

2021 - WORSHIP AT HOME FOR CHRISTMAS

Dear friends,

May I wish you a Happy Christmas and may the New Year – 2022 – bring you and your loved ones peace and happiness. Becky will be composing the Worship at Home for the New Year – so I wish you now all that you wish yourself and look forward to writing more of these Worships through 2022.

With every blessing, *Margaret.*

Call to worship: Loving God, you have come to us in Christ so now we come to you, to offer our worship, to read your word and to reflect on your love. help us through all we share today to hear the great story of Christmas speaking to us as though for the first time. May words that we know of old take on new meaning so that the joy given to Mary – the glad tidings told to the shepherds – the Christ-child visited by the wise men – become Good News for all. **Amen**

**The words to ‘O come all ye faithful’ – Latin 18th century, possibly by John Francis Wade [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 his cradle,
Leaving their flocks, draw nigh to graze.
We, too, will thither bend our joyful footsteps:
O come.....

4 Lo, star-led chieftains, 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.....

Prayers:

Loving God, we thank you for this day and all it speaks of to us – your promise of old to send a Messiah to your people – the fulfilment of that promise through the sending of your Son – the realisation of those long years of expectation – the glad tidings proclaimed by the angels and the wonder and the 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 have shared our humanity and that you want us to share in your everlasting life.

For all that this time means and will always mean, we praise you, Lord.

Loving God, accept our praise – receive our thanksgiving – bless our celebrations and may the wonder of the Gospel come alive in our hearts this day, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Lord Jesus Christ, we recall today how you entered your world and yet your world did not know you – how you came to your people, yet they would not receive you – how, when you were born in Bethlehem, there was no room for you in the inn. From the beginning it was the same old story – your love rejected and your grace ignored. You came to set people free offering them a new relationship with God, breaking down the barriers which keep us apart. You bore the price of our disobedience, opening up the way of true life. But we also remember that though some listened for a moment, few followed you to the end. Time and again the same old story.

We know that so often we are no better for each of us is guilty of spurning your guidance, forgetting your goodness and abandoning your way. We talk of commitment, but often our faith is weak – we speak of following you but then give up if it seems too hard. Though we claim to be a new creation, so often it is just the same old story – your love rejected and your grace ignored.

Lord, have mercy and teach us to receive you with gladness.

Lord Jesus Christ, we marvel that, despite it all – the world's hostility and our own faithlessness – still you reach out in love, never giving up, refusing to write us off.

We thank you that you're always ready to offer a fresh start, a new beginning, to anyone willing to receive it.

Come what may, it is still the same old story – you continue seeking us out however often we fail. Thank you, Lord.

Lord have mercy and teach us to receive you with gladness for it is in your name that we ask it. **Amen.**

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 2: 8-20 [William Barclay translation]:

In that district there were shepherds out in the fields, guarding their flock by night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone round them, and they were terrified. 'Don't be afraid,' the angel said to them, 'for I am bringing you good news of great joy, a joy in which all peoples will share. For today there has been born to you in David's town a saviour who is the Messiah, the Lord. This is how you will recognise him. You will find a baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.'

Suddenly there was with the angel a crowd of heaven's army, singing God's praise. 'Glory to God in the heights of heaven,' they sang, 'and on earth peace to mankind, on whom God's favour rests.'

When the angels had left them and gone back to heaven, the shepherds said to each other: 'Come! We must go to Bethlehem and see what has happened, and what the Lord has told us about!'

So they went as fast as they could, and they found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. When they saw him, they told everyone what they had been told about this child. And everyone who heard it was astonished at the shepherds' story. Mary treasured all this in her heart and wondered in her mind what it all meant.

So the shepherds went back glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, for everything was exactly as they had been told.

Thoughts: A story we all know so well. I think that one of the most important things about this is that the Good News was first told to shepherds at work in the fields – people who were looked down on by the vast majority. They were doing something most people would have avoided – out in all weathers – out at night, keeping awake to ensure that the sheep were safe – probably rather grubby and smelly, stuck out there in the fields. They would certainly have been poor – and yet it was to these shepherds that the angels came to proclaim that the Messiah had been born.

