

Christmas Day At Home Service 2020

A gathering prayer with candle lighting

Jesus of Nazareth, small child of Bethlehem, you were not born in a stable but you were laid in a manger, a manger filled with warm hay, probably in the living room of Joseph's kinsfolk in Bethlehem. We have all woken in homes today – some busy, some quiet, some owned, some temporary. Help us to see that our homes are the places where you come to live in all your glory. And gather us, your people held in the quiet of your birth among us. Ordinary, and extraordinary, all at once. **Amen.**

Isaiah 9.2, 6 – 7

²The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined.

⁶For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.

He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness
from this time onwards and for evermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Singing the Faith 195 Christians awake, salute the happy morn. – John Byrom (1692-1763)

1 Christians, awake, salute the happy morn
whereon the Saviour of the world was born;
rise to adore the mystery of love,
which hosts of angels chanted from above;
with them the joyful tidings first begun
of God incarnate and the Virgin's Son.

3 He spoke; and straightway the celestial choir
in hymns of joy, unknown before, conspire.
The praises of redeeming love they sang,
and heaven's whole orb with alleluias rang;
God's highest glory was their anthem still,
peace on the earth, in every heart goodwill.

5 Like Mary, let us ponder in our mind
God's wondrous love in saving humankind;
trace we the Babe, who has retrieved our loss,
from his poor manger to his bitter cross;
treading his steps, assisted by his grace,
till our first heavenly state again takes place.

Then to the watchful shepherds it was told,
who heard the angelic herald's voice, 'Behold,
I bring good tidings of a Saviour's birth
to you and all the nations upon earth;
this day has God fulfilled his promised word,
this day is born a Saviour, Christ the Lord.'

To Bethl'em straight the enlightened shepherds ran,
to see, unfolding, God's eternal plan;
then to their flocks, still praising God, return,
and their glad hearts with holy rapture burn;
amazed, the wondrous tidings they proclaim,
the first apostles of his infant fame.

Then may we hope, the angelic hosts among,
to sing, redeemed, a glad triumphal song;
he who was born upon this joyful day
around us all his glory shall display;
saved by his love, incessant we shall sing
eternal praise to heaven's almighty King.

Prayers

God of all people, some kings have tried in vain to count the multitudes of their subjects. You, instead, invite all to a feast that celebrates the truest vocation of humanity: to create community and give glory to you, who made all. Today, you invite each one of us, and we together turn to you in gratitude and thanks for your invitation.

But, who are we, ordinary people, to be called as witnesses to the great birth? We are the people you have called. And we each approach you in joy and humility, in gratitude and hope, glad to honour what is most important today: that all life is to be honoured and peace is to be sought. Amen.

Jesus of Nazareth, the smallness of your birth in the confusion of a city calls us to smallness. And so often, we, too, cause the confusion. We get lost in so many things. We turn now from those ways of stress. We take a moment to recognise the quiet voice in us, calling us back – again and again – to what matters most. Forgive us, take us, quieten us, to pay attention to love. Amen.

We sing a song today, a song for all, of the wonder of your goodness.

Authority resting on the small shoulders of a child who calls us all to everlasting peace through the forgiveness that you offer us in him. Amen. Amen. Amen. Praise be to you, O God, born among us.

Luke 2.1-20

¹In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

¹⁰But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

¹⁴'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'

¹⁵When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.' ¹⁶So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Singing the Faith 191 Away in a manger

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| 1 | Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
the little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head;
the stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay,
the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay. | The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,
but little Lord Jesus no crying he makes.
I love you, Lord Jesus! Look down from the sky,
and stay by my side until morning is nigh. |
| 3 | Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask you to stay
close by me for ever, and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in your tender care,
and fit us for heaven, to live with you there. | |

vv. 1, 2 Little children's book, Philadelphia, 1885 v. 3 Vineyard Songs, C. H. Gabriel, 1892 Anonymous

Reflection

Let us go now unto Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place that the Lord has made known to us. If I could have one wish for today it would be that these words of the shepherds could be the words on all lips on this day. A child was born with authority as the Son of God, in a stable, in Bethlehem around 2,000 years ago and for once the picture of 'God with us has a meaning' that should touch every heart and mind.

