**Worshipping Together : Apart**

**Worship for Christmas Day 2021 at 10am**

**Church; Physically Distanced but Spiritually United**

Worship Prepared by Rev. Janine Atkinson

**A Call to Worship God**

It’s Christmas Day!

Together, or apart, it’s time to celebrate!

Celebrate the angels and stars,

shepherds and travellers, new parents and a new born child.

A love story full of danger, promise and intrigue

laying bare the beauty and compassion of an amazing God - our God!

**Hymn – R&S 160: MP 491** *Latin 18th cent, possibly John F. Wade (c1711-86)*

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!*

God of God, Light of light,

lo, He abhors not the virgin’s womb;

very God, begotten, not created:

See how the shepherds, summoned to his cradle,

leaving their flocks, draw nigh to gaze;

we to will thither bend our joyful footsteps:

Lo, star-led chieftains, magi, Christ adoring,

offer him incense, gold and myrrh;

we to the Christ-child bring our hearts oblation.

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,

sing, all ye citizens of heaven above;

‘Glory to God in the highest’:

Yea, Lord, we greet Thee, born this happy morning,

Jesus, to Thee be glory given;

Word of the Father now in flesh appearing:

**Prayer**

Wake up baby God, we want to gaze into your eyes,

those eyes full of light and love and life and glory.

Let us see your baby hands – feel your tiny grip around a finger.

Your grip - a grip that can hold us and the whole world you made.

Wake up baby God, even now you speak volumes to us

in a gasp of life-giving air and the cry of new life.

Let us hold you and feel your weight, both fragile and immense.

Lord God, let us take stock of all that you are in this brand-new body, the one you chose to come and be with us.

Thank you, Lord for letting us *see* you, read *about* you and *examine* you dealing with human life and struggle.

Thank you for the pattern you showed us for our lives

if we will only wake up and open our eyes to see

your light and love and life and glory

Forgive us when we have slept, baby like,

oblivious to the world around us.

Awaken us to all that you see, even in your infancy,

from the borrowed manger where you were laid.

Baby God - God with us as we cry to you,

welcome you and marvel at you.

Help us to welcome you, not only as a child

but to embrace all the grace and glory that your human frame illustrated for us in life, death and resurrection.

God with us,

today you stand at our stable door, bearing the unwrapped

open gift of unrelenting love and you invite us to take it,

to relish it and to be joyful with it.

Waken us up Baby God, again, and again, and again. Amen

**Hymn – R&S 145: MP 503:** *Phillips Brooks (1835-93)*

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.

O morning stars, together proclaim the holy birth,

and praises sing to God the King, goodwill and peace on earth.

For Christ is born of Mary; and gathered all above,

while mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love.

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.

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.

**Light!**

How much difference does it make when you have light to see by?

I have bruises on my legs from bumping into things when I need to get up in the middle of the night, because I can’t see well enough to avoid the obstacles! If I could switch the light on, I’d be less bruised!

Today we celebrate Jesus coming as light for the world, someone to shine a light, to illuminate the way for us to live to stop us from fumbling around in the dark, to show us clearly the way to know God, to throw a spotlight onto God for us and to show us God’s true nature.

Jesus’ light is also a light that will help us to see our own gifts for the building up of God’s kingdom.

And Jesus’ light illuminates our behaviour - and that can be an embarrassment for us!

But here is good news, great news in fact, at the same time as illuminating our poor behaviour, Jesus also lights the way to a right relationship with God, who rewards us with undeserved love – that’s God’s grace!

When we turn our attention to Jesus, we find that through Him we can meet God, who greets us with a twinkle of candle light in his eye and a smile of recognition on his face.

Now, the Gospel writer John had a way with words and he decided not to talk about Jesus’ birth in the same way as the other Gospel writers did. He says nothing about Mary or Joseph or shepherds or kings, instead he summarised what people had come to understand about Jesus, that he was and remains the light of and the light for the world.

‘Listen’ for God’s word of light and life in John’s Gospel.

**Gospel Reading – John 1: 1 – 14 The Word Became Flesh**

**1**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2**He was in the beginning with God. **3**All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being **4**in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. **5**The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

**6**There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. **7**He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. **8**He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. **9**The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

**10**He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. **11**He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. **12**But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, **13**who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

**14**And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.

**A Prayer of Thanks!**

Lord Jesus, we thank you

that when the world was very dark you came

to bring light into our darkness.

