

twelvebaskets



CHRISTMAS DAY A

A complete Sunday service ready to use
for worship and inspire ideas in your church

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Christmas Day - Year A
25th December 2022



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

193 STF – Born in the night, Mary's child OR

213 STF – O little town of Bethlehem

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

216 STF – See him lying on a bed of straw OR

330 STF – Joy to the world, the Lord is come!

Readings: Isaiah 9:2-7; Luke 2:1-14

Hymn:

190 STF – Angels, from the realms of glory OR

206 STF – It was on a starry night

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

210 STF – Love came down at Christmas OR

204 STF – In the bleak midwinter

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

202 STF – Hark! The herald-angels sing OR

199 STF – Glory be to God on high

Blessing

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Call to worship

He has been! He is here! God is with us, Immanuel!

Let us join together in worship on this Christmas Day – this day on which we celebrate God incarnate, God with us, the Christmas miracle. Amen.¹

Hymn:

193 STF – Born in the night, Mary's child OR

213 STF – O little town of Bethlehem

Opening Prayers

Dear Lord,

Thank you for the opportunity to join and celebrate on this most special of days, the day the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us. Remind us once again this morning of the magnitude of what happened that first Christmas, for each and every one of us. May we never lose the wonder, the wonder of the manger.

As we itch to celebrate the festivities elsewhere after this service, help us to focus our hearts on you this morning. Let us take a moment to be still, and to thank God for reaching out to us in Jesus.

Father, despite your endless desire to meet with us, we have not always responded in reaching out to you. We have not acted as though the Christmas story is true. We have not been the light shining in the darkness.

Even on this most joyous of days we still come to you, acknowledging that on our own we fall short.

Today we acknowledge that without the incarnation we would be left in sin, with only ourselves to rely on to build a better world. But as the hymn reminds us: Long lay the world in sin and error pining, till you appeared and the soul felt its worth.

May our souls feel that worth this morning. Accepted, forgiven, and loved.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

The Christmas story in Luke starts with an image of a very busy, bustling town as people came great distances to be registered in the census. In contrast, in the fields outside the city as night fell, we picture the shepherds watching out for their sheep, maybe gathered round a fire, sharing stories, taking it in turns to doze while others, ready to protect their flocks, kept an eye out for wild animals.

The quiet and darkness of the night is punctuated by a bright light, and a single angel voice announcing the birth of the Messiah – a baby in a manger, accompanied by the

¹ Call to Worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by All We Can

reassurance for the terrified shepherds not to fear. Then as if this were not startling enough, a multitude (I am not sure how many a multitude is – but probably too many to count) join the first angel in songs of praise which have been captured in nativity sets, and nativity plays.

The angel's message of God coming as a human baby surrounded by voices of praise is one which can be found in many of our Christmas carols. Once I attended a panto which finished with the audience singing Hark the Herald. I think its hymn writer Charles Wesley would have been delighted to have found his words in such a setting.

The calypso carol (Singing the Faith 216) written for an end of term student concert in London in 1964, invites the angels to sing again the song they sang that first Christmas. It reminds us that the poverty and vulnerability of God in a baby is what gives our life meaning and purpose.

The carol begins with the words

'See him lying on a bed of straw, a draughty stable with an open door'.

The door was open, open to the elements, and open to the world. This is a God who doesn't come locked up or wrapped up, hard to get into, this God comes as a free gift offered again and again.

The door was open so that all could see him, the guests at the inn, the shepherds compelled to leave their sheep, the Kings on their epic journey. All to arrive at an open door.

In a world which would have us build ever higher borders and walls, the gift we are offered is that of a God who holds the door open. This Christmas may our hearts be open to the angels' song and to the invitation to follow Jesus, the light of the world.

Amen.³

Hymn:

216 STF – See him lying on a bed of straw OR

330 STF – Joy to the world, the Lord is come!

Readings: Isaiah 9:2-7; Luke 2:1-14

Hymn:

190 STF – Angels, from the realms of glory OR

206 STF – It was on a starry night

³ All Age Talk written by Christine Dutton

Reflections on the readings

'The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined.'

'For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests on his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace'.

