

Dear friends,

As you see this is a larger offering than usual as it covers three services. I shall be sending again in January 2026 but this ensures that I have a break over the actual Christmas week. There will be a normal layout for each service and I hope that you will find them of value over this time. May I wish you all a Happy Christmas and look forward to continuing our travels together in the New Year.

With love and blessing to you all, Margaret

Call to worship:

Lord, you alone know our hearts, our histories and our hopes'

You alone know our futures and our fears.

Lead us forward, so that whatever part we may play, our story may be shaped by your story, through Jesus, son of Mary, and given a name through Joseph. Amen.

This is the day the fourth Advent candle will be lit – a day to give thanks for the role Mary played in God's unfolding story and we pray:

God of all our lives, you call each of us to play a part in your story and purposes for the world.

May this flame ignite in us the courage and the humility of Mary and Joseph, so that we may shine your light into the lives of others, and draw them to the Christmas stable where hope is born and all are loved. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The words to 'The Angel Gabriel' 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!

Prayer and Lord's Prayer:

We praise you, eternal God, for the voices you give us; for the roles which you entrust to us; and for the company with which you surround us – angels, shepherds, Mary and Joseph, friends, and family, our communities, and our brothers and sisters around the world.

All creation has a share in your redeeming purposes and a place in your heart and we thank you. Amen.

Forgive us, God, when we want to be centre stage and not in the wings – when we want the leading role and not a bit part – when your voice gets drowned out by the sound of our own – when stage fright prevents us from playing our part. Forgive us and grant us humility, grace and openness to your calling – this Advent and far beyond. Amen.

Gracious God – in you no-one is insignificant, no-one goes unnoticed, no-one is turned away, no-one is forgotten, no promise you make is broken, no plan is unfulfilled.

So, with confidence, we can lay down all that burdens us and step out boldly and confidently for we are forgiven, in the name of Jesus. Amen.

We praise you, God of wisdom, for Mary and Joseph, whom you chose to star in the astonishing events of Christ's birth. When our lives are overturned by the unexpected, and you reach out to us in dreams, grant us their love and courage, that we too may be open to your prompting and witness as they were to the coming of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come and 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.

Matthew 1: 18-25 taken from A Common Worship – Year A Miscellany [copyright 2004 Kevin Mayhew Limited] and written by Katie Thompson. Compiled by Nick Fawcett

This is how the birth of Jesus took place. Mary, his mother, was engaged to a carpenter called Joseph; before they were married Mary told Joseph that she was expecting a child. Joseph, who was a good and kind man, wanted to protect Mary from gossip and scandal, so he decided to break off the engagement quietly.

Then one night, as he slept, an angel appeared to him and said: 'Joseph, descendant of David, do not be afraid to take Mary to be your wife. This child has been conceived by the Holy Spirit, and Mary will have a son and you must call him Jesus, for he has come to save his people from their sins.' When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel had said and took Mary to be his wife.

When the time came, she gave birth to a son and they called him Jesus. All this happened just as the Lord had promised through the prophet Isaiah when he foretold: 'See! A virgin will conceive and have a son, and they will call him Emmanuel' [which means 'God is with us'].

Meditation of Joseph [taken from A Most Amazing Man – Year A written by Nick Fawcett. Copyright 2010 Nick Fawcett]

I resolved to get rid of her the moment she broke the news, the thought of someone else's child growing within her filling me with rage – and setting my head buzzing with plans to put her aside. It was a shock, to be fair, for I hadn't touched the girl, let alone slept with her. But if not me, then who? The gossips would have a field day, that was for certain, spreading first one story, then another, and I didn't fancy that one bit. So I made up my mind to hush things up, break off the engagement quietly and brush the whole business under the carpet – you can't get fairer than that. As soon as I could, I'd tell her the score – gently but firmly spell things out. Only I never got the chance, for God had other ideas, not just for me but for everyone.

He was coming into our world – *my Mary* chosen to bear the promised Messiah – and, for all my doubting her, all my unworthy thoughts, I also had a part to play. The privilege of helping to nurture his Son.