Lord Jesus you come to us now - into our lives and into the world

still bringing light to people.

Lord Jesus, as we look into the manger

help us to see there the light that shines for us

not just today but every day Amen

**Hymn – R&S 163: MP 35:**  *James Montgomery (1771-1854)\**

Angels from the realms of glory, wing your flight o’er all the earth;

ye who sang creation's story, now proclaim Messiah’s birth:

*Gloria in excelsis Deo!*



*Gloria in excelsis Deo!*

Shepherds, in the field abiding,

watching o’er your flocks by night:

God with you is now residing, yonder shines the Infant Light:

*Gloria in excelsis Deo!...*

Sages, leave your contemplations, brighter visions beam afar;

seek the great Desire of Nations;

ye have seen his natal star:

*Gloria in excelsis Deo!...*

Saints, before the altar bending, watching long in hope and fear,

suddenly the Lord, descending, in his temple shall appear:

*Gloria in excelsis Deo!...*

**Holding God’s Precious World in Prayer**

Lord we come to you in prayer,

listen for the murmurings of our hearts as we remember,

in a quiet moment, all those people who you have given to us to care for, those near and those far away

We remember those amongst our Church Family…..

and our own families and friends…..

people who are a real gift to us, people who are struggling just now.

Wrap them as the precious gifts they are, in your love. as we wrap them with our love

We pray that they will know you to be with them, upholding them and touching their lives, because you have come, you are God *with* us:

Lord God, you brave our rejection and hurt and nonetheless you hold us in acceptance and love.

You have come, you are God *for* us:

The one who whispers in our ears that we - each and every one of us - are precious and beloved children.

You have come, you are God *under* us:

The one who cradles us in arms that never grow weary;

whose lap has room enough for all.

You have come, you are God *over* us:

The one who watches in the long silence of the night,

so that we might rest in peace.

You have come, you are God *beside* us:

The one who steadies us when we falter, who lifts us up when we fall.

You have come, you are God *behind* us:

The one who picks up all the faded dreams we drop along the way and patchworks them into hope.

In Jesus, you Lord, God kissed the earth and us with the image and the brightness of eternal love.

You have come, God Immanuel - God *with* us! God *within* us!

And we will rejoice for ever! Amen

Pray the prayer that unites you with people all over the world today, celebrating the light that Jesus Christ brought into the world.

***Our Father, who art in heaven…***

**Hymn – R&S 151: MP 589:** *Michael Perry. (1942-)*

See him lying on a bed of straw,



draughty stable with an open door;

Mary cradling the babe she bore;

the Prince of Glory is his name.

*O now carry me to Bethlehem,*

*to see the Lord of love again,*

*just as poor as was the stable then,*

*the Prince of Glory when he came.*

Star of silver, sweep across the skies,

show where Jesus in the manger lies;

shepherds, swiftly from your stupor rise

to see the Saviour of the world.

*O now carry me to Bethlehem…*

Angels, sing again the song you sang,

God’s great glory and redeeming plan;

sing that Bethlem’s little baby can

be the Saviour of us all.

*O now carry me to Bethlehem…*

Mine are riches, from your poverty,

from your innocence, eternity;

mine, forgiveness by your death for me,

Child of sorrow for my joy.

*O now carry me to Bethlehem…*

**Hymn – R&S 166: MP 83:** *Valerie Collison (1933- ) © 1972*

*Come and join the celebration, it’s a very special day;*  
*come and share our jubilation, there’s a new King born today!*

See the shepherds hurry down to Bethlehem,  
gaze in wonder at the Son of God who lay before them:

*Come and join the celebration…*

Wise men journey, led to worship by a star,  
kneel in homage, bringing precious gifts from lands afar; So:

*Come and join the celebration…*

‘God is with us’: round the world the message bring,  
he is with us; ‘Welcome’ all the bells on earth are pealing:

*Come and join the celebration…*

**Closing Words and Blessing**

Remember that in Jesus God has blessed us with the loveand thelight that brought alllife into being.

You are God with us – God Immanuel

Stay with us Lord, always and everywhere,

as we take the good news and joy of your coming among us

onwards and outwards.

And may the smile of God warm us, may the light of Jesus lead us

and may the Holy Spirit blaze in our lives and fill us with love,

not only today, not only this Christmas-time,

but throughout our lives Amen

I wish you a blessed Christmas, filled with the Peace, Hope, Joy and Love of God, through Jesus – God, in human flesh, with us and for us!

Rev. Janine

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