

Welshpool & Bro Hafren Methodist Circuit

Home Worship Sheet, 25th December – Christmas Day

This short act of worship has been prepared and written for you by Rev Jacquie Evans.

I thought that it be good to reflect on what Christmas means to us rather than have a traditional Call to Worship. I found this poem a few years ago and I think that it makes us stop and think.

This Christmas - Anonymous

**The census crowds were occupied
When God first breathed and tears he cried:
And for a world that's still in danger,
Won't you be his living manger – this Christmas?**

**A frightened girl, a worried spouse
Left on the streets, no room, no house:
And for a world that's still unsure,
Won't you be his human stall – this Christmas?**

**Nightshift workers, angel-driven,
See the join of earth and heaven:
And for a world so full of woes,
Won't you be his swaddling clothes – this Christmas?**

**Far-travelled gold was a gift for him
Who came as our sacrifice for sin;
And for a world, so rich but poor,
Won't you be his bed of straw – this Christmas?**

**Hillside choirs sang out in chorus;
To sing again, they're waiting for us:
So, for a world that's tired and worn
Won't you be the place where he is born – this Christmas?**

Hymn: Christians awake, salute the happy morn

To listen to the hymn in a new tab: press Shift and Ctrl together and click [here](#). Close the tab after the hymn.

- 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.
- 2 Then to the watchful shepherds it was told,
who heard the angelic herald's voice, 'Behold,
I bring you tidings of a Saviour's birth
to you and all the nations on the earth;
this day has God fulfilled his promised word,
this day is born a Saviour, Christ the Lord.'
- 3 He spake; 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, and unto men good will.
- 4 To Bethl'hem straight the enlightened shepherds ran,
to see the wonder God had wrought for man;
and found, with Joseph and the blessed maid,
her son, our Saviour, in a manger laid;
joyful, the wondrous story they proclaim,
the first apostles of his infant fame.
- 5 Like Mary, let us ponder in our mind
God's wondrous love in saving all mankind;
trace we the Babe, who has retrieved our loss,
from his poor manger to his bitter cross;
then may we hope, angelic thrones among,
to sing, redeemed, a glad triumphal song.

Prayer of Adoration

Gracious God, we are full of happiness because of the presents we have received and given today. Help us to be aware of times when we have not been able to give or receive.

Thank you that we have been aware of the approach of Christmas, that time when God was to show a different aspect of personality. Thank you that as Christmas has dawned around the world, so a ripple of celebration has raced the light of day. Thank you that this day brings incarnation, when God mysteriously becomes a baby to be with us.

So often we think of Christmas as a day when nothing happens except celebration. Remind us that there are many opportunities to show this day is special as we prepare food and enjoy it together. Help us to make time to think of those for whom we care but with whom we cannot share this day.

Gracious God, we give thanks that we can know your bounty in creation and your love in caring and sharing. We give thanks that this baby Jesus, whose birthday we celebrate today, takes our joy and sorrow, our celebration and exasperation, and recreates what we have to what we can be with your help.

In Jesus' life we witness the development of child, adolescent and man, the one who lived in the spirit of Christmas and died on the first Good Friday, rising with the mystery of new life in you on the first Easter Sunday. We celebrate Jesus, the baby and the man, the life he lived and died, and his resurrection and presence with you and us.

Amen.

Luke 2: 1 – 20

To listen to the hymn in a new tab: press Shift and Ctrl together and click [here](#). Close the tab after the hymn.

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 near by, 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.

Message

I love Christmas, don't you? And if this year has taught us anything the message is that we need to look out for one another. Strange things have happened during this pandemic, people who thought that they could cope struggled, and those who thought that they would have difficulties managed to make the best out of a bad time.

Joseph and Mary fall into that second group I think. What happened with the birth of Jesus was not what Mary would have wanted or planned for, and yet God had other ideas. Jesus was born in the lowliest place of all, a king born in a cattle stall, and he died a criminal's death.

If you were to tell the story to someone else you might describe it thus: The whole Roman world is on the move at the behest of the Emperor who has called a census, and as a result a pregnant woman gives birth in a strange place. This birth is announced by angels and celebrated by shepherds. But if you did that you would be missing out so much of what this account in Luke's gospel give us.

The story, as it is told by Luke, seems to act as a reminder that there are events in the world that grab all the headlines and make all the noise (such as the political manoeuvrings of the Emperor), but we are encouraged to look beneath the surface for the still small things where God is moving. The narrative also reminds us that a person can encounter the wonder of God in the ordinary humdrum of everyday working lives – as the shepherds did, looking after their sheep every day without any particular expectations, only for the glory of heaven to intervene on this one occasion. The season of Advent, practised well, should enable us to look beneath the hustle and bustle of a busy life, to find the still centre, where God is.

One of the greatest problems that we have with this passage is our familiarity with it. I'm sure that some of us can almost recite it by heart, and in looking at it through a familiar lens we miss much of what is there. But have you ever thought that Luke is inviting us to ponder three themes: hospitality, welcome and exile.

As Methodists, we think that hospitality is in our DNA, we are encouraged to welcome all, and in different times, our refreshments are legendary. But Luke reminds us to look beyond mere hospitality to ensure that we can offer a welcome for all, even the outsider. Mary and Joseph were surely outsiders, they didn't appear to have planned the journey, they just turned up without booking, consequently there was nowhere to stay. How many of us would take this kind of risk? Mary and Joseph were outsiders in a town that they had links with and so

were required to return to, but we get the sense that they knew nobody who could help them out.

Not being part of the community, or being welcomed into it made life extremely difficult for Mary. And yet we notice that the people who are called to the stable first are not people with status, as would befit a king, but lowly shepherds. Everything is turned on its head on this first Christmas Day.

As time progresses and more people visit, stories are heard which mean that Mary and Joseph cannot stay, they have to go into exile. What a way to treat a king!

Once we have looked at the passage that is where we normally stop, but I want to you just to pause and think about how Christmas is inextricably linked with Easter. Throughout his short life on earth Jesus was never the way people expected him to be, even Mary and Joseph had difficulty understanding why as a child he stayed behind in the temple when everybody else had moved away. But the child in the stable pointed the way towards his suffering, death and resurrection through the gifts that were given to him by the Magi. Betjeman probably sums this up best at the end of his poem 'Christmas'.

*No love that in a family dwells,
No carolling in frosty air,
Nor all the steeple-shaking bells
Can with this single truth compare –
That God was man in Palestine
And lives today in bread and wine.*

Hymn: Who would think that what was needed

To listen to the hymn in a new tab: press Shift and Ctrl together and click [here](#). Close the tab after the hymn.

- 1 Who would think that what 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 should lead the way?
God surprises earth with heaven,
coming here on Christmas Day.

2 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.

3 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)

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.**
Amen.

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: Hark! The herald angels sing

To listen to the hymn in a new tab: press **Shift** and **Ctrl** together and click [here](#). Close the tab after the hymn.

- 1 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 angelic host proclaim:
'Christ is born in Bethlehem.
Hark! The herald-angels sing
glory to the new-born King**

2 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:

Hark! The herald-angels sing
glory to the new-born King

3 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:

Hark! The herald-angels sing
glory to the new-born King

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

The Blessing:

Jesus said, 'I am the light of the world.
Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness
but will have the light of life.'
Lord, we have followed the bright star
to find Jesus in the stable.
We go out now in his name,
and in his light,
to share our joy and take this treasure
into our troubled world.

Amen.

Wishing you all a happy and blessed Christmas.