

## 201225 St John's service for Christmas Day

*(Service prepared by Rev Adele Moorhouse and Rev Annie Gray)*

Joy and peace to you as you join St John's church in celebration on this Christmas morning.  
Some words from the prophet Isaiah:

'Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.' (Is 60:1)

*The Christmas candle is lit (you may like to light a candle yourself at this point)*

Lord Jesus, Light of light, you have come among us.  
Help us who live by your light to shine as lights in your world.  
Glory to God in the highest. Amen.

### Song

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:  
*O come, let us...*

*Sing, choirs of angels,  
Sing in exultation,  
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above;  
Glory to God  
In the highest:  
O come, let us...*

Yea, Lord, we greet thee,  
Born this happy morning,  
Jesus, to thee be glory given;  
Word of the Father  
Now in flesh appearing:  
*O come, let us...*

*Anonymous Latin, Tr. Frederic Oakley (1802-80)  
SoF 408*

### Prayers Annie

Blessing and honour and glory and power be to our God, for his love revealed in the Word made flesh.

Blessing and honour and glory and power be to our God, coming among us and sharing our humanity.

Blessing and honour and glory and power be to our God, filling Mary with the life of the Divine.  
Blessing and honour and glory and power be to our God, for our salvation, for bringing joy and peace into our world through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Help us to remember at this difficult time, when some will see at least some of their family members, whilst others may be alone, that you are with each one of us this day. May we feel your presence and know your love and your light this day and find we are filled with peace and joy.

**BE BORN IN US TODAY.**

We remember before you all who mourn and are in grief, especially poignant at this time of year. Be with them and give them assurance that their loved ones are safe in your arms. Bring joy in fond memories and hope to hurting hearts that you are with them and share their sorrows.

**BE BORN IN US TODAY.**

Be with all who are weary or suffer in body mind or spirit and in the quiet of our hearts we lift before you those known to us personally. Bring peace, healing and hope.

**BE BORN IN US TODAY.**

Be with all those who work through Christmas and those who have no work and are struggling. Bring them rest, hope and joy even in the demands of life.

## **BE BORN IN US TODAY.**

Lord Jesus, born of Mary, you are part of the human family; you share our joys and our sorrows, our hopes and our fears. Bless our homes with your loving presence, be known to be with us, our families and our friends. Lord Jesus Christ born of the virgin Mary.

**BE BORN IN US TODAY. AMEN**

### **Reading** Luke 2:1-14 NIV *Annie*

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests."

### **Sermon** *Adele*

Some years ago after a service in a tiny chapel where I was the minister, we were making our way through to the hall for our customary chocolate cake when one of the youngsters tugged on my sleeve and asked, 'Adele where is Jesus?'. It's always the youngsters who ask the most challenging questions and I was frantically trying to work out something more meaningful than 'He's everywhere' or 'He's in all our hearts', when the little voice piped up again, 'where has Jesus gone? 'This time little hands gestured to where the crib had stood some weeks before and with some relief I realized that they wanted to know where the blanket-wrapped doll had gone.

'I've taken him home to keep him safe for next year'. And then I became even more tongue-tied as I tried even more frantically to explain that I hadn't actually hidden Jesus away – that the doll was just representing Jesus, reminding us of the fact that God came to earth and was born as a tiny baby. But I felt quite uncomfortable and it really made me think...

As the song written by Ian Bell and Graham Maule tells us: 'God surprises earth with heaven, coming here on Christmas day' – but what happens to Jesus now?

It is a challenging question for us all to ponder on this Christmas day - what happens after this? How will we take hold of that surprise? Where will Jesus spend the rest of the year? Surely we will not shut him neatly in a cupboard, as I did that little doll, leaving him in the dark so he doesn't get in the way of our daily lives - or will we do that without ever intending to?

I think it might help if we take a moment to consider the story of the shepherds we heard about in our Bible reading today. We are like those shepherds in so many ways, standing in the field, doing our work, taking care of our families and ourselves, paying the bills, earning a living, trying to stay warm on a cold night. And suddenly - as we stand there in the darkness, our whole world is overpowered by a brilliant light. As we recall the words of scripture that tell us of Immanuel, of God himself coming to be with us, we see it - we can't miss it - and we are overwhelmed by its beauty and power. But then our fears surface and we start to question, 'Is it just too wonderful to be true?' We shake our heads and say, 'This joy and light and goodness - surely it won't last'.

How hard it is to trust light and hope and possibility when there is so much pain and fear and darkness in the world.