In 1971 as part of the Apollo 15 mission a man called Jim Irwin walked on the moon. As he did so, looking from space towards earth he experienced what he later described as the power of God as he never had before. He spent the rest of his life, sharing the Good News of the gospel, declaring that Jesus walking on the earth was more important than man walking on the moon. None of us can travel back in time to the 1st Century BC, I don't imagine many of us will walk on the moon in our lifetimes, but we can engage our imaginations as we embrace the mystery and reality of Christmas – the good news that from Jesus' first cry onwards humanity has been able to know 'God with us' – the son of God who has the power to change our lives and the life of the world.

In the nativity story in Luke's gospel held together is both the most ordinary and the most extraordinary. This story holds the simplicity of the stable and the wonder of a sky filled with light of heaven's angels. It brings together individuals whose lives are entwined in an event, none of them could have believed possible. When the innkeeper and shepherds started their shifts that morning – who would have thought that by the end of the day their role and place in history would be recorded and retold over 2000 years later?

The story holds the mess, dirt, pain, fear and discomfort alongside transforming love and new life. It challenges power and authority with vulnerability and weakness.

As we read that the night skies are filled with the angel's brightness in Luke's account of Jesus birth – their song heralding the longed for Messiah, we hear echoes of Isaiah's prophecy of the promise of hope of a different future into the struggle and oppression that God's people are living through. Isaiah's expression of their hopes and longing for a reign of peace, justice, authority informed by compassion and justice seem to be a cry that we recognise from our daily reading of the news.

Into a world which is still witnessing humanity's capacity for war and destruction, greed and the oppression of the vulnerable and marginalised – we pause to remember Christ's coming amongst us again.

This is a God who chooses to come as one of us to all of us into a world characterised by uncertainty and instability, into a world where the powerful are challenged, into a world which seems to prize individual gain, we are called to prioritise compassion and care for one's neighbour. Into the darkness the light breaks through.

In every generation since the birth of Jesus God has called people to bear witness to the light of Christ. Bearing witness to the light means passing the message on, telling the good news, sharing our joy – and this calling is for each of us.

We might think that we only know a few people who we can really talk to about our faith - in school, in our work or with our families and friends. This may be our first Christmas or our 100th Christmas. In the incarnation we are given a story to tell - a narrative with twists and turns, death and life, joys and struggles. This is a real life story which speaks to real people – to all of us searching for meaning and hope in a world that is complex and broken. Sharing the love of Jesus is counter-cultural - speaking out and working for justice and peace is prophetic, it takes guts, courage and

stamina. But we do not do it in our own strength – we do it in the strength and power of God working within us and with us, through the amazing grace of God. When we embrace Christ and his peace and love it will shine through our lives, even when we can't imagine it possible.

As we pause to hear the story of the birth of Jesus this Christmas Day, as we meditate and reflect upon what it means to receive the Prince of Peace into our hearts, homes and encounters may we be inspired as the shepherds were to praise God for this gift, the gift of risking all to be amongst us, giving his life for us, that raised to life and in the power of the Holy Spirit – 'God with us' may transform our world.⁴

Hymn:

210 STF – Love came down at Christmas OR

204 STF – In the bleak midwinter

Prayers of intercession

Lord Jesus,

Inspire in us the hope of Christmas. Hope that the darkness does not win, hope that we are not alone, hope that you are close to the weak and the broken-hearted.

May we cultivate that hope in ourselves, and share it with others, so that more may know of what you have done for them.

Thank you that you came to this world in weakness, and in doing so shamed those who would inflict their will through power and exploitation. Send your Holy Spirit to help us build communities that are strong precisely in their weakness. Send your Holy Spirit to convict those who ignore the poor and the vulnerable.

We pray for those for whom Christmas day is a hard one – for those who have recently lost loved ones, for those working, for those struggling to put food on the table. May the peace of the Christ child be known in their hearts this, and every day.

While our Christmases can be characterised by expense and excess, we pray for those places in the world for which poverty is the norm. In our celebrations may we not forget them, and may we commit to serving them in all the ways we can.

We offer these, and any other prayers, to you our Lord and saviour,

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

Christmas God,

Immanuel God,

Thank you that, at Christmas, you come amongst us,

Over and over again,

And we offer you these gifts here again today,

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

⁴ Reflection written by Christine Dutton

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by All We Can

Hymn:

202 STF – Hark! The herald-angels sing OR

199 STF – Glory be to God on high

Blessing

Go from here, celebrating the incarnate God, who is here amongst us.

Go from here, to your friends and family, to the people you will spend time with,

Go and celebrate the incarnate God, Jesus Christ.

Go and have a very happy Christmas!

Amen.⁶

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker