

Advent & Christmas 2020



A booklet of reflections,
carols and prayers

Advent is a time of preparation for the feast of Christmas. Within the hustle and bustle of the preparation for Christmas, I invite you to take some time out of the business to prepare Spiritually for Christmas.

'Christmas is a time not just of rejoicing but also of reflection.'

Winston Churchill

It is my hope and prayer that you find this little booklet of Bible readings, Reflections, Carols and Prayers helpful in your Spiritual preparations.

The Church of England Carol service reminds us:

We come together as Christmas draws near to prepare for our celebration of the birth of God's beloved Son. Through the days of Advent we follow the light of Christ, and we travel in spirit with Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem to acclaim with the multitude of the heavenly host the coming of the Prince of Peace. Through Scripture and silence, prayer and song, let us hear again the wonderful story of our redemption, and, hearing, let us rejoice and respond with lively faith.

Almighty God,
you make us glad with the yearly remembrance
of the birth of your Son Jesus Christ:
grant that, as we joyfully receive him as our redeemer,
we may with sure confidence behold him
when he shall come to be our judge;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Read: Mark 13: 24-end

v. 26 See 'The Son of Man coming on the clouds'

Reflection

In what has been a difficult year how often do we stop to look at the sky – whether it be a sunrise or sunset, the stars and moon on a clear night, or the clouds passing over head. Do we stop and wonder if there is more than just our small planet, floating alone in the universe?

Where also do we look for signs of God's coming in the world – where are the glimmers of light that show us God's presence?

- *In family and friends*
- *In creation*
- *In praying for one another.*
- *Or do you see glimmers of God's presence in another way?*

Hymn

LO! HE COMES with clouds descending,
Once for favoured sinners slain;
Thousand, thousand saints attending
Swell the triumph of his train:
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!
God appears, on earth to reign.

Every eye shall now behold him
Robed in dreadful majesty;
Those who set at nought and sold him,
Pierced and nailed him to the tree,
Deeply wailing, deeply wailing, deeply wailing
Shall the true Messiah see.

Yea, Amen! let all adore thee,
High on thine eternal throne;
Saviour, take the power and glory:
Claim the kingdom for thine own:
O come quickly! O come quickly! O come quickly!
Alleluia! Come, Lord, come!

Prayer

O come quickly Lord, to our world.

We pray for all who are hungry, sick, lost or alone, for those who have no hope. Help us to open our eyes to see your presence & open our hearts to respond to those in need. We pray for all agencies preparing to help those in need this Christmas.

Amen



Where do you see glimmers of God's presence?

Read Haggai 2: 5b-9 'I will fill this house with splendour'

Reflect

What is it that we fear most? Do we fear that our churches will be too empty or too full? Are we afraid that the Lord of Hosts will come and shake the nations of the world, so that all will know that he is King of King and Lord of Lords? Are we ready for people to ask us questions about our faith in the Christ-child?

The Bible tells us we have nothing to fear if we put our trust in God v. 5b reminds us 'My spirit abides among you; do not fear.'

Hymn

COME, THOU LONG EXPECTED JESUS,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.

Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a King,
born to reign in us forever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.

By thine own eternal spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all sufficient merit,
raise us to thy glorious throne.

Prayer



'By thine own eternal spirit rule in all our hearts alone.'

Heavenly Father, help us to put our trust in you, the one who says to us 'do not fear.' Help us to trust in your Son, born to set all people free. We ask for opportunities to speak about our faith. We pray for all those who are held captive by fear. Help us to bring the freedom of your kingdom here to earth. **Amen**

Sunday 13th December 2020

Advent 3

Read Isaiah 9: 2, 6&7

‘The prophecy of the Messiah’s birth’

v.2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

Reflect

We read in this passage the wonderful words ‘Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Those of us who know Handel’s Messiah probably want to break into song ‘For unto us a child is born, and his name shall be called....

As we move towards the longest night, as we are still surrounded by the darkness of coronavirus, as we are faced with the uncertainty of our Christmas plans, it may feel like we are the people who are walking in darkness at this time. But can we hold on to those wonderful words – the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. In all the uncertainty we can still celebrate the birth of Jesus – the light which overcomes the darkness.

