

HAPPY CHRISTMAS!

JESUS IS BORN!

Call to Worship: Joy to the world!

Glory to God for the amazing gift of this baby; his Son, new-born and fragile, tiny and vulnerable,
bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh;
our Saviour, our Friend, Prince of Peace.

Carol: 'O Come All Ye Faithful'. Latin, 18th century, possibly by John Francis Wade [c. 1711-1786] and others. Singing the faith 212

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.....

3 See how the shepherds, summoned to the cradle,
Leaving their flocks draw night to gaze;
We too will thither bend our joyful footsteps.
O come.....

4 Lo, star-led chieftain, Magi, Christ adoring,
offer him incense, gold and myrrh;
we to the Christ-child bring our hearts' oblations.
O come.....

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

6 Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning,
Jesus, to thee be glory given.
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing.
O come.....

Prayer: Dear and loving God, we have so much to thank you for.
Thank you for the dawning of this Christmas Day.
Thank you for the Child in the manger whose shining face brings light and warmth to our lives.
Thank you for the simplicity of his life and his message of love.
Thank you for the way his life changes ours.
Thank you for your amazing generosity behind it all.

Give us open hearts and hands to share your abundance, through Jesus Christ, baby, Saviour, 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 people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness- on them has the light shined. [Isaiah 9:2]

Christ has brought us out of darkness to live in the light of God.

We are called to journey with Mary and Joseph, with the shepherds and the magi, to the birthplace of the child of God. As we bring our hopes and fears, our joys and our sorrows to the manger, let us pray that God will journey with us.

Holy Father, you sent Jesus to be born as a vulnerable baby in a dangerous world. As we hear the Christmas story, meet us, welcome us, and find room for us. **Amen**

Based on Luke 2: 1-20: The birth of Jesus and His birth is announced to shepherds.

The road to Bethlehem is quiet as the night begins to fall. A couple with a donkey struggle up the hill towards the town. They have travelled for several days, and the woman is expecting her first child. They need to find shelter, but the town is full and there are no guest rooms. Eventually a place is found. Although it is not what parents would choose for the birth of this child, the couple are thankful for a roof over their heads. When the baby is born, the father puts him into a manger, where the straw will keep him warm.

The shepherds are looking after their sheep on the hillside near Bethlehem. Suddenly, they are terrified as shining light and voices fill the night's sky. An angel tells them to listen carefully for tonight the world has changed for the better. A baby has been born who will be a wise and generous king, and a kind and fair judge. The shepherds are scared but excited. They decide to leave the fields and go in search of the child.

The story of the shepherds taken from The Message, the translation written by Eugene Peterson.

There were shepherders camping in the neighbourhood. They had set night-watches over their sheep. Suddenly, God's angel stood among them and God's glory blazed around them. The angel said: 'Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide. A saviour has just been born in David's town – a Saviour who is Messiah and Master. This is what you're to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger.'

At once the angel was joined by a huge angelic choir singing God's Praises;

'Glory to God in the heavenly heights. Peace to all men and women on earth who please him.'

As the angel withdrew into heaven the shepherders talked it over. 'Let's get over to Bethlehem as fast as we can and see for ourselves what God has revealed to us.' They left, running, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in the manger. Seeing was believing.

And now the more traditional way we might hear the story.

Carol: 'While shepherds watched' written by Nahum Tate [1652 – 1715] Singing the Faith 221

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 had seized their troubled mind],
'glad tidings of great joy I bring to you and all mankind.

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.

Based on Matthew 2: 1-2 & 7-12.

Visitors from the east.

The magi may have been studying the stars for many years, but now something has changed – something is different. A star is shining in an unexpected place, and at an unexpected time. Like the shepherds they are excited and want to know more. They set out on a journey towards the country where they saw the star appear. They know a child has been born, so they bring presents for a king – gold, frankincense and myrrh. But the journey takes a long time, and the magi are going to be late. They are on their way, but they haven't arrived yet. They don't arrive till sometime after Christmas.

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If someone handed what looked like a truffle sweet covered in chocolate and you bit into it – to discover it was actually a cooked sprout, I wonder what you would think of it?!

Do you like the sprout? And the chocolate? And together??

What about mixing up the non-religious parts of Christmas [like presents, decorations, cards, food] with the story of Christ's birth? How does that work?

