

This short act of worship for Christmas Day has been produced for you by Helen Lunn.



A warm welcome to each of you to this Christmas Day Service. We offer God this time, our hearts and our lives, as we come together to worship him.

Call to Worship

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 us,
and we together turn to you
in gratitude and thanks for your invitation. Amen

Hymn O come all ye faithful (Singing the Faith 212)

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q8dgl4-bVPU>

1. 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!*
2. True God of true God,
Light of Light eternal,
lo, he abhors not the Virgin's womb;
Son of the Father,
begotten, not created:
3. See how the shepherds,
summoned to his cradle,
leaving their flocks, draw nigh to gaze;
we too will thither
bend our joyful footsteps:
4. Lo, star-led chieftains,
Magi, Christ adoring,
offer him incense, gold, and myrrh;

we to the Christ-child
bring our hearts' oblations:

5. Sing, choirs of angels,
sing in exultation,
sing, all ye citizens of heaven above:
'Glory to God
in the highest:'

6. Yea, Lord, we greet thee,
born this happy morning,
Jesus, to thee be glory given:
Word of the Father,
now in flesh appearing:

Latin, 18th century, possibly by John Francis Wade
(c. 1711–1786) and others

Prayer


Let us pray.
Who are we, ordinary people,
to be called as witnesses to the great birth?
We are the people you have called.
And we 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.


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.

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.
Praise be to you, O God, born among us. Amen.

All Age Address

The candy cane is a long-time Christmas tradition. Everywhere we look we see them. They are used as decorations on Christmas trees and, of course, they are one of the most popular of all Christmas treats. I have heard several stories about the history and meaning of the candy cane. I don't know if they are true, but I do think that the candy cane can teach us a few things about the true meaning of Christmas.

First of all, if you look at the candy cane like this  it looks like the letter J. Jesus starts with the letter J, so that should remind us of Jesus and help us to remember that Christmas is Jesus' birthday.

If you look at the candy cane like this  it looks like a shepherd's crook. The shepherd used his crook to keep the sheep from wandering away from the flock and getting lost or eaten by a wild animal. The Bible says, "The Lord is my shepherd." The candy cane should remind us that Jesus is our shepherd and he will keep us from wandering away and getting lost or hurt.

The candy cane is mostly white. White is a symbol of purity. That should remind us that Jesus was the spotless Lamb of God and that because he came to be the sacrifice for our sin, we can become as white as snow.

As you know, the candy cane has three red stripes. The Bible tells us that before he was crucified, Jesus was beaten with a whip which made blood-red stripes across his back. The Bible says that we are healed by those stripes. The stripes on the candy cane should remind us that Jesus suffered and died, so that we can have everlasting life.

To many people, the candy cane is a meaningless decoration seen at Christmas time or just a piece of candy to be eaten and

enjoyed. I hope that this year, every time you see a candy cane, you will be reminded of the true meaning of Christmas.

Let us pray. Lord, we thank you that Jesus is the Good Shepherd who keeps us from harm. We thank you that because of his suffering and death on the cross, we have life everlasting. Help us to remember that we find the true meaning of Christmas in him.

Amen

Bible Reading

Isaiah 9: 2-7 – The Message

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light.

For those who lived in a land of deep shadows—
light! sunbursts of light!

You repopulated the nation,
you expanded its joy.

Oh, they're so glad in your presence!

Festival joy! The joy of a great celebration,
sharing rich gifts and warm greetings.

The abuse of oppressors and cruelty of tyrants—
all their whips and cudgels and curses—

Is gone, done away with, a deliverance

as surprising and sudden as Gideon's old victory over Midian.

The boots of all those invading troops,

along with their shirts soaked with innocent blood,

Will be piled in a heap and burned,
a fire that will burn for days!
For a child has been born—for us!
the gift of a son—for us!
He'll take over the running of the world.
His names will be: Amazing Counsellor, Strong God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Wholeness.
His ruling authority will grow, and there'll be no limits to the
wholeness he brings. He'll rule from the historic David throne
over that promised kingdom. He'll put that kingdom on a firm
footing and keep it going

With fair dealing and right living,
beginning now and lasting always.
The zeal of God-of-the-Angel-Armies
will do all this.

Luke 2:1-20 - New International Version

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."

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

So, they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all

who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Reflection

Do you ever listen to the news and get discouraged, wondering what is happening on our world? Do you ever question God about those who are in charge of nations?

God, it seems, has a habit of working in the most unlikely of places, and through the most unlikely of people. We notice from today's gospel reading that the Emperor exercising his power and declaring that 'all the world should be registered.' Yet, in the midst of this display of power, with all its accompanying noise and chaos, we are taken to a baby lying in a manger. We are reminded that amid the voices of power and noise of life, God is quietly and gently and always present, working in the most unexpected places.

There is something about taking the time to notice. Recognising that in the ordinariness of our everyday lives, God is at work. Imagine the shepherds in the field that night, tending to their sheep as usual. Then, all of a sudden, an angel appearing and instructing them to go to Bethlehem to 'see this thing that has taken place'. They encountered God in their place of work! Not in a synagogue or temple; not in a place when spiritual things are 'meant' to happen. And having got their attention, God takes them to the basement of

an ordinary home. Is God trying to get your attention – in order to look where?

