

THE CAMEL-ALLEN CHURCHES  
CHRISTMAS WORSHIP AT HOME - 2020



CHRISTMAS EVE

Welcome all wonders in one sight!  
Eternity shut in a span.  
Summer in winter, day in night,  
Heaven in earth and God in man.  
Great little one whose all-embracing birth  
Brings earth to heaven, stoops heaven to earth.

O little town of Bethlehem  
How still we see thee lie!  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep  
The silent stars go by  
Yet in the dark street shineth

*Hymn*

The everlasting Light  
The hopes and fears of all the years  
Are met in thee tonight

For Christ is born of Mary  
And gathered all above  
While mortals sleep, the angels keep  
Their watch of wondering love  
O morning stars, together  
Proclaim the holy birth  
And praises sing to God, the King  
And peace to men on earth

How silently, how silently  
The wondrous Gift is given!  
So God imparts to human hearts  
The blessings of His heaven  
No ear may hear His coming  
But in this world of sin  
Where meek souls will receive Him still  
The dear Christ enters in

O holy child of Bethlehem,  
descend to us we pray;  
cast out our sin and enter in,  
be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels  
the great glad tidings tell:  
O come to us abide with us,  
our Lord Emmanuel.

***We confess our sins and receive God's forgiveness***

Christ the light of the world has come  
to dispel the darkness of our hearts.  
In his light let us examine ourselves and confess our sins.

God our Father,  
you sent your Son, full of grace and truth;  
forgive our failure to receive him.  
Lord have mercy. **Lord have mercy.**

Jesus, our Saviour,  
you were born in poverty and laid in a manger:  
forgive our greed and rejection of your ways.  
Christ have mercy. **Christ have mercy.**

Spirit of Love,  
your servant Mary responded joyfully to your call:  
forgive the hardness of our hearts.  
Lord have mercy, **Lord have mercy.**

May the God of healing and forgiveness  
draw you to himself that you may behold  
the glory of his Son, the Word made flesh,  
and be cleansed from all your sins  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**



***Gloria***

**Glory to God in the highest,  
and peace to his people on earth.**

**Lord God, heavenly King,  
almighty God and Father,  
we worship you, we give you thanks,  
we praise you for your glory.**

**Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,  
Lord God, Lamb of God,  
you take away the sin of the world:  
have mercy on us;  
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:  
receive our prayer.**

**For you alone are the Holy One,  
you alone are the Lord,  
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,  
with the Holy Spirit,  
in the glory of God the Father.  
Amen**

***The Collect***

Let us pray in the peace of this Christmas celebration  
that our joy in the birth of Christ may fill our hearts and lives.

***Silence is kept***

Eternal God,  
who made this most holy night  
to shine with the brightness of your one true light:  
bring us, who have known the revelation of that light on earth,  
to see the radiance of your heavenly glory;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and forever. **Amen**

## Reading

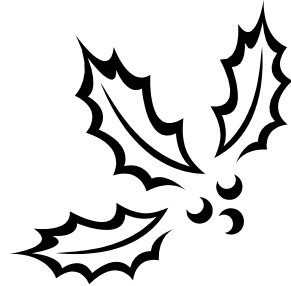
### Isaiah 52. 7-10

<sup>7</sup> *How beautiful upon the mountains  
are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,  
who brings good news,  
who announces salvation,  
who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'*

<sup>8</sup> *Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices,  
together they sing for joy;  
for in plain sight they see  
the return of the Lord to Zion.*

<sup>9</sup> *Break forth together into singing,  
you ruins of Jerusalem;  
for the Lord has comforted his people,  
he has redeemed Jerusalem.*

<sup>10</sup> *The Lord has bared his holy arm  
before the eyes of all the nations;  
and all the ends of the earth shall see  
the salvation of our God.*



## Hymn

While shepherds watched  
Their flocks by night  
All seated on the ground  
The angel of the Lord came down  
And glory shone around

"Fear not," said he, (for mighty dread  
Had seized their troubled minds)  
"Glad tidings of great joy I bring  
To you and all mankind.