I'd made up my mind, decided what I had to do, but that night I learned a vital lesson: though we might make our plans, it is *God* who directs our steps.

Prayer

We can't help it, Lord.

Time after time, day after day, we look at life from *our* point of view rather than from *yours*, judging things by human yardsticks, from the perspective of this world.

Where *you* see possibilities, *we* see problems.

When you speak, we fail to hear.

Whilst you try to lead us, we resist and rebel.

Thank you that, despite our reluctance or inability to glimpse your presence and to recognise your hand at work, you continue to work out your purpose, patiently prompting and guiding, and somehow in all things working together for good.

Teach us – lead us – take us – use us – by your grace and for your glory. Amen.

What a way to have a baby! Written by Mary Hathaway and printed in A Common Worship Year A Miscellany. Copyright 2004 Kevin Mayhew Limited. Compiled by Nick Fawcett

She travelled on a donkey, at night they both slept rough.

In the last stage of pregnancy, a journey's really tough.

No car ride to the hospital, no ante-natal care,
no hygienic labour ward – germs simply everywhere!

Nowhere to go in labour, nothing to help the pain,
not even a bed to lie on – just straw where beasts had lain.

No modern central heating, just the cold night air – no curtains at the windows, stone walls, cold and bare.

No white-coated doctors with sterile clothes to wear –
just Joseph and some animals and smelly stable air.

What a way to have a baby! Where are the cards and flowers?

Just shepherds to share their gladness in the midnight hours.

'Before she married Joseph she was in the family way.

She said an angel told her.....What a thing to say!'

But Mary had her baby before the light of dawn.

This was how it happened, how the Son of God was born.

And a short prayer by Pete Townsend – taken from A Common Worship Year A Miscellany – copyright 2004 Kevin Mayhew Limited. Compiled by Nick Fawcett

Lord, it's quite crazy thought that somewhere in the technicolour haze of my dreams, that somehow, somewhere, you might want to have a word with me!

I think I'm a bit embarrassed really.

My dreams are what you might call a visual dustbin – a montage of funny bits, dodgy bits, gruesome bits and just plain wacky bits.

I have other dreams of course. The sort where I want to do all kinds of exciting things, go to exciting places, meet loads of people [and immediately forget their names!]

There's so much I want to do – but I'd sort of want your opinion on things.

So if you don't mind, can we talk about it, think about it – and even dream about it?

'Cos I'm not so sure that I can get through this on my own.

Be with me, Lord – guide my ways and help me through whatever comes my way. Amen.

The words to 'Born in the night, Mary's child' by Geoffrey Ainger [b. 1925] Singing the Faith 193

1 Born in the night, Mary's Child,
a long way from your home,
coming in need, Mary's Child,
born in a borrowed room.

2 Clear shining light, Mary's Child,
your face lights up our way;
light of the world, Mary's Child,
dawn on our darkened day.

3 Truth of our life, Mary's Child.
you tell us God is good;
prove it is true, Mary's Child,
go to your cross of wood.

4 Hope of the world, Mary's Child,
you're coming soon to reign.
King of the earth, Mary's Child,
walk in our streets again.

Close:

May the God who knows where you come from and where you should be going, go with you.

May the God who knows your hopes and dreams, bless you – and others through you – more than you can possibly imagine.

May the God who was with Joseph and Mary in all that they faced, be known to you as Immanuel – God with you. Amen.

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CHRISTMAS DAY

Call to worship:

We come now to remember Jesus, born in Bethlehem.

Let us ask God to help us discover something fresh and exciting, in a story we know so well.

God of surprises – may we sing like the angels – may we be amazed like the shepherds – and, like the wise men, may we worship the newborn King.

How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given.

So, God imparts to human hearts the blessing of his heaven.

May the Christ candle be a sign of that blessing.

May Christmas be a time of new beginnings,

and may we each find room in our hearts today for the Christ child – and for all those in need. Amen.

The words to 'Hark! The herald angels sing' 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 hosts proclaim: 'Christ is born in Bethlehem.'

Refrain: 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 Immanuel! *Refrain.....*

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: *Refrain.....*

Prayer:

God of glory, in the beginning your love was alive – and it lives still.