Carol

O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

how still we see thee lie

Above thy deep and dreamless sleep

The silent stars go by

Yet in thy dark streets shineth

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 to us today
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell
O come to us, abide with us
Our Lord Emmanuel

Prayer

'How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given.' Lord God as we wait this advent with the darkness and uncertainties of this world, let us still our hearts and minds to make space to see the light through the darkness and allow Christ to enter in. **Amen.**

Read Isaiah 40: 1-8

'A voice cried in the wilderness: prepare the way of the Lord'

Reflect

This passage from Isaiah resonates this year with the longing to be free from the thing that binds us, in Israel's case the bondage of slavery, for us this year from the restrictions imposed by the spread of the pandemic. Isaiah's words bring a message of comfort to Jerusalem, and herald good news to all people – prepare the Lord is coming, make way for him in your lives! As we reflect on Isaiah's words and this year

- *What have you lost (both good and bad)?*
- *What have you gained this year?*
- *What have you learnt?*

Hymn - *of longing for the Saviour to come, each verse starts with one of the names given to Jesus.*

O come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear
*Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel*

O come, O come, Thou Lord of Might
Who to Thy tribes, on Sinai's height
In ancient times didst give the law
In cloud, and majesty and awe,

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny
From depths of hell Thy people save
And give them victory o'er the grave,

O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And death's dark shadows put to flight,

O come, Thou Key of David, come
And open wide our heavenly home
Make safe the way that leads on high
And close the path to misery,

O come, Desire of nations, bind
In one the hearts of all mankind
Bid thou our sad divisions cease
And be thyself our King of Peace

Prayer

**O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here.**

Lord our hearts cry out to you – come
Come and comfort all those who are distressed
Come heal divisions
Come in might and dispel the darkness of our current time.
Come.
Amen



Christmas Week

Monday 21st December

Read Luke 1: 26-38

The Annunciation to Mary

Reflect

The annunciation

Angels move like electricity
and do not wear watches.
They are in the communications
business.

They attend training courses
in calming startled humans.
They visit often
but are usually well disguised.

They have their work to do.

But now and then

they let the mask slip

to show their true identities.

They do this when it matters

that there should be no misunderstanding.

Some have seen angels.

Be humble and expect them and they will come
in their own good time or rather in God's time.



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How many of us have hidden behind our masks this year? Whether the physical mask made of sterile surgical material or cloth, or the mask of our computer screens as we socially distance – how do let our masks slip? To whom have you been an angel recently? Have you let anyone be an angel to you?

Carol

THE ANGEL GABRIEL from heaven came,
his wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame:
'From God, all hail,' the angel said to Mary,
'most highly favoured lady!' Gloria!

'Fear not, for you shall bear a holy child,
by him shall we to God be reconciled;
his name shall be Emmanuel, the long-foretold:
most highly favoured lady!' Gloria!

Then gentle Mary humbly bowed her head:
'To me be as it pleases God,' she said,
'My soul shall praise and magnify his holy name.'
Most highly favoured lady! Gloria!

'And so,' she said, 'how happy I shall be!
All generations will remember me;
for God has kept his promises to Israel.'
Most highly favoured lady! Gloria!

Of her, Emmanuel - the Christ - was born
in Bethlehem, upon that Christmas morn.
And Christian folk throughout the world will ever say,
'Most highly favoured lady! Gloria!'

Prayer

'Glory to God in the highest'

Lord of all, help us to remember to give the glory back to you when we are visited by an angel in human form. We pray that we too may respond as Mary did "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" **Amen.**

Tuesday 22nd December

Read Luke 1: 39-56

The visit of Mary to Elizabeth

Reflect

This passage contains Mary's song – a song that she lived with throughout her life and sustained her even in those moments when everything seemed to end in disaster.

- *What sustains us when all seems to be (ending in) a disaster?*

v. 53 'He fills the hungry with good things and the rich he sent empty away'

- *Who do you know who is hungry?*

*Either for food **or** those who are hungry because they know that they have nothing of themselves, but that everything is a gift from God.*

Hymn

IN THE BLEAK MIDWINTER, frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,
In the bleak midwinter, long ago.

Our God, heaven cannot hold Him, nor earth sustain;
Heaven and earth shall flee away when He comes to reign.
In the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ.

Enough for Him, Whom cherubim, worship night and day,
Breast full of milk, and a manger full of hay;
Enough for Him, Whom angels fall before,
The ox and ass and camel which adore.

Angels and archangels may have gathered there,
Cherubim and seraphim thronged the air;
But His mother only, in her maiden bliss,
Worshipped the beloved with a kiss.

What can I give Him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give Him: give my heart.