"To you in David's town this day  
Is born of David's line  
A Saviour, who is Christ the Lord -  
And this shall be a sign

"The heavenly Babe you there shall find  
To human view displayed  
And meanly wrapped in swaddling bands  
And in a manger laid.'

Thus spake the seraph, and forthwith  
Appeared a shining throng  
Of angels praising God, who thus  
Addressed their joyful song:

"All glory be to God on high  
And to the earth be peace;  
Goodwill henceforth from heaven to men  
Begin and never cease.'



**John 1. 1-14**

*1In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup>in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*

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

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

*14 And 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.*



So, we're nearly there! It's almost time! But, for now, we wait. Each perhaps, for different things, but wait all the same...

May be we wait to see just what *is* in that strangely-shaped parcel under the tree? Wait to find out if Father Christmas got our letter and has brought what we want?

Wait for the crunch of tyres on the gravel, or that special knock on the door saying, 'we've arrived' - family or friends we've perhaps not seen for months during this very strange year?

Wait to celebrate with a new family member – a partner, child or grandchild? Or perhaps, to see how it feels for the first time with an empty chair in the place a loved one always sat? Or, under the restrictions, with a much reduced gathering?

Do we wait for a jolly 'phone call or simply to see if the pudding is as 'ultimate' as Nigella promised?

Whatever we're waiting for, it will come, in time. Life so often involves waiting and always has. 2,000 years ago the whole world was waiting for God to act just as he had promised.

Right at the very beginning, before time, Heaven watched as God created the world; seen how he adored all he'd made - especially those in his own image. God was delighted as he breathed life into man and woman; all was love, peace, hope and joy. Until those same humans broke the one house rule and damaged that perfect relationship with God; hiding, growing away from him, forgetting about him, breaking his heart.

Never compelling them to return, God worked on a recovery plan and history, His Story, unfolded. Time and again, in love, God called the people back; time and again the people didn't listen.

Now, in the biggest love-act ever, it is God's time. Taking on flesh and blood, he becomes a real, vulnerable, human baby. It's very risky; he'll depend on those he created to sustain him, he will be at their mercy; with no magical escape should things turn sour.

But that doesn't stop him, he needs humans to know he, God, knows what it's like to be human. In his love for each one, he's prepared to take that huge risk. And today, although it doesn't yet know it, the world stands on the brink of the greatest moment ever...

The Gospel [the Good News of Christ] reading says, '*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us*'. (John 1: 14). To put it another way, 'there, in a smelly, straw-lined stable; a new-born boy with wrinkled skin and a puckered face lets out his very first cry. A cry that says, 'I have arrived!' 'I'm here!' 'Nothing will ever be the same again!''

The verse continues, '*We have seen his glory.*' God's glory? We might think of thunder and lightning, mountains and valleys, blazing sunsets; absolutely, but God's ultimate glory is his love, his goodness, his gift to us in that baby, Jesus.

Yet, it's not a glorious start. Bethlehem is full, but quiet – tired visitors sleep. No one assists. There's no palace, no crown, no silk for the new-born King. Just a few grubby shepherds say, 'Hello'.

Next day, the traders are unaware that God has come. The innkeeper wouldn't believe he'd sent the Lord to a stable. People would scoff should anyone tell them the Saviour of the World is sleeping in a manger of hay.

Most people missed Jesus' arrival that night, not deliberately, not because of dishonest acts or wrong intent; rather, because they simply weren't looking.

Has much changed in the 2000 years since?

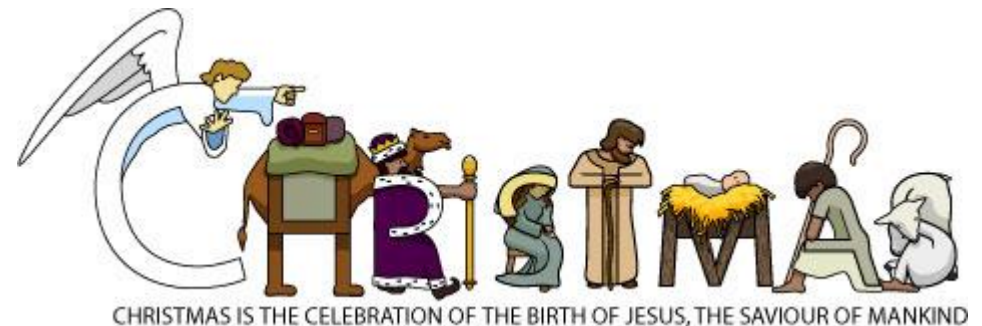
During the 'Season of Goodwill'; things are different from normal. Perhaps we chat with people who irritate us the rest of the year. We wish strangers a 'Happy Christmas!' We might give more generously to others, those we know and those we don't.

