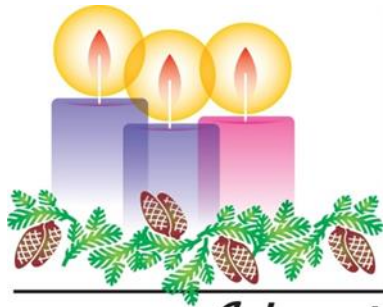


# Camel-Allen Churches

Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> December 2020



THIRD SUNDAY OF *Advent*

*Welcome on this third Sunday in Advent Sunday, two down and two to go; mid-way, and the church customarily lightens the mood of Advent today, calling it 'Gaudete' - 'rejoice'.*

*Traditionally the candles in the Advent Wreath are purple for three Sundays, and pink today [not because we might focus on Mary!] but to emphasise the*

*looking forward in anticipation and hope, with joy. In some churches the Priest will wear a pink stole and robes in place of the sombre purple of other weeks.*

*For this service, you may wish to have a third candle, to add to the previous two, the same candle you have lit each time, or simply note the pictures.*

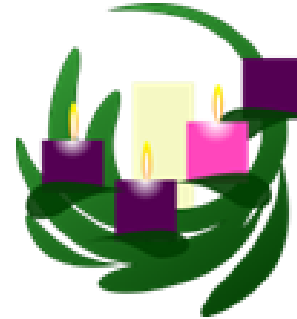
## WE PREPARE

Sing songs of hope into the waiting air  
and begin the dance of joy,  
for the life of faith is before us.

Look into the distance, and see the rising dawn  
with shining rays like acts of love  
and warming brightness from the heart of God.

Let us sing praises to God  
and watch for the Christ;  
for in the longing of Advent  
lies the promise of good which is yet to come.

**We light our third Advent Candle,**



**1<sup>st</sup> candle;** we light this candle as a sign that the Word of God is ever present in the world

**2<sup>nd</sup> candle;** we light this candle as a sign that in life's rough places we are called to prepare the way for our God

**3<sup>rd</sup> candle;** we light this candle as a sign that in the darkness of the struggle for life, the Light for all the World in every generation is surely coming

Be known to us now, Holy Spirit.  
Come and enlarge our faith so that  
we may watch and wait in hope.  
Show to us your life which is present in the silences.  
Show to us your mind and speak into the emptiness.  
Come, gracious Spirit, come.

## HYMN

Long ago, prophets knew  
Christ would come, born a Jew,  
come to make all things new;  
bear his people's burden,  
freely love and pardon.

*Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring!*  
*Sing, choirs, sing, sing, sing!*  
When he comes,  
when he comes,  
who will make him welcome?

God in time, God in man,  
this is God's timeless plan:  
He will come, as a man,  
born himself of woman,  
*Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring!...*

Mary hail! Though afraid,  
she believed, she obeyed.  
In her womb, God is laid:  
till the time expected,  
nurtured and protected,  
*Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring!...*

Journey ends! Where afar  
Bethlehem shines, like a star,  
stable door stands ajar.  
unborn Son of Mary,  
Saviour, do not tarry!

*Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring!*  
*Sing, choirs, sing, sing, sing!*  
Jesus comes!  
Jesus comes!  
We will make him welcome!

**We say, 'Sorry'...**

O God, it is sometimes in the centre of the waiting  
that we lose hold of hope,  
when we have moved past the enthusiasm of our beginnings  
but are not yet near enough to see your gifts to us.  
We long for quicker answers  
and find ourselves impatient to know your will  
and to see your face more clearly.

*silent reflection*

Be with us in our anxieties, Jesus Christ.  
Take our hands and lead us towards your grace.

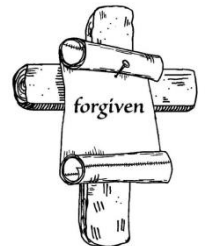
O God, sometimes we discover  
small beginnings of your work in us,  
seeds of new life which call us on to greater things  
and we let that die in us because we are afraid;  
or we see that happening in others and we fail to encourage them  
in case they may bring changes which we do not want  
or because we fear for them as they take new steps in life.

*silent reflection*

Be with us in our anxieties, Jesus Christ.  
Take our hands and lead us towards your grace.  
Forgive us and restore us to your way, we pray. Amen.

**...and receive Assurance of God's Pardon...**

God is faithful to us forever.  
The Christ will visit us with renewing kindness.  
We are forgiven.  
Thanks be to God. Amen.



### We give Thanks...

We give thanks to you, O God,  
that day after day, year after year,  
we can have absolute confidence  
in your love for us  
and in your understanding of our journey.