In the beginning you created all things – and you love them still.

In Jesus the Word became flesh – and is with us still.

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Amen.

Lord Jesus, forgive that – in the midst of all our Christmas presents, you are the gift.

In the midst of all our partying and noise – you are the word made flesh.

In the midst of all our angst and conflicts – you are the Prince of Peace.

In the midst of all our darkness – you are the Light of the World.

In the midst of every moment of our lives – you are our Emmanuel – God with us. Amen.

Gracious God – in you no-one is insignificant – no-one goes unnoticed – no-one is turned away – no-one is forgotten – no promise you make is broken – no plan is unfulfilled.

So, with confidence, we can lay down all that burdens us and step out boldly, confidently and forgiven, in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Lord Jesus, we praise you that your birth transcends all time and unites heaven and earth, past and present. May we, in response to your care for us, reach out beyond our comforts and privileges and embrace the needs of all people. May this Christmas be a time of prayer and action for the world's poor and vulnerable, in whom your love was fully revealed at Bethlehem. Amen.

Psalm 98

Sing a new song to the Lord, because he has done amazing things! His powerful and holy right arm has brought him another victory. The Lord showed the nations his power to save. He showed them his goodness. He has kept his promise of love and loyalty to the people of Israel. People everywhere have seen our God's power to save.

Everyone on earth, shout with joy to the Lord. Start singing happy songs of praise!

Praise the Lord with harps and shout for joy to the Lord our King!

Let the sea and everything in it, the earth and all who live in it shout his praise!

Rivers, clap your hands! All together now, mountains sing out!

Sing before the Lord because he is coming to judge the world. He will judge the world fairly.

He will rule the people with goodness. *[reproduced from ERV with permission]*

Comment: this psalm celebrates a king's enthronement. The new reign will be shaped by God's steadfast love and faithfulness. It is a victory for God over hostile powers - and must be celebrated globally. God restores order to the chaos of sea and floods and comes with justice to judge. The king is expected to embody these qualities and to rule as God's Son.

The people of Israel hoped that each new king would follow God's direction. Inevitably, they never found the perfect king and, gradually, the hope shifted to an expectation that God would, one day, send anointed representative, the Messiah.

Christians believe that this has happened in Jesus Christ. In him we recognise the perfect king who is God's Son.

John 1: 1-14 [translation by Katie Thompson and found in A Common Worship Year A Miscellany [copyright 2004 Kevin Mayhew Limited] Compiled by Nick Fawcett

At the beginning of time, the Word already existed. The Word was with God; and the Word was God. From the very beginning, all things were created through him. All life came from the Word, and this life was the light for all people. The shines out from the darkness, & the darkness could never overcome it. God sent a man called John, to be a witness for the light, so that others would believe because of him, even though he was not the light. The real light was the Word who was coming into the world to give light to everyone.

He was in the world created by him, and yet the world did not know him. He came to his own people and they did not accept him. To those who did receive him he gave the right to become children of God, the offspring of God himself.

The Word became flesh, and he lived as a man amongst us. We saw his glory, given by the Father, to his only Son, who is full of grace and truth.

Comment: John's introduction to his gospel begins with a single image, the Word. In the beginning, God spoke creation into being. We are invited to focus on that Word – dynamic, creative speech; a blueprint shaping the cosmos. John weaves more images into the pattern, naming the outcome of the Word's creative activity as life. [remember Jesus' words: 'I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly'] {John 10:10}. Life comes through the Word's engagement with the world. Next John adds 'light', identifying it with 'life' so that we can better understand how life makes a difference – light opposed to darkness.

