twelvebaskets



ADVENT 4B

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

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Fourth Sunday in Advent - Year B
20th December 2026

Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

186 STF – Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord! OR

165 STF – Advent candles tell their story

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

206 STF – It was on a starry night OR

173 STF – Into the darkness of this world

Readings: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Luke 1:46b-55; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

Hymn:

591 STF – Let all mortal flesh keep silence OR

455 STF – All my hope on God is founded

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

221 STF – While shepherds watched their flocks by night OR

178 STF – Long ago, prophets knew Christ would come

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

185 STF – Sing we the King who is coming to reign OR

546 STF – Behold the servant of the Lord!

Blessing

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Call to worship

Tell out my soul, the greatness of the Lord.
Tell out our hearts, the compassion of the Christ.
Tell out our mouths, the peace of the Spirit.
And may we prepare a room for your incarnation in our hearts, this Christmas, we pray,

Amen.[1]

Hymn:
186 STF – Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord! OR
165 STF – Advent candles tell their story

Opening Prayers

Light of the world,
Who appears through star, through angel and as baby in the familiar Christmas story,
Show us again today the way we should go, the message we need to hear, the encounter we need to have.
Show me, show us, show the world,
Immanuel.

Light of the world,
In the darkness of our own lives, shine your light.
Forgive us, love us, set us free, we pray.

Light of the world,
Come amongst us, as we worship you,
Knowing ourselves to be a part of your kingdom of light.

And in this week of fairy lights, candles and winter wonderlands,
Bring your eternal, ethereal, unwavering light,
That we might see peace on earth,
A world in which all the oppressed are set free,
And good news reaches those who need it most,
In Jesus' name, Immanuel,

Amen.[2]

We say together the Lord's Prayer

[1] Call to worship written by Tim Baker

[2] Opening prayers written by Tim Baker

All Age Talk

Have you ever been asked to do something that felt impossible? I have never been a whizz at maths and always found complex problems or equations really difficult to solve! *(you can insert your own challenge here instead!)*

What has been the one thing that you've felt you'd never be able to master? Have a conversation with the person beside you now in the next few moments.

Take some responses from the congregation as they share impossible experiences. Reflect a little on why these things may have felt or seemed impossible.

In the story of that first Christmas, Mary feels at first that God has tasked her with something impossible. That she doesn't have the skills or experience to do what's being asked of her. When the angel Gabriel comes to tell her that she will give birth to a very special baby she's afraid and wonders how on earth this is going to happen.

But the angel reassures her by saying how God will be with her in all kinds of different ways: by God's spirit being upon her, bringing power and her baby will be called the 'Son of God'. The angels final words are the most important of all: "For nothing will be impossible with God".

Spend a few moments having a conversation with the person next to you about something that feels impossible right now. How can God make it possible?

Give people time to speak with one another and see if one or two wish to share something afterwards. Be sensitive to those who may well be facing impossible situations in terms of health, finance or other issues in their lives.

The story of Christmas is a tale of making the impossible possible, God came to be with us, his Son came to save us and promised to be with us always. Would we take heart in these words especially when life feels hard, knowing that Emmanuel – God with us, gives us reason to celebrate Jesus' birth on Christmas Day.

Amen.[3]

Hymn:
206 STF – It was on a starry night OR
173 STF – Into the darkness of this world

Readings: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Luke 1:46b-55; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

Hymn:
591 STF – Let all mortal flesh keep silence OR
455 STF – All my hope on God is founded

[3] All Age Talk written by Gail Adcock

Reflections on the readings

When you hear the word *home,* what comes to mind? Perhaps you picture a childhood home, or your birthplace. Perhaps home is where you are now; the home you have built with your partner and children, the place you share with flatmates, or the cosy cocoon you have cultivated for yourself. Perhaps your mind goes immediately to a home country, city, town or village. The truth is that many of us will have countless different answers to this question. It could be that home does not spark associations of a place, but a person. Edward Sharpe and the Magnetic Zeros sing it best: *"Home is wherever I'm with you".* In this spirit, for some of us, home is a much less permanent concept. *"Wherever I lay my hat, that's my home,"* sings Paul Young. We are invited by friends to make ourselves at home when we visit them. Perhaps, to feel *at home*, is to feel safe, loved and at rest, wherever we find ourselves in a geographical sense.

I have friends who, if you ask them where they are from, will answer, "How long have you got?!" accompanied by a wry smile. For those who have lived in more than one country, or who have parents, grandparents and children with different nationalities, the question of what one would consider home becomes infinitely more complicated. It's a common thing for people who have emigrated from their country of birth to feel an affinity - a sense of home - in both places. It is sadly no less common for people living in those circumstances to face a struggle to belong - in a strange way, neither country truly feels like home. They might feel a sense of distance from the culture they grew up around, whilst not quite feeling integrated enough into their adopted nationality.

In our text from Samuel, David seems to be wrestling with the notion of home - not only his own new dwelling place, but that of God also. We find him reflecting on his position in a time of relative peace, and witness the onset of his concern that he has not built a grand enough temple for the Ark of God (the physical manifestation of God's presence on Earth). He looks around at his own swanky dwelling place and, feeling guilty, sends Nathan back and forth to communicate his discomfort. God gives David a clear message in reply:

"*Are you the one to build a house for me to live in? I have never lived in a house, from the day I brought the Israelites out of Egypt until this very day. I have always moved from one place to another with a tent and a Tabernacle as my dwelling. Yet no matter where I have gone with the Israelites, I have never once complained to Israel's tribal leaders, the shepherds of my people Israel. I have never asked them, "Why haven't you built me a beautiful cedar house?"*

In other words: thanks, but no thanks.

