

This short act of worship has been produced by Revd Dan Haylett for you to use at home or wherever you are and if you are unable to worship in a church building. We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Opening Prayers

Holy God, in this season of rejoicing and celebration, we praise you for coming to us. We give thanks that you meet us as we are in Jesus' birth, through his life and teachings, dying and rising for us.

When our hearts are laid low, or when we find ourselves alone: may the joy of Jesus reach into our lives.

May we take hold of hope as we worship, bringing our best to you today and always.

In the name of Christ. Amen.

Hymn Let earth and heaven combine (Singing the Faith 208)

Sing/Read/Pray/Proclaim the words

www.youtube.com/watch?v=WyoSU3UT3IM

Let earth and heaven combine,
angels and all agree,
to praise in songs divine
the incarnate Deity,

our God contracted to a span,
incomprehensibly made man.

He laid his glory by,
he wrapped him in our clay;
unmarked by human eye,
the latent Godhead lay;
infant of days he here became,
and bore the mild Immanuel's name.

Unsearchable the love
that has the Saviour brought;
the grace is far above
both earth's and angel's thought:
suffice for us that God, we know,
our God, is manifest below.

He deigns in flesh to appear,
widest extremes to join;
to bring our vileness near,
and make us all divine:
and we the life of God shall know,
for God is manifest below.

Made perfect first in love,
and sanctified by grace,
we shall from earth remove,
and see his glorious face:

his love shall then be fully showed,
and we shall all be lost in God.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Reading: John 1:1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Reflection

What a difference a day makes! Yesterday we celebrated the ordinariness of Luke's account of Jesus' birth in the humble poverty of the stable. Today, whilst we are still digesting the fullness of our Christmas celebration, we are invited to take a step back.

The Fourth gospel steps in where Luke leaves off. The baby born to Mary in the nowhere place of Bethlehem is actually, we are told, the Word (the loving intention and will) of God. In Charles Wesley's famous words, we are given the most sublime paradox to hold in tension: "our God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man".

John's poetic words represent a huge shift in our celebration and understanding from the first Christmas Day to today. They reflect the gap in understanding between the birth of Mary's boy child to the majesty of the Incarnation. John's words in their beauty and majestic scope speak of the praying reflection of Christian faith on the simplicity of what happens on that first Christmas Day.

As we so often note, in these opening verses we are taken back to the beginning. Back to the creation accounts of God bringing order to a chaotic cosmos. God's covenantal love is

displayed in the allowance and space given to the created order for the universe to grow and change. God's creative love is a risk-taking initiative – and we are reminded in John of the cost of this risk, where the world “did not accept” the Christ who was “from the beginning”.

John paints his Christmas picture on a big canvass, the largest possible. All creation is drawn into this salvation drama which narrows in focus down through John the Baptist, to reveal the true Light of God.

The image left by this prologue is a complex and beautiful one, showing us God's ongoing creative and loving intention. Just as God creates in love, willingly giving over power and freedom, in Christ's coming the same Word is experienced. In Jesus' birth God is going about the business of being God: always faithful, loving and true. Jesus is the new creation that reflects this loving intention most clearly.

It's inevitable at this Christmas season that preachers and leaders of worship want to remind us that Christmas doesn't stop in the stable in Bethlehem. Christmas is for life – not just for, well, Christmas! In the hymn we sang earlier, we were reminded that “our God is manifest below” that we might be lost in God, as we grow in the image of the One of who comes as the babe of Bethlehem.

We who have seen the glory of the Christ child are made new, with grace upon grace to sustain us and empower our telling of the difference that Christ's coming makes to us and to every life. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Prayers

God of all, we pray for the world which you love so much that you sent your only Son to come among us.

We pray for families at this time, remembering the care of Mary of Joseph and the pressures they were under. We pray for all who care for children and young people.

We pray for those working long hours and sometimes in dangerous situations, remembering the shepherds who visited Jesus.

We pray for all who find these days hard, and for all who cannot see any reason to celebrate. We pray for a world in need, for those who are grieving and for all who are awaiting your light and love.

God of all, coming to us in vulnerability and helplessness, we welcome you and offer our prayers in the name of Christ, the Prince of Peace.

Song: Who would think? (Singing the Faith 222)

Sing/Read/Pray/Proclaim the words

www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwCyLamhFrk

Who would think that was needed
to transform and save the earth
might not be a plan or army,
proud in purpose, proved in worth?
Who would think, despite derision,
that a child might lead the way?

God surprises earth with heaven,
coming here on Christmas Day.

Shepherds watch and wise men wonder,
monarchs scorn and angels sing;
such a place as none would reckon
hosts a holy helpless thing.

Stable beasts and by-passed strangers
watch a baby laid in hay:
God surprises earth with heaven,
coming here on Christmas Day.

Centuries of skill and science
span the past from which we move,
yet experience questions whether,
with such progress, we improve.
While the human lot we ponder,
lest our hopes and humour fray,
God surprises earth with heaven,
coming here on Christmas Day.

John L Bell (b. 1949) and Graham Maule (b. 1958)

From *Heaven Shall Not Wait* © 1987 WGRG, Iona Community, Glasgow

Blessing

God, surprise us and sustain us,
Hold us and heal us,
Renew our hope in you.

May the love of the Lord Jesus be in your hearts and homes,
today and for ever. Amen.

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