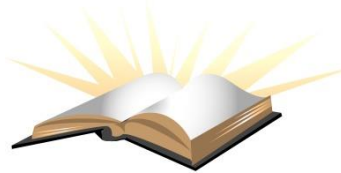
We thank you for the moments  
when we find that faithfulness in other people,  
in those who have become your good servants.  
Thanks be to God. Amen.

### A Collect for today

Come, Holy Spirit of God, come upon us,  
that you may send us out in your power.

Fill us with your grace and goodness,  
that we may be able to bring the Good News to the oppressed,  
to comfort the broken-hearted,  
and to bring liberty and freedom to your people;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

### THE WORD OF GOD



### Canticle: The Magnificat

<sup>46</sup> And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord,  
<sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,  
<sup>48</sup> for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.  
For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
<sup>49</sup> for he who is mighty has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.

<sup>50</sup> And his mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.  
<sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;  
<sup>52</sup> he has brought down the mighty from their thrones  
and exalted those of humble estate;  
<sup>53</sup> he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and the rich he has sent away empty.  
<sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
<sup>55</sup> as he spoke to our fathers,  
to Abraham and to his offspring forever."

### Gospel Reading

John 1:6-8, 19-28

<sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup> He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

### The Testimony of John the Baptist

<sup>19</sup> And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" <sup>20</sup> He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." <sup>21</sup> And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." <sup>22</sup> So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" <sup>23</sup> He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight<sup>[a]</sup> the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

<sup>24</sup> (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) <sup>25</sup> They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" <sup>26</sup> John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, <sup>27</sup> even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." <sup>28</sup> These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

## SONG

*El-Shaddai, El-Shaddai*  
*(God almighty, God almighty),*  
*El-Elyon na Adonai*  
*(God in the highest, O Lord),*  
*age to age You're still the same*  
*by the power of the name.*  
*El-Shaddai, El-Shaddai*  
*(God almighty, God almighty),*  
*Erkamka na Adonai*  
*(We will love You, O Lord),*  
*we will praise and lift You high,*  
*El-Shaddai.*

Through Your love and through the ram  
You saved the son of Abraham.  
Through the power of Your hand,  
turned the sea into dry land.  
To the outcast on her knees  
You were the God who really sees,  
and by Your might You set Your children free.

*El-Shaddai, El-Shaddai . . .*

Through the years You made it clear,  
that the time of Christ was near.  
Though the people couldn't see  
what Messiah ought to be.  
Though Your word contained the plan  
they just could not understand.  
Your most awesome work was done  
through the frailty of Your Son.

*El-Shaddai, El-Shaddai . . .*

## Reflection

Twelve more sleeps and Jesus will again be born into the world! This reminder of new birth is reliable; year after year, regardless of anything, Christmas reminds us that God does not stand at a distance waiting for us to go to him, but comes to us and is always with us.

For the young teenager Mary, Christmas is a radical, never before, never again, experience of the power of the living God. Like many girls her age, fourteen or fifteen perhaps, she is betrothed to a much older man she hardly knows. It frightens her to think about leaving home as his wife. But it doesn't frighten her as much as the news just brought by an angelic visit; that news would have caused a grown woman to tremble. From within his gleaming brightness, he told her she would have a baby; God's Son. After just a moment, Mary found herself accepting the call, offering herself as God's servant.

Wasting no time, she travels away to take stock with Cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth, a couple of generations older than Mary, is also expecting a child by God's grace; a son who would go on to become the 'Voice of one in the wilderness', who would prepare the way for Mary's Son; but that is thirty years in the future. The now is very different.

Now, Mary is scared. Being pregnant outside of wedlock is a disgrace. Her family might disown her, her fiancé might break off the engagement, she might have to move out of town, she could be stoned for her 'behaviour'. She is numb.

Yet as soon as Elizabeth claps eyes on her young cousin, she declares, 'Blessed are you'. Blessed - happy, hallowed, holy. Suddenly Mary knows deep within that everything will be alright, and totally filled with joy, she feels a song coming on. Words are not enough; it has to be music, and she begins to sing. An improvised song leaning on her Jewish heritage and Scripture, it is rich and rejoices at the privilege of serving God. It confirms God's great power, looks forward to God's transformation of the world through his Son, and praises God for his faithful promise to Abraham, the Father of the Nation.

Now, it points us to God and offers us examples of how we are called, with Mary, to trust and believe in him and his Son, all he does and will do with and for us, and to rejoice.