There can be no coincidence that things are different in the time of the year when so many more are looking to Jesus; receiving the love, peace, hope and joy that only he can give; giving to him in acts of kindness to one another; worshipping him.

But, of course, Jesus didn't risk being born a baby and living a human life to die a terrible death that we might look to him for only a few hours or days, each year. Rather, Jesus came that we might each live a fully restored relationship with God, our Creator. Life as he wants it to be, each and every day.

The gift of Jesus Christ is given to all, but God never makes or compels us to open it. We can choose our response - whether to disregard it, put it away for another time, or whether to open ourselves and receive the greatest gift ever, freely given, with Love from God.

At this Christmas time, what are we waiting for?



## *Affirmation of Faith*

**I believe in God,  
the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ,  
his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting.  
Amen.**

## *Hymn*

Silent night, holy night!  
All is calm, all is bright  
round yon virgin mother and child!  
Holy infant, so tender and mild,  
sleep in heavenly peace,  
sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night!  
Shepherds quake at the sight:  
glories stream from heaven afar,  
heav'nly hosts sing, "Alleluia!  
Christ the Saviour is born,  
Christ the Saviour is born!"

Silent night, holy night!  
Son of God, love's pure light,  
radiant, beams from thy holy face  
with the dawn of redeeming grace,  
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth,  
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth!



## Prayers

Let us pray to Jesus our Saviour.  
Christ, born in a stable,  
give courage to all who are homeless.  
Jesus, Saviour,  
**hear our prayer.**

Christ, for whom the angels sang,  
give the song of the kingdom to all who weep.  
Jesus, Saviour,  
**hear our prayer.**

Christ, worshipped by the shepherds,  
give peace on earth to all who are oppressed.  
Jesus, Saviour,  
**hear our prayer.**

Christ, before whom the wise men knelt,  
give humility and wisdom to all who govern.  
Jesus, Saviour,  
**hear our prayer.**

Christ, whose radiance filled a lowly manger,  
give the glory of your resurrection to all who rest in you.  
Jesus, Saviour,  
**hear our prayer.**

**Jesus, Saviour, child of Mary,  
you know us and love us,  
you share our lives  
and hear our prayer.  
Glory to you for ever. Amen.**

## Hymn

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.

God of God, Light of light eternal,  
Lo he abhors not the virgin's womb;  
Very God, begotten not created.

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,  
sing, all ye citizens of heav'n above:  
"Glory to God, in the highest!"

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



*Closing prayer and blessing*

May the Father,  
who has loved the eternal Son  
from before the foundation of the world,  
shed that love upon us his children.

**Amen.**

May Christ,  
who by his incarnation gathered into one  
things earthly and heavenly,  
fill us with joy and peace.

**Amen.**

May the Holy Spirit,  
by whose overshadowing Mary became the God-bearer,  
give us grace to carry the good news of Christ.

**Amen.**

And the blessing of God almighty,  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
be among us and remain with us always.

**Amen.**



## CHRISTMAS MORNING



*All five candles of our Advent wreath are lit...*

I bring you good news of great joy:  
**a Saviour has been born to us.**

Unto us a child is born,  
**unto us a Son is given.**

He is Christ the Lord.  
**We worship and adore him.**

Once in royal David's city,  
Stood a lowly cattle shed,  
Where a mother laid her Baby,  
In a manger for His bed:  
Mary was that mother mild,  
Jesus Christ, her little Child.

### *Hymn*

Christ comes in humility to share our lives:  
forgive our pride.  
Lord have mercy,  
**Lord have mercy.**

Christ comes with good news for all people:  
forgive our silence.