I really do believe the shepherds give us a great example. Let's not just say, 'it's too good to be true – 'but let us instead go and take a closer look at Jesus – and take with us whatever gifts we can – think of the carol – 'if I were a shepherd I would bring a lamb, if I were a wise man I would do my part, yet what I can I give him – give my heart'. Let's not miss this moment when God surprises earth with heaven, let us make our way to Jesus, Immanuel, God with us, and open our hearts to give him our love, but also to accept all that he is offering to us.

What will we do with Jesus now?

That is the question we must ponder in our hearts. Will we discard him along with all the trappings and trimmings of Christmas once this day is over, or hide him away in a cupboard, safely out of sight and perhaps even out of mind for another year. Or will we take hold of the fact that God surprises earth with heaven itself, coming here on Christmas day. Will we take hold of Jesus and let his love challenge and inspire us, comfort and reassure us as we carry him with us holding him close to our hearts in the days and weeks, and years to come. Amen

**Communion** *(if you have a communion pack you may wish to make sure it is within reach)*

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

Father, it is our joy and delight, our reason for being, to offer you thanks and praise.

All your actions show wisdom and love.

Through your Word you spoke creation into existence and made us in your image and likeness.

When we disobeyed you and drew away from you, you did not leave us in darkness, but sent your Son, the Word made flesh, to be the light of the world.

Emptying himself of all but love, he was born of Mary, shared our human nature and died on the cross.

Yet you have raised him from death to eternal life;

and through him you have sent your holy and life-giving Spirit

to make us your people, a people of light, to reflect your glory in all the earth.

And so with angels and archangels and all the heavenly choir

we join in the unending hymn of praise:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might.**

**Heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

**Hosanna in the highest.**

**Blessèd is he who comes in the name of the Lord.**

**Hosanna in the highest.**

Holy and redeeming God, we see your grace and truth in Jesus Christ our Lord,

who, on the night in which he was betrayed,

took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying,

'Take this and eat it. This is my body given for you.

Do this in remembrance of me.'

In the same way, after supper,  
he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying,  
'Drink from it all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant,  
poured out for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins.  
Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

**Christ is born.  
The Saviour has come.  
God is with us.**

And so, Father, we remember and celebrate all that Christ has done for us.  
We have asked that you would send your Holy Spirit that these gifts of bread and wine may be for  
us the body and blood of Christ. Through him we give ourselves to you.  
May your Spirit draw us together in the one body of Christ,  
that we may have life in all its fullness, live in your love,  
and fill creation with a song of never-ending praise.  
We ask this through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Through him, with him, and in him,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
all honour and glory be given to you,  
almighty Father, throughout all ages. Amen.**

Christ is the bread of life.  
Christ is the light of the world.

**God here among us,  
light in the midst of us,  
bring us light and life.**

*The Sharing of the Bread and Wine - please take your communion pack, if you have one, peel off  
the clear lid and consume the bread with the words 'The body of Christ, given for you', then peel  
off the remaining lid and drink the wine with the words, 'The blood of Christ keep you in eternal  
life'.*

*Prayer after Communion:*

**Father of all, we give you thanks and praise,  
that when we were still far off you met us in your Son and brought us home.  
Dying and living, he declared your love, gave us grace, and opened the gate of glory.  
May we who share Christ's body live his risen life;  
we who drink his cup bring life to others;  
we whom the Spirit lights give light to the world.  
Keep us firm in the hope that you have set before us,  
so we and all your children shall be free,  
and the whole earth live to praise your name;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

**Final comment**

What will we do with Jesus now? Will we hide him away once this day has passed?  
It is my prayer that we will each be able to accept God's gift of love and continue to hold Jesus  
close to our hearts in the coming days.

**Song**

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 host proclaim, 'Christ is born in Bethlehem.'  
Hark! The herald angels sing, 'Glory to the new-born King!

Christ, by highest heaven adored, Christ, the everlasting Lord.  
Late in time behold him come, Offspring of a virgin's womb.  
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see! Hail the incarnate deity!  
Pleased as man with man to dwell, Jesus our Immanuel.  
Hark! The herald angels sing, 'Glory to the new-born King!

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 men no more may die;  
Born to raise the sons of earth; Born to give them second birth.  
Hark! The herald angels sing, 'Glory to the new-born King!

*Charles Wesley (1707-88)*  
*SoF 155*

**Blessing** *Annie*

Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace. The peace of the Lord be always with you. **AND ALWAYS WITH YOU.**

This Holy day, let the Love of God enfold you. And the blessings of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you and all whom you love. **Amen**

*Communion liturgy take from Methodist Worship Book © 1999 Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes*

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