

Christ Church, Ipswich

Sunday 25th December 2020

Christmas Day Worship

with Revd Neil Coulson

Hello, good morning and happy Christmas! I hope you are well and whilst this day and indeed, this whole season will no doubt be very different and unusual for many of us and very difficult for some us, I pray that you and your family will sense the love, hope and peace of God this Christmastime. There is an opportunity at the beginning of our Christmas Day Service for you to light a candle and so you may wish to be ready to do this as we begin our worship on this special day.

Let us worship God together:

The Lighting of a candle for Christmas

We light this Christmas Candle to remind us that Jesus is the light of the world.

**A boy has been born for us, a son given to us.
Glory to God in highest heaven!
Peace upon earth amongst people of goodwill!**

Hymn Joy to the world, the Lord is come! (R&S 135)

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare him room,
and heaven and nature sing.

Joy to the world, the Saviour reigns!
Let all their songs employ;
while fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
repeat the sounding joy.

No more let thorns infest the ground,
or sins and sorrows grow;
wherever pain and death are found
he makes his blessings flow.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness
and wonders of his love.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748) altd.

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

Loving God,
we thank you for this special day and all it speaks of –
your promise of old to send a Messiah to your people,
the fulfilment of that promise through the coming of Jesus,
the realisation of those long years of expectation,
the glad tidings proclaimed by the angels,
the wonder and mystery of that first Christmas.

We thank you for this season's power to move, inspire and challenge,
to gladden the hardest of hearts and most broken of spirits,
to stir our minds and capture our imagination.

We thank you for the special things we associate with Christmas -
the spreading of goodwill, the sharing of friendship,
the longing for peace and the expressing of love.

But above all we thank you for the truth behind this day -
the message that you have come to us,
that you love us,
that you share our humanity,
and that you want us to share in your abundant life.

Loving God,
accept our praise, receive our thanksgiving,
and may the wonder of the gospel come alive in our hearts today,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Old Testament Reading Isaiah 9:2-7 (NRSV)

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.

³ 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.

⁴ 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.

⁵ For all the boots of the tramping warriors
 and all the garments rolled in blood
 shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

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 onwards and for evermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Gospel Reading**Luke 2:1-20 (NRSV)***The Birth of Jesus*

2 In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. **2** This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. **3** All went to their own towns to be registered. **4** 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. **5** He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. **6** While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. **7** 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.

The Shepherds and the Angels

8 In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. **9** Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. **10** 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: **11** to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah,^[a] the Lord. **12** This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' **13** And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host,^[b] praising God and saying,

14 'Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'^[c]

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.' **16** So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. **17** When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; **18** and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. **19** But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. **20** The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Reflection***First, a word to the young children within our Church family...***

Hello, Happy Christmas to you! I hope your day has begun well! Although we can't all see your gifts this year, (and we always look forward to seeing what you bring to Church to show us!), we are thinking of you and all of us at Christ Church hope you have a wonderful Christmas! God bless you! Hope you enjoy today!

Let's all say a prayer together this Christmas:

God, in the amazing, loving gift of Jesus,
you remind us that the truest gift is the gift of love.
Today, giving and unwrapping gifts,
with joy and maybe even disappointment,
we ask that you help us to love one another,
because love comes from you,
and love is the best thing worth celebrating.
So we give you our thanks and praise this Christmas Day.
Amen.

Now, a short Christmas reflection...

As we hear once more Luke's wonderful story of the birth of Jesus, one thing that stands out is the amazing way in which God appears to work within our world. We see him at work in the most unlikely of places and through the most unlikely of people. We observe the Emperor exercising his considerable power and declaring that 'all the world should be registered'. And yet, in the midst of this display of power, with all the surrounding noise and chaos, our heads are turned and our hearts are touched as we are drawn to a baby lying in a manger. As one commentator wisely writes. 'we are reminded that amid the voices of power and the noise of life, God is quietly and gently and always present, working in the most unexpected places.'