### *Prayers of Penitence*

He came down to earth from heaven,  
Who is God and Lord of all,  
And His shelter was a stable,  
And His cradle was a stall:  
With the poor, and mean, and lowly,  
Lived on earth our Saviour holy.

For He is our childhood's pattern;  
Day by day, like us, He grew;  
He was little, weak, and helpless,  
Tears and smiles, like us He knew;  
And He cares when we are sad,  
And he shares when we are glad.

And our eyes at last shall see Him,  
Through His own redeeming love;  
For that Child so dear and gentle,  
Is our Lord in heaven above:  
And He leads His children on,  
To the place where He is gone.

Christ have mercy,  
**Christ have mercy.**

Christ comes in love to a world of suffering:  
forgive our self-centredness.

Lord have mercy,  
**Lord have mercy.**

### *Receiving God's Forgiveness*

May God who loved the world so much  
that he sent his Son to be our Saviour  
forgive us our sins  
and make us holy to serve him in the world.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

### *Bible Reading*

#### **Isaiah 9.2-7**

<sup>2</sup> The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—  
on them light has shined.

<sup>3</sup> You have multiplied the nation,  
you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as with joy at the harvest,  
as people exult when dividing plunder.

<sup>4</sup> For the yoke of their burden,  
and the bar across their shoulders,  
the rod of their oppressor,  
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

<sup>5</sup> For all the boots of the tramping warriors  
and all the garments rolled in blood  
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

<sup>6</sup> For 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.

<sup>7</sup> His 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.



## Hymn

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,  
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.  
The stars in the night 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 Thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky  
And stay by my cradle until morning is nigh.

Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask Thee to stay  
Close by me forever, and love me, I pray.  
Bless all the dear children in thy tender care,  
And fit us for heaven, to live with Thee there.

## Gospel Reading

### Luke 2.1-20

<sup>2.1</sup> In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup>This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup>All went to their own towns to be registered. <sup>4</sup>Joseph 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. <sup>5</sup>He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup>While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. <sup>7</sup>And 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.

<sup>8</sup> In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup>Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup>But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: <sup>11</sup>to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup>This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' <sup>13</sup>And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

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

<sup>15</sup> When 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.' <sup>16</sup>So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup>When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; <sup>18</sup>and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup>But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup>The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.



## Reflection

*'Christmas is Cancelled'* Newspaper headlines December 20 2020

Joseph had been making a wedding canopy for the past few months, now. He worked on it at twilight, when he had finished all his tasks for the day but when it was still light enough to see in the workshop. Three sides were decorated, now: ornate, floral carvings which alluded to the roses and lilies in the Song of Songs. I traced my finger across the leaf pattern, feeling the grooves twisting through the cedar wood.

I'd been excited about the wedding. Not just for us, or even for just our families, but because it would be such a big celebration and involve the whole village. It's all cancelled now though.

"It's not cancelled," Joseph said, "It's just different. We're still getting married, Mary. The important thing is that we love each other."

But it sounded like he was trying to convince himself. The celebrations were being replaced by a quick, private ceremony and nobody was feeling festive. I had thought about my wedding since I was a little girl. The special jewellery, the veil, the feast. But now everything had changed. I didn't have time to think about being a bride. I was going to be a mother. Already my ankles were swollen and a neat bump was visible beneath even my most floaty dresses.

The next time I visited Joseph's workshop, I saw that he had stopped working on the canopy and started making a crib. It was his way of saying the very complicated things it was difficult for us to say to each other at the moment. I looked at the effort and attention to detail he was making for a child that was not his own. I told myself it was our love that mattered, not the wedding. I tried not to be too disappointed.

We began to plan the birth with a rising level of bubbling excitement. All the women in my family would come and stay. They would bring food and drink and their love and support would hold me through the pain and the fear. We would feel surrounded by the village, by the reassuring presence of my mother and aunts who had been there and done this very dangerous thing before. Their love would be like a glowing lantern. I began to feel excited.

But then, one day, Joseph returned from town with an ashen face and tears in his eyes. He was trembling. "Mary," he said. "I've got some bad news. The government have made an announcement."

