

WORSHIP AT HOME - 20TH DECEMBER – 2020

Call to Worship:

God was with Mary and Joseph on the road to Bethlehem - **Lord, be with us as we approach Christmas.**
Come, be with God as he is with us – **we come before God to worship him.**

Carol: ‘Long ago prophets knew’ written by Fred Pratt Green [1903-2000] Singing the Faith 178

1 Long ago prophets knew Christ would come, born a Jew,
Come to make all things new, bear his people’s burden,
Freely love and pardon.

Ring bells, ring, ring, ring! Sing choirs, sing, sing, sing!
When he comes, when he comes, who will make him welcome?

2 God in time, God in man, this is God’s timeless plan;
He will come, as a man, born himself of woman,
God divinely human.

Ring bells.....

3 Mary, hail! Though afraid, she believed, she obeyed.
In her womb, God is laid; till the time expected,
Nurtured and protected.

Ring bells.....

4 Journey ends! Where afar Bethlem shines like a star,
Stable door stands ajar. Unborn Son of Mary,
Saviour, do not tarry!

Ring bells, ring, ring, ring! Sing choirs sing, sing, sing!
Jesus comes! Jesus comes!
We will make him welcome!

Prayer: Praise be to God who was born in Bethlehem and in whose divine nature is found babe and child, male and female, mother and father. Praise be to God, the eternal parent, who entrusted his Son to Mary and Joseph. For their human qualities we thank you, O Lord; for Mary’s strength and resilience; for Joseph’s tenderness and mercy. In the mingling of divinity and humanity, we discover the heart of God.

Amen

We light a candle for the angel, God of goodness and light, and thank you for the messages of encouragement you have given us in our lives – for moments of illumination and answers to prayer – and for the people. Oh God, we thank you for the many human angels in our lives; for the people who have listened to us patiently, heard our despair or uncertainty, and who [sometimes by hardly saying anything] have made the way ahead seem possible, giving us hope and peace and blessing. May they, too, be blessed. May your name be blessed. God with us, Emmanuel. In your precious name we pray **Amen.**

Father, we confess that we often view Jesus’ birth through rose-tinted glasses – a fair maiden, a dutiful man, angels, dreams, kings and a star – a baby laid in sweet-smelling hay. We love the sentimentality, the scene remembered each year. Forgive us for forgetting the human pain – a teenage girl, pregnant out of wedlock, far from home – a troubled man, trying to trust in what she and the angel have told him. Nowhere to sleep but a stable, amid the stench and dirt – fleeing in fear for their lives in the stark light of morning.

Forgive us for failing to see this pain, for it shows us the true depth of the miracle. **Amen**

Dear God, how we must weary you! You long to come close to us, to give us grace, to kindle hope in us, to let your face shine on us. But we turn away, stubborn, unbelieving and grace-less. Lord, we turn to you now, seeking your acceptance and forgiveness, trusting your promise to us to get us out of the messes we have made for ourselves. We thank you for the sign – the child about to be born. May his presence fill our hearts, our homes and our world. **Amen**

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.

Luke 1: 26-38 taken from New Living Translation of the Bible:

The Birth of Jesus Foretold.

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. Gabriel appeared to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured woman! The Lord is with you!'

Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. 'Don't be afraid, Mary,' the angel told her, 'for God has decided to bless you! You will become pregnant and have a son, and you are to name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor, David. And he will reign over Israel for ever; his Kingdom will never end!'

Mary asked the angel, 'But how can I have a baby? I am a virgin.'

The angel replied, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby born to you will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. What is more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say that she was barren, but she is already in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God.'

Mary responded, 'I am the Lord's servant, and I am willing to accept whatever he wants. May everything you have said come true.' And then the angel left.

Carol: 'The Angel Gabriel' written by Sabine Baring-Gould [1834-1924]. Singing the Faith 187

1 The Angel Gabriel from heaven came, his wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame;
'All hail,' said he, 'thou lowly maiden Mary. most highly favoured lady'
Gloria!

2 'For known a blessed Mother thou shalt be, all generations laud and honour thee,
Thy son shall be Immanuel, by seers foretold ; most highly favoured lady'
Gloria!

3 Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head, 'To me be as it pleaseth God,' she said.
'My soul shall laud and magnify his holy name,' Most highly favoured lady,
Gloria!

4 Of her, Immanuel, the Christ was born in Bethlehem all on a Christmas morn,
And Christian folk throughout the world will ever say, Most highly favoured lady'.
Gloria!