Prayer

In the bleak mid-winter, we pray for those who are hungry, cold, sick, lost and alone. Help us to see the need and to reach out in any way we can. We pray for all agencies this Christmas who will feed the hungry, house the cold, tend the sick and give company to those who are lost and alone. **Amen.**

Wednesday 23rd December

Read Luke 1: 57-66

The Birth of John the Baptist.

Reflect

Elizabeth and Zachariah were surprised to be having a baby in the later years of their lives. They remained open to God, through the Holy Spirit. As we reflect on these words today, we might also like to read on to include vv 67-80. God is always a God of surprises.

- *How do we stay open to the God of surprises?*
- *How do we stay open to the Spirit of God that moves at will?*
- *Where are we too comfortable to be surprised by grace?*

Hymn

LIKE A CANDLE FLAME

Flickering small

In our darkness

Uncreated light

Shines through infant eyes

God is with us Alleluia

Come to save us

Alleluia, alleluia

Stars and angels sing

Yet the earth

Sleeps in shadows

Can this tiny spark

Set a world on fire

Yet His light will shine

From our lives

Spirit blazing

As we touch the flame

Of His holy fire

Prayer



Alleluia God is with us...

Lord God,
We pray that we will allow your
spark
to fill our lives this day.
Help us to open our lives
to again be surprised and delighted
by the birth of Jesus
the light of the world
Amen.

Thursday 24th December Christmas Eve

Read: John 1:1-14 The Incarnation of the Word of God
v.14 The Word became flesh and lived among us and we have seen his
glory.

Reflect *These words from the start of John's gospel shout Christmas to so many of us, often heard at Midnight Mass or Carols from Kings. They also echo the words in Genesis 1 'God said let there be light and there was light.' On this most holy of days let us wonder again at the magnitude of the Word of God (Jesus), who was there at the beginning with God, becoming flesh and living among us. Today let us reflect on Emmanuel which means God is with us.*

Hymn

ON CHRISTMAS NIGHT all Christians sing
to hear the news the angels bring;
on Christmas night all Christians sing
to hear the news the angels bring:
news of great joy, news of great mirth,
news of our merciful King's birth.

Then why should we on earth be sad
since our Redeemer made us glad;
then why should we on earth be sad
since our Redeemer made us glad
when from our sin he set us free,
all for to gain our liberty?

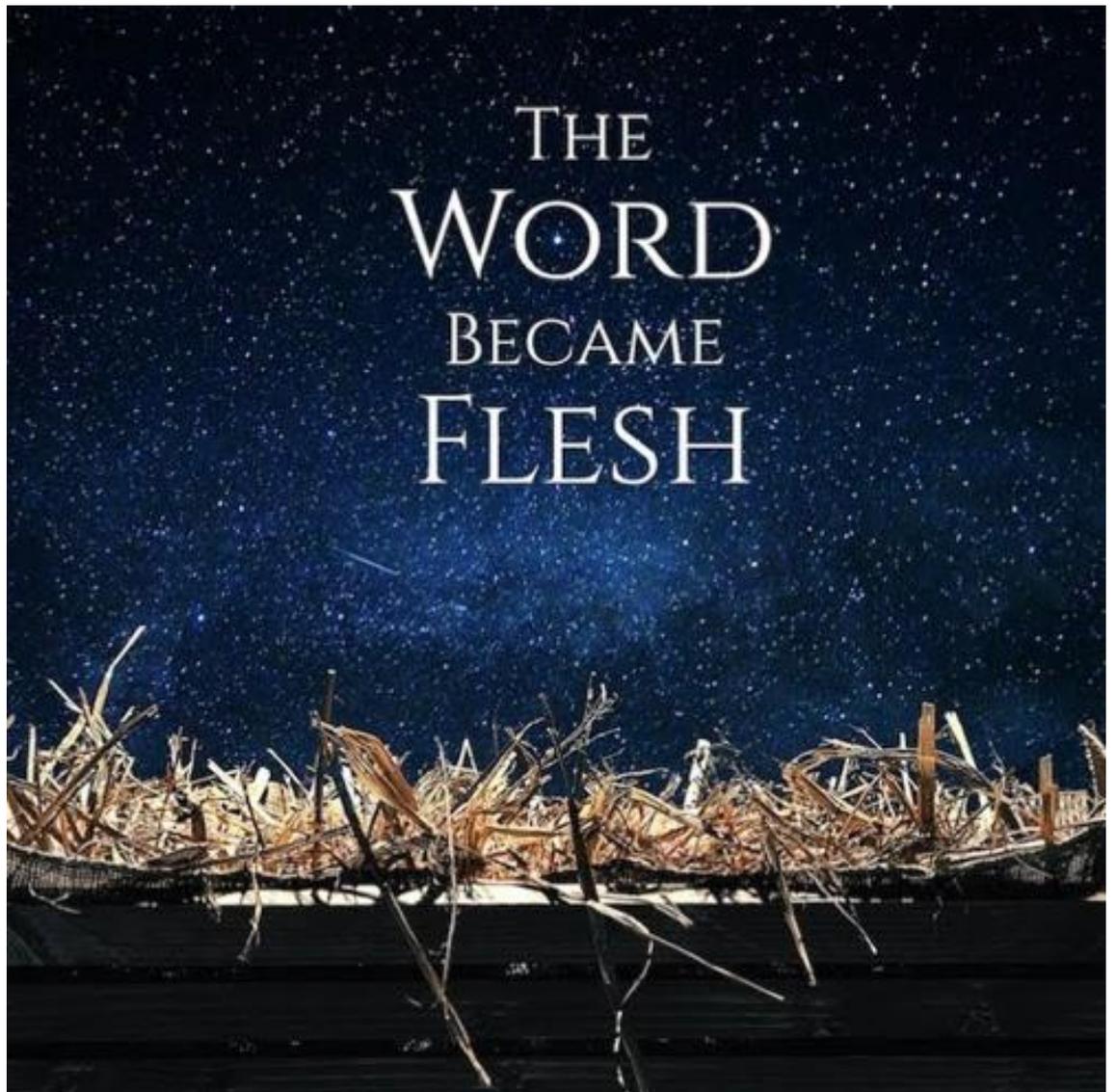
All out of darkness we have light,
which made the angels sing this night;
all out of darkness we have light
which made the angels sing this night:
'Glory to God, goodwill and peace
be to all now and never cease!'