So, it turned out we wouldn't be having the baby at home after all. We would be travelling to Bethlehem, where Joseph's ancestors were from. Instead of nesting here in Nazareth, and getting the house ready, we would be travelling. We wouldn't even be able to bring the crib.

"It's ok, Mary," Joseph said. "We'll find a lovely inn. There's plenty in Bethlehem." And the crib will be ready and waiting when we get back. It's going to be all right."

It was a starry night when we began the journey to Bethlehem. By this time, I was so pregnant I couldn't sleep anyway. Perhaps we were naïve, but we didn't anticipate the surging crowds that would overwhelm the small town. The noise of the crowd, the pushing and jostling, the smell of too many bodies. Children screaming as they lost sight of their parents, oxen and donkeys, the cry of street sellers. And it looked like everywhere was fully booked. I began to cry.

"This is terrible." I said. "Nothing is going to plan. This is meant to be a special baby and we are giving him the most terrible start."

“We’ll find somewhere,” said Joseph. “There’s got to be an inn somewhere in Bethlehem with a space left for a pregnant lady.”

There wasn’t. We ended up in a back room where the animals are kept. It stank of sheep. And instead of the beautiful crib Joseph had made, the best we could do was a feeding trough.

“I feel like the worst mother in the world.” I said.

“Nonsense,” said Joseph. “It’s just for a couple of nights. We’ll get home to Nazareth by the end of the week.”

I had lost my dream wedding, and now we were about as far as you could possibly get from a perfect birth. Nobody knew us here. Nobody was going to visit. We were alone.

“It’s going to be all right,” said Joseph.

“None of this is what we wanted,” I lamented. “None of this is what we planned. The angel said I was blessed among women. He must have been having a laugh.” Somewhere outside, some sheep were bleating. “I don’t think I can do this,” I said. “I don’t feel like I have any strength left.”

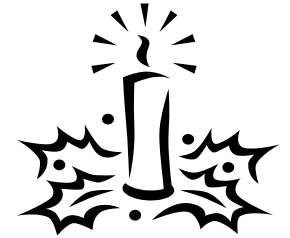
“Look,” said Joseph. He was pointing through the window in the door of the stable. It was the brightest star I had ever seen.

*Adapted from a story by Sorrel Shamel-Wood – used with permission.*

Our circumstances may be tough, things may not be as we had hoped or planned, but Christmas is not cancelled. Christmas isn’t about HOW we celebrate but WHO we celebrate: Christ has already come and God is with us!



Heavenly Father, in a week usually so full of excited anticipation  
When sleeps are counted, hope is heralded  
And the star of Christmas shines brightly,  
It’s hard not to feel under siege.  
Plans have been abandoned  
Hopes of respite and reunion dashed  
And fear has grown as the virus mutates, outwits and spreads further.  
Help us to keep our eyes on you,  
The wonder of your son  
The miracle of hope  
Whose light doesn’t dim  
And love never falters.  
We give you thanks,  
In Jesus name,  
Amen



### Hymn

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!  
Let earth receive its king;  
let ev’ry heart prepare him room,  
and heav’n and nature sing,  
and heav’n and nature sing,  
and heav’n, and heav’n and nature sing.

Joy to the world, the Saviour reigns!  
Let all their songs employ  
while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains,  
repeat the sounding joy,  
repeat the sounding joy,  
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

He rules the world with truth and grace,  
and makes the nations prove  
the glories of his righteousness,  
and wonders of his love,  
and wonders of his love,  
and wonders, wonders of his love.

### Prayers

*Please add your prayers as appropriate...*

Jesus, born in a human family:  
We pray for... (families)  
Lord Jesus,  
**Hear our prayer.**

Jesus cradled in a manger:  
We pray for ... (homeless and refugees)  
Lord Jesus,  
**Hear our prayer.**

Jesus, sharing a stable with the animals:  
We pray for... (creation)  
Lord Jesus,  
**Hear our prayer.**

Jesus, worshipped by shepherds and kings:  
We pray for ... (nations, peoples)  
Lord Jesus,  
**Hear our prayer.**

Jesus, Emmanuel - God with us  
We pray for ... (those in particular need)  
Lord Jesus,  
**Hear our prayer. Amen.**

### The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven...



### Hymn

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 man to dwell,  
Jesus, our Emmanuel.

