

CHRISTMAS DAY 2020

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Lighting of Christ Candle & Call to Worship

We light the four Advent candles to remind us that we have watched and waited for the coming of the Christ child

Today we light the Christ candle, celebrating the birth of the Christ child. God's love has come down at Christmas! (*Light candle*)

All the candles are lit. The Christ child is here!

Lord we greet you, born this happy morning.

Carol O come all ye faithful

Prayer

We are blessed, O God, for you come to us and are with us

In difficult and uncertain times you send light and hope

Into a weary world you bring peace and joy

For unto us a child is born/Unto us a son is given

Be with us today as we remember and celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray.....

O God, if we have lost the sense of wonder and delight in the birth of love in Jesus Christ/If we no longer expect surprises and take the gifts of others and our own gifts for granted/If we do not believe that the power of love will prevail in the world/If we give in to cynicism and a spirit of defeat....Forgive us, o God of hope, of love, of surprises, of Christmas.... Amen

Scripture Reading Isaiah 9: 2-7
 Luke 2: 1-20

Carol While shepherds watched their flocks

Reflection

Today is Christmas day, a day of rejoicing! We rejoice as we again celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, even though we do so a bit differently this year. A short service in church, only the choir singing, no large family gatherings, a festive meal with some people missing around the table, perhaps less presents to give and receive.... Perhaps even a Christmas alone. Yes, this year Christmas may be a time that we keenly feel our losses. Christmas is a time of joy, but for many people, each year, it is also a time of sadness as they remember the loss of a loved one, a companion, a friend. This year we experience other losses too, as our lives have been turned upside down by the corona pandemic and we cannot celebrate Christmas as we are used to or would wish to.

For some of us the remembrance of Christmases past and the hope of a more "normal" Christmas again in the future is very comforting while we enjoy whatever way we can celebrate this year. But we are aware that for others it is a time of loneliness and despair. So underneath the joy of Christmas, any year, lies the question: how are we to deal with the tragic dimension of human life, of sadness, suffering and pain? What good tidings of joy?

The strange and beautiful story we celebrate today is about a young couple, the woman pregnant, the man honourable, who have made their way down a dusty road to a provincial town, where they are looking for shelter for the night. The place is full of people and there is no room for them. They are homeless, at least for the night, about to welcome their first-born child into the world. We picture them cold, lonely and hungry....

Why should we want to hear this story? It has no relevance to us, does it? As it happened many years ago and many miles away, what relevance in our high-tech, modern lives in Europe? After all, we can make a plane or train reservation on the internet (and it can even be cancelled for free in this time of a pandemic); while on our way we can book a room for the night; anyone who is pregnant can go to a hospital and (most likely) our wonderful NHS will take good care of mother and baby. The story of what happened so long ago, a very simplistic story, can seem terribly boring and apart from delighting to see our children or grandchildren act a part in a Nativity play we could just as well switch off. Yet....yet, on this day we keenly listen again to this story because the story tells us what life is all about. It is about deep hope born in the human heart, not a casual optimism that "life is going to be wonderful, amazing, brilliant.....", in a same vain as politicians use

superlatives to describe a rosy future after the pandemic, after Brexit, etc. No, there will be pain, there will be struggles, but Luke tells the story of Jesus' birth in such a way that it resounds as a story of the birth of hope, of new life, of salvation. Luke conveys the "good news" in such a way that it touches all who dream of a better tomorrow, of a new day...of freedom of all that oppresses, all that diminishes life. In the story we sense that in all the struggles of life we will find strength sufficient for our needs. We find strength as we become aware, again and again, that in the darkness of the world, hope is born; there is goodness and there is new life. The wonder and mystery of our faith is that "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"

We celebrate the new life emerging, the new world being born in a stable long ago and far away, but also here, today. Joy to the world, the Lord is come. Yes, the Lord *is* come; Jesus comes to us, here and now. The light emanating from the stable is the light of God, come to be with us, come to dwell in us, come to transform us, so that we may be bearers of God's light ourselves.

Yes, Christmas is not only a celebration but also a calling, a calling to be bearers of God's light, to share the good news of hope, peace, joy and love....especially with those who most need it, today and in the days to come.

Musical Interlude Memories (One Voice Children's Choir)

Prayers

O God, we thank you for the message of love that Christmas brings into a weary world and into our lives. We pray that love may overcome hostility and violence wherever it may occur and that we may reveal in our lives the love that Jesus embodied and showed us. Help us to work for healing and reconciliation where lives are broken and communities divided.

O God, we thank you for the message of joy that Christmas brings into a world where too many people suffer. We remember those who are hungry and homeless, who cry out for a word of kindness, a sign of hope, a gesture of love, and, most of all, the practical help and solutions to meet their needs. We remember all for whom this day is clouded by loneliness, anxiety or bereavement. We pray that they may find comfort and strength as they

remember the birth of him who bore our grief and carried our sorrows...who came to us that we may know fullness of life.

O God, we thank you for the message of goodwill that Christmas brings to a world grown self-centred and cynical because of power-plays and greed. Help us to remember that Jesus came not to be served but to serve and may we find fulfilment in service to others. And we especially thank you for all who have served us faithfully and selflessly in the exceptional circumstances of the ongoing pandemic.....

O God, we thank you for the message of peace that Christmas brings to a troubled world. May there be peace among the nations and within the nations, peace in our homes and in our hearts, as we remember the birth of the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ our Lord.

And we pray together....OUR FATHER

Offering & Dedication

O God of Love, receive our gifts and with them the thanksgiving of our hearts for this day. With these gifts we will carry your love that came down at Christmas into the world. Amen.

Carol It came upon the midnight clear

Blessing

Proclaim the good news. The Word of God dwells among us.

The Light of God shines in the world. Sing praises. Shout for joy.

Celebrate the hope and promise of this day. Go with the peace of God in your hearts.....

May the love of God who created us

Who came as one of us

And who is with us still

Bless and sustain you this day and forevermore. Amen.

