

Worshipping Together : Apart
Sunday 12th December 2021 at 10.30am
Church; Physically Distanced but Spiritually United
Worship Prepared by Rev. Janine Atkinson

A Call to Worship God

Waiting for the light of Christ: I am here
away from the wandering from store to store
away from the crowds
away from the 'stuff' that needs to be done before Christmas day,
I am here in worship...

Lead me as I come with you, help me to find my way to Bethlehem,
to the manger; to your light; and your way; and your truth.

Hymn - R&S 138: MP 102:

Come, thou long-expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us;
let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear Desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver;
born a child, and yet a King;
born to reign in us for ever;
now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal Spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all-sufficient merit
raise us to thy glorious throne.

Charles Wesley (1707-88)

Approaching God in Prayer

Living God

you are the reason for our celebration this season
so come and meet us in the rituals and preparations
for the feast of Jesus' birth.

We remember here and now that you are God with us.
You came from infinity to make your home here.

In flesh and blood, you came and made yourself known to us
In a time of census, a time of lists and household and family ties
a time of both happy, and fractious reunions and relationships
you entered our world.

In the confusion of travel chaos, long, wearying journeys and an
overcrowded town
in a place where there was no room for you,
you broke into the hullabaloo.

With a life-giving gasp of air and a baby's cry you found your voice.

In an animal's feeding trough, a manger, you lay.

Lord we are sorry for the times we have crowded you out,
for the times we've planned our lives and excluded you.

For the times when our lists have omitted you.

For the times when our busy-ness
has left no room for you in our homes.

For the times we've gasped for air
in the suffocation of the pressures of life
and failed to notice your Holy Spirit, breathing life and health.

When we've failed to hear the cry of a new-born struggling to survive
or the cries of suffering, because 'their' plight doesn't affect us.

Whenever we've forgotten to find you space in our lives,
where you can be born afresh, and lay your head - Lord, forgive us.

Be born in us *this* Christmas-time.

Help us to receive the familiar story of your birth in fresh, new ways.

Equip us to share the joy of the good news,

that you came to be with us and for us

the good news that you can break through the trimmings of Christmas

and the hullabaloo of life today

We give you thanks that, even when we forget to make room for you,

you have made room for all of us

and a myriad more besides to be embraced by the strengthening and

tender arms of your loving presence.

You are God with us; God for us; God in us

Father, Son and Holy Spirit Amen

Hymn - R&S 139: STF 187: Basque Carol para. S. Baring-Gould (1834-1924)

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!*

'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!*

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!*

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!*

Gospel Reading - Luke 1: 26a - 38

^{26a} the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David.

The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.'

²⁹ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

³⁰ The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. ³¹ And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.'

³⁴ Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?'

³⁵ The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.'

³⁶ And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren.

³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God.'

³⁸ Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.

Reflection

As a child I remember playing 'Christmas' games with my family: Scavenger Hunt; Ring on a String; Hunt the Key; the Memory Game and Charades – amongst others, particularly food!

It struck me that all these games help us think about Christmas. Here's why!

To play Scavenger Hunt you must be prepared. If yours is a team with a handbag filled with all manner of random things, and you're observant and responsive, your team is more likely to win. Advent is about being prepared - prepared to meet Jesus when he comes, being vigilant, observant and responsive to Jesus, all attitudes associated with Advent and Christmas.

Again, Ring on a String involves being observant – the one in the middle tries to work out who's got the ring? It also involves passing something valuable on (depending on the quality of the ring!) much like the Good News of Christmas we are to pass on to the world.

Hunt the Key involves hiding something that unlocks things. Best to hide things somewhere no one will think to look. Who'd have thought to look for a King in a manger in a stable – the Wise Men didn't. The Christmas message unlocks something precious to be found and shared.

Playing the Memory Game involves seeing things on a tea tray for a short time, then relying on memory to recall them and write them down. Jesus was in the world for a short time and, so that the world will know, we have to recall his words and actions to a world in need of knowing God's love.

Charades is about communicating with actions. God communicated his great love for us by action; coming in person in Jesus to demonstrate how God intends us to live. In doing so, Jesus demonstrated the extent of God's great love.

It's easy to hide the meaning of Christmas in food, presents, fun and games.

But, maybe there *is* a Christmas message in the games we play.

So, Lord, help us to be prepared, vigilant, willing to unlock the message and pass on your Good News - your love demonstrated in Jesus Christ.
Amen

Think about the story of Jesus' birth.... What would you like to pass on about it to someone else?



Prayer

The Light of the World came to live among us.