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 we no more may die,  
born to raise the sons of earth,  
born to give us second birth.

***Closing Prayer and Blessing***

Jesus, son of Mary, Son of God,  
We join with the worship of the angels  
may we never lose that heavenly vision.  
Like the shepherds and the wise men,  
We rejoice at the news of your birth;  
help us to proclaim this message in word and deed  
To your praise and glory. **Amen**

And the blessing of God, Almighty  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit  
be with us and remain with us always. **Amen.**

**Jesus, is born: Emmanuel, God is with us!**

**We wish you and your loved ones wherever they are  
a happy, safe and peaceful Christmas**







SUNDAY 27<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER

FIRST SUNDAY OF CHRISTMAS



*We still our hearts to worship God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit*

Angels from the realms of glory,  
wing your flight o'er all the earth;  
ye who sang creation's story  
now proclaim Messiah's birth:

Come and worship,  
Christ the newborn King:  
come and worship,  
worship Christ, the newborn King.

Shepherds, in the field abiding,  
watching o'er your flocks by night,  
God with us is now residing;  
yonder shines the infant light:

Sages, leave your contemplations,  
brighter visions beam afar;  
seek the great Desire of nations;  
ye have seen his natal star:

Saints before the altar bending,  
watching long in hope and fear,  
suddenly the Lord, descending,  
in his temple shall appear:

Though an infant now we view him,  
he shall fill his Father's throne,  
gather all the nations to him;  
ev'ry knee shall then bow down:

*We confess our sins and receive God's forgiveness*

Lord of grace and truth,  
we confess our unworthiness  
to stand in your presence as your children.  
We have sinned  
**forgive and heal us.**

The Virgin Mary accepted your call  
to be the mother of Jesus.  
Forgive our disobedience to your will.  
We have sinned:  
**forgive and heal us.**

Your Son our Saviour  
was born in poverty in a manger.  
Forgive our greed and rejection of your ways.  
We have sinned:  
**forgive and heal us.**

The shepherds left their flocks  
to go to Bethlehem.  
Forgive our self-interest and lack of vision.  
We have sinned:  
**forgive and heal us.**

The wise men followed the star  
to find Jesus the King.  
Forgive our reluctance to seek you.  
We have sinned:  
**forgive and heal us.**

May the God of all healing and forgiveness  
draw *us* to himself  
and cleanse *us* from all *our* sins,  
that *we* may behold the glory of his Son,  
the Word made flesh,  
Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

### Reading

#### Gal 4.4-7

<sup>4</sup>But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup>in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. <sup>6</sup>And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' <sup>7</sup>So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.



It came upon the midnight clear,  
that glorious song of old,  
from angels bending near the earth  
to touch their harps of gold:  
"Peace on the earth, good will to men,  
from heaven's all-gracious King."  
The world in solemn stillness lay,  
to hear the angels sing.

Still through the cloven skies they come  
with peaceful wings unfurled,  
and still their heavenly music floats  
o'er all the weary world;  
above its sad and lowly plains,  
they bend on hovering wing,  
and ever o'er its Babel-sounds  
the blessed angels sing.

And ye, beneath life's crushing load,  
the world has suffered long;  
beneath the angel-strain have rolled  
two-thousand years of wrong;  
And warring humankind hears not  
the love-song which they bring:  
O hush the noise of mortal strife,  
and hear the angels sing!

For lo, the days are hastening on,  
by prophets seen of old,  
when with the ever-circling years  
comes round the age of gold;  
when peace shall over all the earth  
its ancient splendours fling,  
and all the world give back the song  
which now the angels sing.

## Gospel Reading

### Luke 2. 8-21

<sup>8</sup> In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: <sup>11</sup> to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup> This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' <sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

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

<sup>15</sup> When 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.' <sup>16</sup> So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup> When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; <sup>18</sup> and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup> The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.



## Reflection

*Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.*

Today with all the busy-ness of Christmas over perhaps we have time to reflect as Mary did, on what it all means...

