to protect, to hold close and cuddle. It's as though we instinctively know that physical closeness is as necessary for that baby's survival as hourly feeds and clean nappies.

And all those daft things - the crooning, the baby phrases and words – all expressions of delight. It is desperately important for every child too, to see the light in someone's eyes when they look at them, to hear the lift in the voice, to see the smile on the face.

Every parent knows it as they hold their child for the first time: the wonder at this complete human being, each part new and precious, a source of gratitude and joy. How did we, so flawed and imperfect, bring forth such perfection?

And not just our own children or grandchildren. We almost will every child to be a blessing, to realise the inexhaustible possibilities in that new life.

Of course, these haven't always been the usual responses to new-born babies. Not so long ago, in my lifetime certainly, men would not expect, and would not have been expected, to be involved in tiny babies' care. And in a previous age women of certain classes wouldn't either. There would have been the wet nurse, the day nurse, the night nurse and the nanny. Women's work or servants' work.

And, of course, there are people who view new-borns with fear or distaste. You can imagine the voice, can't you: they're really rather messy, darling. What's the phrase – 'stuff coming out of both ends and a loud noise in the middle'!

And what that identifies cannot be denied. Babies are overwhelmingly physical, and people who look after babies are up to their elbows in the physicality of being human. In what, when it comes down to it, we are all about; blood, bones and hair; eating, sleeping and getting rid; touching, holding and being close.

When we encounter a baby, we are brought face to face with our bodily-ness.

I think in our culture there has been a tendency to want to distance ourselves from our physical nature while at the same time fetishising certain manifestations of it. So our teenagers are obsessed with weight or appearance while knowing that isn't all they are worth.

Christianity has, through some of its interpreters, taught us to despise our bodies, teaching us that spirit is so much more important than flesh; that flesh is at best an unfortunate accident and at worse the abode of Satan himself.

The legacy of that is a deep discomfort with the messiness of human life. I don't just mean a place for everything and everything in its place, but a real sense of shame about bodily functions, a feeling that it might be necessary but we don't want to talk about it.

A variation on this is a sense of impatience with the limitations of the body, refusing to acknowledge its weakness, shame or denial in the face of illness or breakdown.

So some people do react to babies with fear. New parents especially as they hold their little bundle of vulnerability that depends utterly and totally on them for their survival. They feel the weight of that responsibility and fear they won't be able to do it properly. And they rapidly realise how demanding that little bundle is. Their every need must be met the moment it is felt. Everyone knows new parents are permanently exhausted, sleep deprived. Life revolves round the tiny tyrant and it is just to be borne. Only gradually will the baby learn to trust that its needs will be met because they have learnt that they always have been in the past.

Inextricably bound up with the baby's physical needs is the need for love and attention; because it is there that, the foundations of our belief in ourselves are laid. When we know we are loved we can believe we are lovable and we don't need to keep searching all our lives for that love.

We have a long apprenticeship in being human and what we are given as babies, or not, influences the kind of person we are able to become, the direction we take.

Which is why we greet babies with sometimes unexpected responses. As any amateur psychologist will tell you they awaken the lost or buried child within each one of us, perhaps facing us with our own unmet needs.

So here we have babies: vulnerable, unable to survive by themselves; physical, immediate, instinctive; demanding and needy; wondrous and awe-inspiring.

Today we keep the feast of the Incarnation, when we say God became human, and we mean God became a baby and lived a human life. In the birth of Jesus he took flesh and lived among us. He shared our human life.

The Old Testament images of God all emphasise his power. Think of those titles: Lord, Sovereign, King, Ruler, Judge. All about greatness and majesty. He made covenants with his people; he would be their God with an arm mighty in battle, swift to defend or reprove.

We are the inheritors of the New Testament, with a new understanding of God. By becoming human, he bridged the gap between himself and us. Through Jesus, he redeemed our humanity for himself and forever.

In some ways, Incarnation is only the same story as Creation. In creation, God made us in his image. At the incarnation, he inhabits his image and it becomes him.

In becoming the baby at Bethlehem, he has given us the clearest possible message. Forget stories of Jesus' sinlessness and perfection and uniqueness: he was only that in the same way that every newborn baby is sinless, perfect and unique.

He became one of us – vulnerable, physical and needy - and in that human guise, he lived a life of inestimable significance. We see the baby in the manger and we know what happened next. The child grew to a man, bringing the message of salvation to a world that, then and now, wasn't listening. The Child of the Promise became the body on the cross, rejected and done away with.

But God meant it when he entered the world and death was not the end. The raising up of Jesus demonstrates God's yearning to have all his creation restored to him in glory. The death and resurrection of Jesus is God's promise to us, God's demonstration of unfailing love, that will not be overcome even by the worst that can be done to it.

And so forever human-ness is shot through with that divinity, with the gift of God's love calling each of us back to him in the depths of our being.

If we take the Incarnation, seriously, we have no option but to see every human life as sanctified: every baby, child and adult as made for God and destined to find their way to him. It means we have to see all others, and ourselves, as carrying God within us. It means we have to see the journey to true humanity as also the journey to true divinity.

It is in Jesus that that is most clearly seen. Because of Jesus we are able to live our lives in search of, and as an expression of, the God-with-us, God in us. And our task and the task of all the church is to clear the path of all that would conceal or disguise him.

So this is our most wonderful Christmas present: God's gift of the baby in the manger. And because of him every human life is changed, our own and every one that we meet. And this can be our gift: to treat each person as God himself come to visit us, to search for God within them, and to warm our hands at the flame.

Even so, shall his kingdom be established on this earth and we shall sing with the angels

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth

Amen