Mary's Song [we call it the 'Magnificat' - from its Latin opening] is magnificent in its energy, and possibly the most famous song in history. It has been transformed into scores [*musical pun*] of great works for choirs throughout the ages, from Monteverdi, Vivaldi, J.S.Bach, Rachmaninoff through to the contemporary composers, Tavener, Rutter, Pärt and many more. Sung out in immense works, whispered in private prayer, chanted in evensong, it has been offered in great cathedrals, village churches, tiny chapels, outside, for generations.

Let us just return to the opening line, for it is rather curious. 'My soul magnifies the Lord'. My dictionary says of 'magnifies', 'to make [an object] appear larger than it is...'. Mary declares that her soul magnifies the Lord, yet it is surely impossible to make the Lord, the God who created everything from nothing, the One who is in all places at all times, any larger? Just what is she saying?

It seems the only way for us to magnify our Lord, is to draw close to him. At a distance something appears small, the closer we get, the bigger it becomes, we see greater detail, hear more clearly, feel more deeply. So it is with our Lord.

Mary became the human mother to God's Son on earth; she was a regular kind of person who accepted God's call when it came.

When God's call comes to us regular folk, whatever form it may take, how will we respond? Will we accept it with hope and joy and even a song? Above all, will we magnify the Lord, seek to draw ever close to him, allow him to fill all our senses and be the biggest, greatest part of our life? What better time than when we remember Jesus' coming to us, than to get really close to him? When we do, there is no telling what might happen! Amen.

**SONG** **Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!**

Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;  
tender to me the promise of His word;  
in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of His name!  
Make known His might, the deeds His arm has done;  
His mercy sure, from age to age the same;  
His holy name, the Lord, the Mighty One.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of His might!  
Powers and dominions lay their glory by.  
Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,  
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

Tell out, my soul, the glories of His word!  
Firm is His promise, and His mercy sure.  
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord  
to children's children and for evermore!

## WE PRAY TOGETHER

Loving God, we dare not sing a glad song this day  
without bringing before you those  
for whom singing a song of joy  
is a costly and hard-won moment of hope,  
and those for whom singing a song of joy  
seems impossible and may never cross their minds....

*silent reflection*

Lord, as we come thankful that the Covid-19 vaccination programme  
is beginning; we bring to those for whom it is too late, or too far off,  
or outside their grasp...

*silent reflection*

Lord, as we come thankful that we may worship you; we bring those  
who are persecuted for their faith, forbidden to worship you or sing  
hymns or read your Word...

*silent reflection*

Lord, as we come thankful for the comforts we have, our food,  
warmth, homes; we bring those who are homeless, hungry, reliant on  
charity, recently unemployed, fear for their future...

*silent reflection*

Lord, as we come thankful for company; we bring those who are  
lonely, alone, barred from meeting friends and family by the Covid  
restrictions...

*silent reflection*

Lord, as we come thankful for health and hope; we bring those who  
are dis-eased in body, mind or heart, those who have lost loved  
ones, those at the end of their tether...

*silent reflection*

### A prayer for ourselves

Closer to You, Lord, and closer still,  
'til I am wholly in Your will,  
closer to hear Your beating heart,  
and understand what You impart.  
O Breath of life, come purify  
this heart of mine, and satisfy;  
my deep desire is to worship You –  
Lord of my life, come closer still.

And we make our prayers  
in the name of the One who taught us to pray,  
Our Father who art in heaven.....



# Advent

*A Season of Hope  
& Expectation*

## HYMN

### **I will sing the wondrous story**

of the Christ who died for me –  
how He left the realms of glory  
for the cross on Calvary.

Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story  
of the Christ who died for me –  
sing it with His saints in glory,  
gathered by the crystal sea.

I was lost: but Jesus found me,  
found the sheep that went astray,  
raised me up and gently led me  
back into the narrow way.

Days of darkness still may meet me,  
sorrow's path I oft may tread;  
but His presence still is with me,  
by His guiding hand I'm led.

He will keep me till the river  
rolls its waters at my feet:  
then He'll bear me safely over,  
made by grace for glory meet.  
Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story  
of the Christ who died for me –  
sing it with His saints in glory,  
gathered by the crystal sea.

## OUR SERVICE DRAWS TO A CLOSE

May we go, knowing that Christ is near and soon we will hear the  
sounds of joy.

And may the whole earth be renewed by its God,  
the universe sound with Christ's promise of coming life  
and the Spirit surround us with a cloud of grace. Amen.

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*Service material drawn from:  
'Liturgies for High Days' by Dorothy McRae-McMahon  
Hymns taken from Mission Praise, CCL#999402  
Service and reflection put together by Claire*