David's dilemma here represents a misunderstanding that is all too common amongst people of faith. We continually miss the point when it comes to how we worship God. The Old Testament is full of people deciding to make it their life's work to build the grandest temples to honour the Most High. What better place to offer before God the finest of animal sacrifices? Time after time, God tries to remind us that we are missing the message. The passage from Amos lays this out starkly. *Your burnt offerings mean nothing if they are not accompanied by action.* God would rather have none of the lavish offerings as long as we continue to hurt and exploit one another.

Ultimately, we find ourselves pondering the concept of 'God's home' and reaching the wrong solution. We build churches and refer to them as Houses of God. In our minds, God is tucked up safely in our fancy churches when, in reality, God is laying God's proverbial hat at the margins; they have set up a precarious dwelling place among the lost, the lonely, the starving and the hopeless. We find God in the tents before we find God in our churches.

The other verse I find compelling in this text is this: *I am here to build a temple, a house, a dynasty for you*; that is perhaps to say, God ultimately wants all of humanity to find a sense of home here on earth. All humans - Jews and Gentiles alike - should have a place. God sees it as their purpose to build a home, a dwelling place, a 'belonging place' for all of humanity. In the words of Casey Thornburgh Sigmon, Assistant Professor at the St Paul School of Theology in Kansas, "God doesn't need us to build a fancy new dwelling. God wants to build us." Our job is not to build the most lavish churches for God to live in here on earth. Our calling is to be God's hands, feet and voice out in the world and to ensure that all people have a home: a dwelling place, a 'belonging place', a place where they know they matter.

One of the most powerful manifestations of God's desire to be among us and not tucked away in a fancy cedar building, comes in the Christmas story. Just like David would not expect the Ark of God to be happy in a simple tent, few would have expected the human manifestation of God to be brought into the world by a teenager. Nor would many people have predicted the birthplace of Jesus to be a stable, and yet, this is the story we retell year after year. Unable to find a dwelling place on the night of their son's birth, Mary and her fiancé Joseph find themselves welcomed with open arms by a local innkeeper. He does not have a room he can offer them, but he does the best he can and is able to make space for them in their stable round the back. In that stable, the Saviour of the world is born and laid in the animals' feeding trough. This should serve for us as the ultimate reminder that God's home is not a physical place, nor should we be questioning how 'worthy' our dwelling places for God are. Jesus came to overturn our notions of kingship and power, and teach us how to worship The Servant King - what better place to begin that work than among the animals, welcoming the most unlikely of visitors to his bedside?

May we all be able to answer the question, "What does home mean to you?" with a smile on our faces. May we do all we can to ensure that everyone we meet knows beyond doubt that they can find a place of safety and belonging with us. May we enjoy and savour the communities we have built within our church walls, but may we remember that it is by stepping outside of them that we truly find the home of God. May we keep the maintenance of those buildings in perspective, never letting their upkeep come at the expense of our calling to find the tents in which God truly dwells. May we never forget that the only worthy offering God demands from us is our whole hearts: authentic, humble, open and full of love.

- How can our church buildings sometimes be a barrier to someone encountering God?
- Why do you think it is so difficult for us to grasp the concept of God dwelling at the margins?
- What could it look like to give someone a feeling that they *belong* in our community?[4]

Hymn:
221 STF – While shepherds watched their flocks by night OR
178 STF – Long ago, prophets knew Christ would come

[4] Reflection written by Emma Dobson

Prayers of intercession

Nomadic God,
You make your home among the lost and the lonely,
the poor and the despairing,
the hopeless and the hurting.

Guide us away from our comfort zones, and draw us to the margins to meet with you.

We lift before you those in the midst of conflict
Those living in a war zone, fearing the next attack from on high
Those experiencing the erasure of their people through genocide
Those forced to flee a place that no longer feels like home.

God of peace, come near
God of justice, strengthen us to stand in solidarity with the powerless.

Displaced God,
You make your home among the lost and the lonely,
the poor and the despairing,
the hopeless and the hurting.

Guide us away from our comfort zones, and draw us to the margins to meet with you.

We lift before you those suffering the worst effects of the climate crisis
Those dealing with the devastating effects of flooding
Those forced to work in unbearably hot conditions
Those fearing for the future.

God of justice, come near
God of comfort, empower us to keep hope alive.

Ever-present God,
You make your home among the lost and the lonely,
the poor and the despairing,
the hopeless and the hurting.

Guide us away from our comfort zones, and draw us to the margins to meet with you.

We lift before you those dealing with challenges in their lives
Those facing the reality of a diagnosis
Those mourning the loss of a loved one
Those worried about finding employment or direction in life.

God of comfort, come near
God of compassion, enable us to reach out our hands in friendship and connection

Ever-loving God,
You make your home among the lost and the lonely,
the poor and the despairing,
the hopeless and the hurting.

Guide us away from our comfort zones, and draw us to the margins to meet with you.

In Jesus' name we pray
Amen.[5]

[5] Prayers of intercession written by Emma Dobson

We will now take up the offering.

In this season of giving and gifts,
We give you thanks for all that you have given us.
Accept these gifts, and all the resources we have,
May we use them for your kingdom-building here on earth,
In Jesus' name,

Amen.[6]

Hymn:
185 STF – Sing we the King who is coming to reign OR
546 STF – Behold the servant of the Lord!

Blessing

Go with the grace of God, into a world where the Christ is already incarnate,
Where the love of God is coming closer every day.
And may your Christmas be truly blessed.

Amen.[7]

[6] Additional prayers by Tim Baker

[7] Additional prayers by Tim Baker