When these men told Mary and Joseph what had happened and about the angels proclaiming the Good News it was confirmation for them of what had previously been a secret which only they had known. That God had told it to these very ordinary countrymen – had entrusted them with this wonderful news – may seem strange – why pick uneducated, working people and not highly educated and powerful. God chose these ordinary folk because they believed – they didn't overthink it, or nit-pick at every little point – they believed in the Messiah coming to earth as God planned – and they rejoiced.

Meditation of the shepherd; [Nick Fawcett]

It was just an ordinary day, that's what I can't get over – nothing special about it – nothing different – just another ordinary day.

And we were just ordinary people, that's what made it even more puzzling. Not important or influential – just plain, ordinary shepherds out working in the fields. Yet we apparently were the first singled out for special favour!

We were the first to know – the first to see – the first to celebrate – the first to tell!

I'm still not sure what happened – one moment night drawing in, and the next bright as day; one moment laughing and joking together, and the next moment rooted to the spot in amazement; one moment looking forward to getting home, and the next hurrying down to Bethlehem.

There just aren't words to express what we felt, but we knew we had to respond – had to go and see for ourselves. Not that we really expected to see anything mind you, not if we were honest. Well, you don't, do you? I mean, it's not every day the Messiah arrives, is it? And we'd always imagined that when he finally did it would be in a blaze of glory, to a fanfare of trumpets – with the maximum of publicity.

Yet do you know what? When we got there it was to find everything just as we had been told – wonderfully special, yet surprisingly ordinary.

Not Jerusalem but Bethlehem – not a palace but a stable – not a prince throned in splendour but a baby lying in a manger.

We still find it hard to believe even now – to think God chose to come through that tiny vulnerable child. But as the years have passed – and we've seen not just his birth but his life - and not just his life but his death – and not just his death but the empty tomb, his graveclothes, his joyful followers – we've slowly come to realise it really was true.

The words to 'O little town of Bethlehem' written by Phillips Brooks [1835-1893] Singing the Faith 213

1 O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light;
the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

2 O morning stars, together proclaim the holy birth,
and praises sing to God the King, and peace to all the earth!
For Christ is born of Mary, and gathered all above,
while mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love.

3 How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven.
No ear may hear his coming; but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in.

4 O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;
cast out our sin and enter in; be born in us today!
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel!

Prayers: Lord Jesus Christ, born an outcast and a refugee, in weakness and frailty, as we rejoice today hear our prayers for all those who have no cause for celebration.

We pray for the hungry and the homeless – the poor and the unemployed -the oppressed and the exploited – the lonely and the downhearted.

We pray for those who are sick, and those who are dying – for the sorrowful and the bereaved. We pray for victims of violence and war. We pray for all those whose lives have been shattered by tragedy and disaster.

Lord Jesus Christ, born to set your people free, come again in our world, bringing reconciliation where there is division – and comfort where there is sorrow, hope where there is despair and confidence where there is confusion.

Come and bring light where there is darkness and love where there is hatred; faith where there is doubt, and life where there is death.

Lord Jesus Christ, come again to our world, and bring that day nearer when your kingdom will come and your will be done.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer for we ask it in your name. **Amen.**

Sovereign God, we thank you for all those who have borne witness to your coming in Christ; all who have shared their faith so that others might come to know him and experience his love for themselves.

We thank you for those from whom we first heard the gospel, and all those who have nurtured and encouraged us in the following years.

Help us, now, to play our part in that continuing ministry, sharing what Christ means with those around us, and making known the way he has worked in our lives.

Send us always in his name. **Amen.**

The words to 'Hark the Herald Angels sing' written by Charles Wesley [1707-1788] StF 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 a virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see! Hail, the incarnate Deity!
Pleased as man with man to dwell, Jesus, our Immanuel!
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 better birth:
Hark!

Closing Prayer and Blessing:

God of Mary and Joseph,
God of the shepherds and of the magi,
God of the baby lying in a manger,
God with us –
touch our hearts
with the living presence of Christ,
fill us with the love and joy
which he alone can bring,
and send us out to proclaim his kingdom,
glad tidings for all.
In his name we pray. **Amen**

And the blessing of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – be with us and all whom we love this Christmas and
on into eternity. **Amen.**