Regardless of the pains and troubles of this year, regardless of whether we are gathered as families or friends together, or at home alone, the message is that we are at one with God on this special day for 'God is with us'. Incomprehensibly God is made man and lives among us and this should change everything.

Read the words of the well-known Christmas carols and the new ones and themes come flying out at you about what Christmas means for the world. These tell us what a difference the birth of Jesus should make to our world on this day.

Peace on earth should be a reality as we celebrate the birth of Jesus. Past wrongs should be forgiven as we acknowledge that 'Jesus is Lord'. All children of God should be blessed through the manger and the cross that is to come for new life and new hope is given through this birth, life, crucifixion and resurrection. Hope should abound in a world where despair is too often a reality. The hungry should be fed because a new world order has come about and much more besides because a 'child has been born to us' and for us. Yet, the rhetoric is not matched by the reality of what we see around us.

There is a version of 'Silent night' sung by Simon and Garfunkel where there is a compilation of evening news read for 1966. The news is all bad, of course, but it is the carol that eventually overwhelms the bad news. This is the message of Christmas – that good will overcome the bad that we see around us. But this change only happens when we each 'go unto Bethlehem' to see what has happened, to meet the good news and then to return giving glory to God in all that we think and say and do.

Today remember those around you who have 'winter but no Christmas' and bring them the joyful tidings 'praise to God the Christ has come' through your actions, your love and your friendship.

Singing the Faith 197 Cradled in a manger, meanly laid the Son of Man his head

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| 1 | Cradled in a manger, meanly
laid the Son of Man his head;
sleeping his first earthly slumber
where the oxen had been fed.
Happy were those shepherds listening
to the holy angel's word;
happy they within that stable,
worshipping their infant Lord. | 2 | Happy all who hear the message
of his coming from above;
happier still who hail his coming,
and with praises greet his love.
Blessèd Saviour, Christ most holy,
in a manger thou didst rest;
canst thou stoop again, yet lower,
and abide within my breast? |
| 3 | Evil things are there before thee;
in the heart, where they have fed,
wilt thou pitifully enter,
Son of Man, and lay thy head?
Enter, then, O Christ most holy;
make a Christmas in my heart;
make a heaven of my manger:
it is heaven where thou art. | 4 | And to those who never listened
to the message of thy birth,
who have winter, but no Christmas
bringing them thy peace on earth,
send to these the joyful tidings;
by all people, in each home,
be there heard the Christmas anthem:
praise to God, the Christ has come! |

George Stringer Rowe (1830–1913)

Intercessions

A baby, born in the night to a young mother, wearied by journeying.

Loving God, we pray for all those wearied by their journey to this Christmas Day:

the exhausted and stressed . . .

the anxious and afraid . . .

those who live with conflict . . .

those who live with need . . .

those weighed down by illness . . .

those heavy with sorrow or grief . . .

Light of Christ: dawn in our darkness.

A baby, born in the night to an anxious couple, far from home.

Loving God, we pray for all those who feel far from their homes this Christmas Day:

the refugees from war or persecution . . .

the incomers in a strange land . . .

those working away from home . . .

those divided from their families by disagreement . . .

those who are lonely even amongst others . . .

those who are lonely because they are alone . . .

Light of Christ: dawn in our darkness.

A baby, born in the night to all humankind, to bring us joy.

Loving God, we pray for ourselves, the family of Christ, this Christmas Day:

the sisters and brothers here with us now . . .

the extended family throughout the world . . .

those working amongst the needy . . .

those announcing the Good News . . .

those finding faith hard . . .

those whose memory we cherish . . .

Light of Christ: dawn in our darkness. We pray in the name of him who has increased our joy and given us great gladness, Jesus Christ, God with us. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Offering

Bringing all that I bring to you today, my thoughts, my feelings, my hopes, the things that have worked out, and the things that haven't, the joys and sadnesses: I offer them to you, knowing that you will accept everything I bring, because I bring it and offer it to you. Amen.

Singing the Faith 202 Hark the herald angels sing - Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

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 men to dwell,
Jesus, our Immanuel:

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 man no more may die,
born to raise the sons of earth,
born to give them second birth:

Final prayers

God, send me out now, knowing that in small moments, today and every day, I can see you and honour you. and may the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, rest upon me and remain with me always. Amen.

God-is-with-us: I go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

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