In Isaiah, a poetic account of a military victory is transformed by the understanding that victory is achieved, or at least marked, in the birth of a baby. The birth of a child in a time of war is a poignant sign of hope. In the past, commentators suggested that Jesus was born during one of a very few periods of sustained peace in the world – or the known, Roman, world. However, it is not clear that this claim is sustainable. Leaving aside the wider non-Roman world, within the bounds of the Roman Empire, the famed Roman Peace was sustained only by threat of military violence. Still today, some argue that peace can only be maintained by lavish spending on the military, while all around children are born and die in poverty.

In Luke's Gospel, Emperor Augustus is portrayed as someone capable of ordering people half a world away to move around 'to be registered' (this is repeated three times in three verses). Still today, there are people who have inordinate power over others half a world away. Politicians such as the President of the United States probably come first to mind, but we might also think of those who influence the world's media and social media, not just the owners but also so-called 'opinion formers' with millions of 'followers'.

We know how challenging it is for political leaders to deliver justice and peace. Yet it is not an unreasonable desire. We hope that our leaders will deliver good things for the people; but, as Christians, we

believe that Jesus is the true fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy. This truth exposes our pretensions, because the fulfilment of God's reconciliation cannot be reduced to human politics. The 'king' we are offered in the form of Jesus is no traditional ruler or politician. He comes as a vulnerable child who calls us out of our self-obsessions. We are asked to love and serve him by loving others.

There are two ways of (legitimately) acquiring goods and objects from other people. We can acquire them through a transaction: we want something from somebody else, and we come to an agreement as to what needs to be given in exchange – so, we pay for our shopping before we take it home! The other way is through the giving – or more accurately, the exchanging – of gifts. Except that the exchange may not happen all at once, and there is (for most people) no expectation that the value of the gifts will be exactly the same. The value of a gift is not simply its financial value. Gifts express something of the relationship between the two givers. The story of God's gift to us begins with a tiny baby.

Plenty of gifts – presents – are given at Christmas. Most of us do not count the precise cost of the presents we receive from others, though we probably know instinctively if the gift-giving is unbalanced: for example, if the monetary value is much greater than would be normal for the depth of the relationship, or if gifts exchanged are significantly different in value. If that were to happen, how would that make you feel? How, then, does it feel to know that God's gift-giving to us exceeds anything we can possibly give in return? Ultimately, the only thing that we can truly say that

we own is ourselves. So, the only gift that we have that has value is our own life. What, then, does it mean to give that to God in return for his gift?

The well-known opening of John's Gospel makes profound claims about Jesus as God's first Word. One of its startling lines is, 'He came to that which was his own, but his own people did not receive him' (John 1.11). John writes very clearly from the perspective of Jesus' cosmic significance. Yet when placed alongside Luke's pictures of infancy it is deeply moving. God comes to us in all vulnerability, and there is a simple invitation: to love him. When faced with the ongoing offer of that love as Jesus grows up, we end up crucifying him. God's perfect love is a threat to our ways of going on. But the invitation remains. The resurrected Christ does not bring vengeance, but another call to serve and love him.

This Christmas remember that the birth of Jesus is only the beginning so let us not leave Jesus in the box till next year but let us use our call to love and serve others just like we love and serve him.

Song - From the Squalor of a Borrowed Stable

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YksTeR61O1I>

From the squalor of a borrowed stable,
By the Spirit and a virgin's faith;
To the anguish and the shame of scandal
Came the Saviour of the human race.
But the skies were filled with the praise of heaven,
Shepherds listen as the angels tell
Of the Gift of God come down to man
At the dawning of Immanuel.

King of heaven now the Friend of sinners,
Humble servant in the Father's hands,
Filled with power and the Holy Spirit,
Filled with mercy for the broken man.
Yes, He walked my road and He felt my pain,
Joys and sorrows that I know so well;
Yet His righteous steps give me hope again –
I will follow my Immanuel.

Through the kisses of a friend's betrayal,
He was lifted on a cruel cross;
He was punished for a world's transgressions,
He was suffering to save the lost.
He fights for breath, He fights for me,
Loosing sinners from the claims of hell;

And with a shout our souls are free –
Death defeated by Immanuel.

Now He's standing in the place of honour,
Crowned with glory on the highest throne,
Interceding for His own beloved
Till His Father calls to bring them home!
Then the skies will part as the trumpet sounds
Hope of heaven or the fear of hell;
But the Bride will run to her Lover's arms,
Giving glory to Immanuel!

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Prayers of Intercession

Today, in all the demands,
we pray for those who are facing a Christmas
without someone they love.
God of goodness,
Hear us and be with us.

Today, in all the delights,
we pray for those who are facing a Christmas alone.

God of goodness,
Hear us and be with us.

Today, in all the celebration,
We pray for those who are facing conflicts.
God of goodness,
Hear us and be with us.

Today, in all the time at tables,
we pray for those who are hungry.
God of goodness,
Hear us and be with us.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. **Amen**

Hymn Come and join the celebration (Singing the Faith 196)

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pMqG5M76tFE>

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

1. See the shepherds hurry down to Bethlehem,
gaze in wonder at the Son of God who lay before them:
2. Wise men journey, led to worship by a star,
kneel in homage, bringing precious gifts from lands afar, so,
3. 'God is with us,' round the world the message bring,
he is with us, 'Welcome,' all the bells
on earth are pealing:

Valerie Collison (b. 1933), Words and Music: © Hye-Fye Music Ltd

Blessing

Go from the Christmas stable
with wonder in your heart,
with compassion in your heart,
with hope in your heart,
and know that you are loved,
now and for ever.

Amen.