Sometimes we might react against mixing things together like that – but the story of Jesus' birth is full of messy and mixed up things. There is an animal's trough instead of a cradle – there are terrifying visions of angels – there are strange [and smelly!] visitors.

It would seem that the holy and the secular are mixed up and inseparable at Christmas. It is important that we don't try to sanitise the story by separating the religious and non-religious. After all, the story of Jesus – and being a follower of Jesus – is not a separate part of our lives. It is the context for the whole of our lives. The story of Christmas is 'God with us' – warts and all!

Let us, then, bring the story of Jesus and the non-religious festivities together both at home and in the community. Share in the joys of presents, television, chocolate [with or without the sprouts!] – but still find a way to remember – and to be a witness to – 'God with us' this Christmas – and next, when hopefully we shall be back to a new normal and the festivities might be ramped up.

Prayer Let us pray for light in dark places:

We pray for those who are in danger today: for those who live in war zones, and those who are refugees; for those who work in the emergency services; and for our armed services.

We pray for those who are vulnerable today; for those who are imprisoned for their faith; for the very young and the very old.

We pray for those who are in need today: for those who are ill and those who are in pain; for the bereaved and those who are mourning - and we pray for those who dread the coming of morning.

We pray for our community today; we pray for those who are lonely or tired or who have lost hope this year.

We pray for ourselves and those whom we love: for anything that might trouble us; for the things we long for; for any hidden fears.

We pray for light in all dark places, Lord. Let there be light.

We thank you, Lord God, for the light of the Christ-child in the dark places of our world; our community; our church; and our lives. Help us to shine your light and to bring your peace, your love and your hope this Christmastide and on into the future. **Amen**

A Reflection: The Golden Thread.

The baby held in his tiny fist a golden strand of brittle hay, on which the lamplight gleamed. The mother bent over the wooden trough and smiled at the new-born. The baby loosed the corn from his fist, took her finger, and gazed into her eyes.

Later, in a home the family would flee, the toddler played on the wooden floor with a golden box, enjoying the rattle of coins within, a gift from a stranger, along with incense and anointing oil, whose presence made his mother's heart run cold.

Day by day, the boy grew up, with only occasional flashes of golden light to illuminate the normality of an ordinary life. And then the carpenter's son, beside the Jordan, as golden water splashes up, reflecting sunlight, looked into the face of his cousin. They smiled and knew that everything had changed.

In the wilderness, he shared with the bees a sticky golden treasury of honey; then from the gold temple roof, the golden crust of new-baked bread, and gold crown of the world's kingdoms, he scorned temptation. The desert light brought clarity to a story threaded through history and prophecy, leading to a road which only led to pain.

From fast to feast, the lamplight of the Upper Room shone to illuminate another loaf of bread and cup of golden wine, shared by friends and betrayer who held in his pocket a fistful of coins. But, none the less, a golden moment, in which eternity must hold a new creation in taut harmony with earthly time and space. The golden cockerel crowed a third time, and by the light of a brazier, perhaps the worst betrayal of all played out.

Another dawn will bring the cross, a day within which colour leached away to grey until the moment when son and mother met in unbearable agony.

No gold, no thread, a great unravelling.

A fracture in eternity at the moment of incarnation shines golden through the wounds of torture, cross and grave, revealed in resurrection light of day, recognised in a flowered garden. From scars, shine out the light of a new day. God is woven into the weft of history, the golden thread appearing in our past and on into our futures.

A golden hope, a bright sadness, is woven through your life.

Recognise for yourself the illuminated path, the golden strands of God that weave you into the very heartbeat of Jesus. *[Taken from Roots 2016]*

Carol: Hark! 'The herald angels sing' written by Charles Wesley [1707-1788] Singing the Faith 202

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 the virgin's womb.

Veiled in flesh the Godhead see! Hail the incarnate Deity!
Pleased as man with man to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel! *Hark*.....

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.....

Closing Prayer and Blessing:

When the song of the angels is stilled;
When the star in the sky is gone;
When the kings and the princes are home;
When the shepherds are back with their flocks –
Then the work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To make peace among people,
And to make music in the heart.
Let us go, then, into the year to come, to begin the work of Christmas
In the name of our Lord and saviour, Jesus Christ.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us
and with all whom we love this Christmas day and for evermore. **Amen**