Then the meaning of light is extended – the Word is the light, and our light is dependent on the light-giving Word. Further images colour John's picture. The Word becomes flesh, entering into the created matter of the cosmos – the eternal and the temporal bound together to bring new creation. God's glory is revealed, as the chosen agent does his will, shining to overcome the darkness and bring God-centred change to the limitations of human existence. Glory is the context in which grace and truth can be revealed. The reckless generosity of God's free grace stands alongside truth, a complete alignment with the life-giving speech of the Word, which expresses the reality of the cosmos. This cosmic symphony is played out in the framework of human life, not in a remote space in heaven. Yet humans take little notice of the unfolding drama, or we reject it and refuse to engage. John the Baptist challenges us to pay attention and get involved. His role as witness shows God's chosen way of working, always through people who are called to point out the light to those who live in darkness. We are invited into a permanent relationship with the Word as children of God, able to remain in his presence and to become part of the Word's story.

Meditation of John the Evangelist [taken from 'A Most Amazing Man year A' by Nick Fawcett. Copyright 2010 Nick Fawcett]

It still puzzles me, even as I write the words – still leaves me mystified that the world did not know him, and that he was rejected, even by his own people. But I've seen with my own eyes that it's all too true. Not entirely, of course, for some received him, Jew and gentile alike – a few ready to hear, listen and respond – but they were the exception, rarities, for each individual who accepted his claims, there were hundreds who turned their backs on him, closed in heart and mind.

He offered them light and they preferred darkness – life, and they chose death.

Instead of being children of God, born not of the flesh but of Spirit, they dismissed the idea out of hand, without, apparently, so much as a second thought.

There are many reasons why, and it's not for me to judge – he made that clear enough – but it still leaves me amazed sometimes that the one we longed to see over so many years should be hounded to his death when he finally came.

Should I marvel, though? Perhaps not, for though his way brings unparalleled joy, it brings cost too – a price as well as a reward. It means give as well as take, preferring *his* will to our own – and, whoever we are, that's more difficult than we might first imagine.

We've seen his glory, that of God's only Son, full of grace and truth – but never be complacent, assuming that the job's done, everything signed and sealed, for we must go on responding day after day.

Some received him, others would not.

Some believed; many didn't.

Ask yourself carefully, prayerfully: what about you?

.....

Lord Jesus Christ, help us to make room for you in our lives – not at the margins, allowed in when it suits us, but at the heart of everything we think, say and do, so that your guidance may direct our steps – your purpose restore our hope, your mercy renew our faith, and your love fashion our being. Whatever else we allow to be squeezed out of life teach us to welcome you afresh into our hearts today and every day. Amen. **NF**

Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, you came to our world and it did not know you – you came to your people and they would not accept you – you came to the inn and there was no room for you there as there has so often been no room among so many people. Help us to make room for you this Christmas-time – to welcome you gladly at the heart of our celebrations and to receive you as our Lord and Saviour with body, soul and mind.

Lord Jesus Christ, come now and make your home within us. Amen.

NF

Loving God, you have given us and all the world good news in Christ. Help us to hear that news afresh each day, recognising it as good news for us. Help us to receive it with both our minds and our hearts, always looking to understand more of what it continues to say. And help us to share what Christ has done for us so that others in turn may celebrate what he has done for them. Amen. **NF**

The words to ‘Silent night’ written by Joseph Mohr [1792-1848] and translated by Stopford Augustus Brooke [1832-1916] Singing the Faith 217

1 Silent night, holy night:

sleeps the world; hid from sight,

Mary and Joseph in stable bare

watch o’er the child beloved and fair

sleeping in heavenly rest. x2

2 Silent night, holy night:

shepherds first saw the light,

heard resounding clear and long,

far and near, the angel-song:

‘Christ, the Redeemer is here!’ x2

3 Silent night, holy night:

Son of God, O how bright

love is smiling from your face!

Strikes for us now the hour of grace,

Jesus, Lord, at your birth. x2

Close: Christ our Saviour is born!

Eternal God breaks into human existence to transform and redeem it.

In the darkness of night, God’s majestic glory becomes a vulnerable new-born baby.

Creator of all is entirely dependent on those he has created.

Such is the measure of his infinite love. Amen.

28TH DECEMBER FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Call to worship: In the midst of the wonders of this Christmas season, we come to worship God with our joys but are mindful too of the sorrows of those who struggle at this time.

Let us worship God who, in Jesus, came to be one with us in sorrow and joy. Amen.