It's time to find peace.

It's time to give up our darkness.

It's time to follow the light.

The Light of the World has come to us.

We are the people who are called to serve you.

We are your people – lead us to you, Jesus.

We are the people who look for your light in this world.

We are the people called to take your light to others.

We are the people who should celebrate you, not the world

We are your people – lead us to you, Jesus.

You are the true light, which enlightens everyone...

So, come Lord Jesus

You are the light that shines in the darkness

And the darkness will not overcome it.

Lord Jesus Christ, shine in your church today Amen

Hymn - STF 706

Longing for light, we wait in darkness
Longing for truth, we turn to You.
Make us Your own, Your holy people
Light for the world to see.

*Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in Your church gathered today.*

Longing for peace, our world is troubled
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has pow'r to save us.
Make us your living voice.

Christ, be our light!....

Longing for food, many are hungry
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us Your bread, broken for others
Shared until all are fed.

Christ, be our light!....

Longing for shelter, many are homeless
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us Your building, sheltering others
Walls made of living stone.

Christ, be our light!...

Many the gift, many the people
Many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another
Making Your kingdom come.

Christ, be our light!....

Bernadette Farrell (b. 1957)

Holding the World in Prayer

We are waiting Lord Jesus:
Come and live with us soon.

We are waiting because we know who you are:
The creator of the world,
God who took on human form,
the son of Mary - a girl just like any other girl.
We are waiting Lord Jesus;
Come and live with us soon.

We are waiting because we have faith in you.
We know that we can trust you.
We remember that you are good to us,
and we thank you for all the good things that you give us every day.
We are waiting Lord Jesus;
Come and live with us soon.

Lord Jesus we are waiting here and now
waiting for you to come into our houses; our streets; our shops; our
offices and schools.
Fill them with your light and your peace.
We are waiting Lord Jesus;
Come and live with us soon.

We are waiting for you to come and change things the world over:
To use us to bring health to our sick ones,
to comfort those who have lost loved ones
and to change us - turn us around
so that we can be active for you -
your hands and feet; your ears and eyes,
in this world that needs you so very much.
We are waiting Lord Jesus;
Come and live with us soon.

I am waiting for you to come to me and the people I love and care for
as I remember them now in quiet trust.....

I am waiting Lord Jesus;
Come and live with me now.
Amen

And I say the prayer Jesus taught us
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.

Hymn: R&S 373: MP 435:

Patrick Appleford.

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Lord Jesus Christ, You have come to us,
You are one with us, Mary's son.
Cleansing our souls from all their sin,
pouring Your love and goodness in;
Jesus, our love for You we sing,
Living Lord.

Lord Jesus Christ, You have come to us,
born as one of us, Mary's son.
Led out to die on Calvary, risen from death to set us free,
living Lord Jesus, help us see
You are Lord.

Lord Jesus Christ, we would come to You,
live our lives for You, Son of God.
All Your commands we know are true,
Your many gifts will make us new,
into our lives Your power breaks through,
Living Lord.

Don't wait for an Angel

Don't wait for an angel, don't look for a star,
To tell you the message or guide you from far.
These are part of the background for art-lovers' eyes,
To help them to measure the portrait for size.
He's only a baby to grow to a man:
To call you to finish the work he began.

It isn't to Bethlehem shepherds must go,
But to look for the missing lamb under the snow.
It isn't on camels that real kings ride,
But on asses and crosses with robbers beside.
He's only a baby to grow to a man:
To call you to finish the work he began.

Now all you good people from bench and from sink,
Come turn up the volume and hear yourselves think:
Who else on his birthday's put back in a cot?
Do you reckon Act One is as good as the lot?
He's only a baby to grow to a man:
To call you to finish the work he began.

Caryl Micklem from the book A Word in Season Edited by Donald Hilton.(p.20)

Hymn - R&S 740: MP 631:

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.

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.

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.

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 forever more!

Timothy Dudley-Smith. (1926-) based on Luke 1:46-55

Closing Words and Blessing

Do not be mistaken
the story of Christ's birth will continue to break through the wrappings
and trimmings of Christmas
for as long as we tell the story
of God, who is *not* remote in heaven
but come down to earth to share human life in all its complexity.

The child we find in the manger *is* God and Lord of all.

So we must pass on through sticky sweet fingers
chocolatey mouths and chatter over shared times
the story of God's love and sweetness in the living of our lives

We must answer God's call, to finish the work he began
take Christ out of his cot and let the world know
about the baby who grew to a man
to show us the way that God loves.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the
fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore Amen

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