Of course, there is something here about us being open to God and about us taking the time to notice God being with us. After all, today we celebrate the Immanuel, the God who is with us. I hope that we're able to recognise his presence in a time like this which, just like the first Christmas, is very much a season of challenge and change. Also, and just as importantly, I hope that we are able to recognise his presence in the ordinary, everyday aspect of our lives, which right now, may well have at least a little less variety than we're used to - still, God is with us; still, God is at work! Imagine the shepherds in the field that night, caring for their sheep as usual. Then, suddenly, an angel appears and tells them to go to Bethlehem to 'see this thing that has taken place'. They encountered God very much in 'the ordinary', their place of work! They weren't even in a religious building! (Isn't that where these kinds of things are supposed to happen!?) But no, they are not in the synagogue or the temple, they were in their normal everyday life, out in the countryside, doing their work. And having grabbed their attention, God leads them to the basement of an ordinary home. In all this, the message of the story is clear – we can encounter the wonder, the mystery, the nearness of God in the ordinariness of our daily lives, just as the shepherds did.

So, I wonder, is God trying to grab your attention? What is he drawing you to look at this Christmas? Are you open to God, the Immanuel, the God who is with us, the God who is with *you*, drawing close to *you* even in the ordinary, even in this most challenging of times, given all that is going on right now? New Testament Scholar, Tom Wright helpfully reminds us that 'Christmas has always, from the very beginning, been about God doing something new, just at the time when everything seemed dark and strange and frightening. And I guess it's going to have to be like that again this year.' So may I encourage you this Christmas: God is with you in the present darkness and in the normal 'everydayness'; God comes to be with you, he does not remain remote, God is with you! May the love, joy and peace of the Immanuel envelope us all this Christmas, even as we long for God to, once again, do something new within our world. Amen.

Hymn O come, all ye faithful (R&S 160)

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!*

God of God,
Light of light,
lo, He abhors not the virgin's womb;
very God,
begotten, not created:

See how the shepherds,
summoned to his cradle,
leaving their flocks, draw nigh to gaze;
we too will thither
bend our joyful footsteps:

Lo, star-led chieftains,
magi, Christ adoring,
offer him incense, gold and myrrh;
we to the Christ-child
bring our hearts' oblations:

Sing, choirs of angels,
sing in exultation,
sing, all ye citizens of heaven above;
'Glory to God
in the highest':

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

Latin 18th cent, possibly John F. Wade (c1711-86)
tr. Frederick Oakeley, altd.

Our prayers of intercession

Today, in all the demands,
we pray for those who are facing a Christmas
without someone they love.
God of goodness,
hear us and be with us.

Today, in all the delights,
we pray for those who are facing a Christmas alone.
God of goodness,
hear us and be with us.

Today, in all the celebration, we pray for those who are facing conflicts.
God of goodness,
hear us and be with us.

Today, in all the time at tables, we pray for those who are hungry.
God of goodness,
hear us and be with us. 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.
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.**

Hymn Hark! the herald angels sing (R&S 159)

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.*

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 us to dwell,
Jesus, our Immanuel:

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 we no more may die,
born to raise the things of earth,
born to give us second birth:

Charles Wesley (1707-88) altd.*

The Blessing

May the joy of the angels,
the wonder of the shepherds,
the perseverance of the wise men,
the obedience of Joseph,
the love of Mary
and the peace of the Christ child
fill your hearts this Christmas.

And may the blessing of almighty God,
Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,
be upon you and those you love,
this day and always. **Amen.**

The Grace

Holding each other in our prayers, we say together:

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all,
for evermore. Amen.**

May God bless you and your loved ones richly this Christmastime,
with our love and very best wishes,

*Neil, Gill,
Jess, Jon, Amy, Hannah.*

Resources taken and adapted from *ROOTS for Churches Limited* and Nick Fawcett's *Prayers for all Seasons*.
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