Lord, we praise and thank you for the joy and wonder of Christmas, and for all the blessings we enjoy at this time. As we continue to celebrate the good news of your birth, help us to be mindful of those who are in pain, difficulty or danger at this time. Please be with them as we thank you for being with us. Amen.

We may not have seen a star in the east but we have come to worship you, our God.

We may not have travelled far and wide, but we have found you, and bring the gifts of our presence and praise. Amen.

The words to ‘Unto us a boy is born’ by Percy Dearmer [1867-1936]

Singing the Faith 218

1 Unto us a boy is born!

King of all creation,

came he to a world forlorn,

the Lord of every nation. x2

2 Cradled in a stall was he

with sleepy cows and asses;

But the very beasts could see

that he all folk surpasses. x2

3 Herod then with fear was filled:

‘A prince,’ he said, ‘in Jewry!’

All the little boys he killed

at Bethlem in his fury. x2

4 Now may Mary’s son, who came

so long ago to love us,

lead us with hearts aflame

unto the joys above us x2

5 Omega and Alpha he!

Let the organ thunder,

while the choir with peals of glee

now rend the air asunder. x2

Prayer:

Lord God, you are the giver of all that is good and just and right – you give beyond measure.

You are the giver of a gift beyond the value of gold – beyond the potency of any frankincense – beyond the cleansing of any myrrh – beyond life and death.

In your sight, we are more precious than anything else.

Thanks and praise be to you. Amen.

In the light of Christmas – in the light of Christ Jesus our Lord – in the light of all this goodness and joy – we want to cast off all our failings:

our failure to stand with others in their weeping and sorrow,
our turning away from the pain of others,
our cowardice in the face of injustice and violence that affects the weakest and the poorest the most.
Forgive us, Lord, and change our hearts. Amen.

God assures us that the dark shadows of our wrongs are wiped away, our sins forgiven, our slate wiped clean.

With the gift of forgiveness, let us live in the light. Amen.

We bring our praises to our Almighty God.

Lord, we thank you that each life is special and precious in your sight.

We thank you for those who have offered us care in our times of need – comfort in times of loss – attention when we felt neglected.

Help us, as your treasured children, to pay that giving and care forwards to others.

Open our eyes to those who are suffering and grieving at this time.

Lord, we thank you for the solace of your presence and ask that we may share it with those who need it most. Amen.

Matthew 2: 13-23 – taken from Holy Bible: ERV copyright 2006 by World Bible Translation Center, Inc. and used by permission.

After the wise men had left, an angel from the Lord came to Joseph in a dream. The angel said: ‘Get up! Take the child with his mother and escape to Egypt. Herod wants to kill the child and will soon start looking for him. Stay in Egypt till I tell you to come back.’

So Joseph got ready and left for Egypt with the child and his mother. They left during the night. Joseph stayed in Egypt till Herod died. This gave full meaning to what the Lord said through the prophet: “I called my son to come out of Egypt.”

Herod saw that the wise men had fooled him, and he was very angry. So he gave the order to kill all the baby boys in Bethlehem and the whole area around Bethlehem. Herod had learned from the wise men the time when the baby was born. It was now two years from that time, so he said to kill all the boys who were two years old and younger. This gave full meaning to what God said through the prophet Jeremiah:

“A sound was heard in Ramah – bitter crying and great sadness. Rachel cries for her children, and she cannot be comforted, because her children are gone.” [Jeremiah 31:15]

While Joseph was in Egypt, Herod died. An angel from the Lord came to Joseph in a dream and said: ‘Get up! Take the child with his mother and go to Israel. Those who were trying to kill the child are now dead.’

So Joseph took the child and his mother and went to Israel. But he heard that Archelaus was now king in Judea. Archelaus became king when his father Herod died. Joseph was afraid to go there. Then after being warned in a dream, he went away to the area of Galilee. He went to a town named Nazareth and lived there. This gave full meaning to what God said through the prophets. God said the Christ would be called a Nazarene.

Meditation of a mother in Bethlehem – written by Nick Fawcett and taken from A Common Worship Miscellany copyright 2004 Kevin Mayhew Ltd - compiled by Nick Fawcett.