Christmas shows us a God who is so committed to this complex world, to our complex world, that he is born into it as one of us. The things we celebrate and give thanks for today are the start of the solution to all of the issues we face, every single one. Because we know that this world and everyone in it is this precious to God, we must live with the conviction that everyone has worth and that life itself is sacred.

What God does in Jesus Christ is not sentimental or soft or sensible or safe. It is courageous and daring and selfless and determined. In Jesus, God is saying that he has had enough. Enough of being taken for granted. Enough of being forgotten. Enough of being kept far away. Enough of being protected and ignored. Enough. God comes in Jesus Christ, in the cold quiet of the night, to love us.

He creeps in next to us, because he wants to be with us. We have shoved him away for long enough, gone through the motions, kept up appearances. And God has had enough of it.

Christmas is an act of outrageous love. God in Jesus Christ lays aside his power and his might and is born, like us, into a world of dependence and need, into a world of risk and danger, into a world of love and possibility, into our world, like we were.

And he has a plan- to make the love of God so real, so tangible, so touchable, so present that we can no longer overlook it, or look around it. The world, the fragile, flawed, fallen, beautiful world, our fragile, flawed, fallen, beautiful world, is changed and healed and restored through this love, and so are we.

*Adapted from a piece by Richard Lamey, Rector of St Paul, Wokingham*

### *Affirmation of Faith*

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,  
source of all being and life,  
the one for whom we exist?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son,  
who took our human nature,  
died for us and rose again?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit,  
who gives life to the people of God  
and makes Christ known in the world?

**We believe and trust in him.**

This is the faith of the Church

**This is our faith.**

**We believe in one God;  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  
Amen.**

### *Hymn (tune: Greensleeves)*

What child is this who, laid to rest,  
on Mary's lap is sleeping?  
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,  
while shepherds watch are keeping?  
This, this is Christ the King,  
whom shepherds guard and angels sing:  
Come, greet the infant Lord,  
the babe the Son of Mary!

Why lies he in such mean estate,  
where ox and ass are feeding?  
Good Christians, fear,  
for sinners here, the silent Word is pleading.  
Nails, spear shall pierce him through,  
the cross be borne for me, for you:  
hail, hail, the Word made flesh,  
the babe, the Son of Mary!

So bring him incense, gold and myrrh,  
come rich and poor, to own him.  
The King of kings salvation brings,  
let loving hearts enthrone him.  
Riase, raise the song on high,  
the Virgin sings her lullaby:  
joy, joy for Christ is born,  
the babe, the Son of Mary!



## Prayers

Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given.  
Let us bring before God the needs of the world.

Wonderful counsellor,  
give your wisdom to the rulers of the nations.  
Lord, in your mercy  
**hear our prayer.**

Mighty God,  
make the whole world know  
that the government is on your shoulders.  
Lord, in your mercy  
**hear our prayer.**

Everlasting Father,  
establish your reign of justice and righteousness for ever.  
Lord, in your mercy  
**hear our prayer.**

Prince of peace,  
bring in the endless kingdom of your peace.  
Lord, in your mercy  
**hear our prayer.**

Almighty Lord,  
**hear our prayer**  
**and fulfil your purposes in us,**  
**as you accomplished your will**  
**in our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.**

## The Lord's prayer

Our Father, which art in heaven...

## Hymn

Go tell it on the mountain,  
over the hills and everywhere.  
Go tell it on the mountain  
that Jesus Christ is born.

While shepherds kept their watching  
o'er wand'ring flocks by night,  
behold from out of heaven,  
there shone a holy light.

And lo, when they had seen it,  
they all bowed down and prayed;  
they travelled on together  
To where the babe was laid.

When I was a seeker,  
I sought both night and day:  
I asked the Lord to help me  
and he showed me the way.

He made me a watchman  
Upon the city wall,  
And, if I a Christian,  
I am the least of all.



## *Blessing*

May the Holy Spirit,  
by whose overshadowing Mary became the God-bearer,  
give you grace to carry the good news of Christ.

**Amen.**

And the blessing of God Almighty,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit  
be upon us and remain with us  
and with those whom we love,  
this day and always. **Amen.**



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