Matthew 1: 18-25

The Birth of Jesus the Messiah

Now this is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her fiancé, being a just man, decided to break the engagement quietly, so as not to disgrace her publicly. As he considered this, he fell asleep, and an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. 'Joseph, son of David,' the angel said, 'do not be afraid to go ahead with your marriage to Mary. For the child within her has been conceived by the Holy Spirit, and she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All of this happened to fulfil the Lord's message through his prophet:

"Look! The virgin will conceive a child!

She will give birth to a son

And he will be called Immanuel

[meaning, God is with us.]"

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord commanded. He brought Mary home to be his wife, but she remained a virgin until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus.

Comment: There are times when it seems as if the whole world waits on the reaction of one person – and this is just such a moment. Mary is betrothed to Jesus. It is possible that they could have been promised to each other since Mary was a child – then they became betrothed. Such betrothal is usually for a year and when the couple agrees to the promises that were made for them years before. At this stage they are considered man and wife and the relationship is binding and can now only be terminated by divorce. Mary has told Joseph that she is pregnant – and he knows the baby is not his. In fairness, how could he begin to understand when Mary told him of her encounter with an angel?

Joseph's reaction is a natural one. He cares for Mary and does not want her to face public disgrace, but he feels he must dismiss her. These thoughts obviously disturbed him day and night, but he made up his mind – he knew what he must do. Then he had a dream that would change the course of the world. An angel came and spoke to him: 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.'

I don't suppose that Joseph could understand this – but nevertheless he would obey God's messenger. Without Joseph's willingness the whole plan would have come to nothing. Often God depends on us for achieving what he wants done in the world. Without our co-operation the kingdom of God cannot be found on earth. However, when we do what God wants of us, wonderful things can happen.

Joseph is told how Mary will bear a son and that he was to name him Jesus. By naming the baby, Joseph is accepting Jesus as his own son. By calling the boy Jesus [which is Greek for the Hebrew name Joshua and means 'Jehovah is salvation' or 'God is saviour'], Joseph is to acknowledge what is promised through Jesus. Matthew is keen to show that the coming of Jesus into the world is God's work – and he quotes from Isaiah.

Immanuel - God is with us. But this reality cannot be achieved without our obedience and co-operation. It is when we say 'Your will be done' that the possibility of the kingdom of God takes shape in our lives. When Joseph awoke he did as he was commanded. It is through the obedience of Joseph, as well as that of Mary, that the possibility of Immanuel – God in our midst – came about.

There are two schools of thought or belief about the Christmas story. There are those who believe every word believing that God can do anything, however impossible it might seem to a human mind – and there are those who say that logically it can't have happened as it says, and find many different ways of looking at the story.

Does it really matter which camp any one of us is in? [and I will say that I am in the first]. No, for God came among us - Jesus is our Saviour – and that cannot be changed by human reasoning. Be thankful and praise God for his glory.

Prayer: Where do we see Mary today? We pray for:

Young girls caught in an unplanned pregnancy; young mothers doing their best on low income; refugee mothers, afraid for their children's lives.

Where do we glimpse Joseph? We pray for:

Men who look out for their families; men who do their duty; men who act on their beliefs.

Where do we glimpse angels today? We pray for:

Those who care for the needy; those who welcome the stranger; those who do not judge.

We pray in the name of the one whose birth we celebrate. **Amen**

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It's all about to happen... but everywhere in the Christmas stories the first thing the angel needs to say is 'There's no need to be afraid!' He said it to Mary and to Joseph – in other stories we know he said it to Zechariah and to the shepherds. Can we, in the run up to Christmas, hear the angel's voice reassuring us, reminding us that it's good news, helping us to a calm and joyful state of mind?

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Carol: 'Tell out my soul' written by Timothy Dudley Smith [b.1926] and based on *The Magnificat*. StF 186

1 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord! Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;
Tender to me the promise of his word; in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

2 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name! make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;
His mercy sure, from age to age the same; his holy name – the Lord, the Mighty One.

3 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might! Powers and dominions lay their glory by;
Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight, the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

4 Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word! Firm is his promise and his mercy sure.
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord to children's children, and for evermore!

Closing Prayer and Blessing:

God, who comes to be with us at Christmas, Emmanuel, let your face shine upon us.

God who sends his angels to comfort, reassure and strengthen. Let your face shine upon us.

God of power and grace, of beauty and glory. Let your face shine upon us.

Let it shine on us – let it shine on all your children everywhere.

Let your face shine. Amen

And may the blessing of God – the father, Son and Holy Spirit – be with us and all whom we love now and forevermore. **Amen**