It was as if all hell was let loose, the most terrible day in my life, as suddenly soldiers burst in upon us – cold, cruel, clinical – wresting our little ones from us – ignoring *our* screams for mercy, *their* screams of terror, and hacking them down in cold blood before our very eyes.

There are simply no words to describe how we felt – the fear, the horror, the emptiness, the rage, and, above all, the helplessness – unable to do anything but watch grief-stricken as our world fell to pieces. One moment life was full of promise – the next, utterly bereft.

One moment we were laughing with our children, and the next sobbing our hearts out as we laid them to rest.

Why did it have to happen? What could have possessed even Herod to do such a thing?

And, most of all, how could God ever have allowed it? I'll never understand that, as long as I live – never! It's thrown a cloud over everything, even faith itself, for I can't help thinking of an event not so very different – the moment of our nation's deliverance, centuries back, from Egypt, when, after the death of their first-born, Pharaoh at last let our people go.

A glorious chapter in our history, so they tell us, and maybe it was, but I can't help thinking of all *those* mothers, and the agony *they* must have gone through, while we skipped away to freedom.

We were spared then, of course – the blood of a lamb setting us apart – but not *this* time – this time we were left to face the full force of unbridled evil, hatred incarnate, humanity at its most vile – and all, apparently, because Herod had heard some rumour that the Messiah had been born somewhere here in Bethlehem.

How much longer must it go on?

How much more suffering must there be, before God decides to do something about it?

I'm sorry, but it seems to me if he really loved this world as he says he does, then it's about time he provided another lamb – another sacrifice – just like he provided before. Only this time one to save not a few of us – those specially chosen, set apart – but everyone.

Comment: this is a very hard story to hear. On one level God protects and saves his Son by Joseph's attention to a dream. But we are also made deeply aware of the precious lives cut short by Herod's jealousy and paranoia, and the grief this brings on their families. Many of us who have lost children, and see children dying prematurely across the world, want to weep with Rachel and refuse comfort. There is no record of this slaying of the children anywhere other than in the Gospels, but it is not out of character for Herod, called the Great, who was not beyond killing a wife and a child if they threatened his power and the fragile arrangement he had created with the Roman Empire. Is the slaughter of the innocents by the powerful a thing too commonplace or too dangerous to record?

Prayer

A Time for Change:

Lord of all, we have heard this once more Christmas season the good news of the coming of Jesus Christ, the glad tidings of his coming – we have heard also of the cruelty of Herod and the sadness of the mothers in Bethlehem. We pray now for people for whom this time of year brings no joy, serving only to remind them of their pain.

Lord, come again to your world, and turn tears into laughter, sorrow into gladness.

We pray for the poor, the hungry, the homeless – those for whom this time brings yet another day in the struggle for survival – for those caught up in war, violence and persecution – those for whom this

Christmas might be their last. We pray for all who are unloved, lonely, homeless – indeed, we pray for all for whom this time of year simply heightens their sense of isolation.

We pray for those who are anxious, troubled or fearful – those who feel swamped by their worries. We hold before you, Lord, all who are sick and suffering – those who are broken in body and mind – all for whom this season means only pain.

We pray for all who are bereaved and aching with their loss. We think of those who are divorced or estranged. Indeed, we pray for all for whom this time of year brings home the memory of past happiness and present pain.

Lord of all, you give us a vision through the song of Mary of the way the world ought to be and one day shall be – a world in which you show the strength of your arm and scatter the proud – in which you bring down the powerful and lift up the lowly – where you fill the hungry with good things and send those who kept their riches to themselves away empty – a world of justice, in which good will triumph, evil be ended and the meek inherit the earth.

Give us confidence that day can come – and give us the resolve to make it happen. Stir the hearts of your people everywhere to work in whatever way possible for change – to bring the dawn of your kingdom closer & so translate the vision into reality, for in the name of Christ we ask it. Amen.

Close:

When the Song of the Angels is Stilled – Howard Thurman

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 the 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, to begin the work of Christmas in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

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Be with you again in 2026 – and may 2026 treat you kindly. *Margaret*