Prayer

On Christmas night all Christians sing.

Lord help us to be a beacon of light
and love in our towns and villages.
Help us to help all people to sing with joy,
as we remember Emmanuel
this Christmas and always

Amen



Friday 25th December

Christmas Day

Read: Matthew 1: 18-25 The birth of Emmanuel

v. 23 Look the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means 'God with us'

Reflect

This reading of the birth of Jesus echoes the business and hurriedness of what many of us do on Christmas Day. Whatever we find ourselves doing today – whether at home or in hospital, with family or alone, we remember Emmanuel – God with us.

Take some time today to sing

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 the favoured one.

Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see;

Hail, the incarnate Deity:

Pleased, as man, with men to

dwell,

Jesus, our Emmanuel!



Hail! the heaven-born
Prince of peace!
Hail! the Son 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 son of earth,
Born to give them second birth.

Prayer:

Peace on earth and mercy mild. Lord of all we pray for peace around the world. We ask that all people everywhere may be reconciled by your love and live together in peace. Let the world lay down its weapons of hate and fear and live in the light of your love.



Saturday 26th December

Read: Luke 2: 1-14 The birth of Jesus

v.14 Glory to God in the Highest and on earth peace.

Reflect

Yesterday for many was a busy day – for others it was a day tinged with sadness that they weren't as busy as they would have liked through distancing, or illness. Today we focus on the peace that comes after a time of turbulence. Take some time to breathe today, welcoming the peace of Jesus in to our lives today.

Hymn

AWAY IN A MANGER no crib for His bed

The little Lord Jesus lay down His sweet head

The stars in the sky look down where He lay

The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay

The cattle are lowing the poor Baby wakes

But little Lord Jesus no crying He makes

I love Thee, Lord Jesus look down from the sky

And stay by my side 'til 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 take us to Heaven to live with Thee there



Prayer

Away in the manger no crib for a bed; Jesus you came to an ordinary family in Bethlehem, You made the earth and humbled yourself to be a crying baby. We pray for all families, those gathered together and those separated at this time. Lord we know You understand what it is like to be human and to struggle, we pray for your strength in the struggles we face. Help us Lord to give our troubles to you. **Amen**

Sunday 27th December

Christmas 1

Read: Luke 2: 15-21

The Shepherds

v.19 Mary treasured these words and pondered them in her heart.

Reflect *What will we ponder in our hearts this Christmas season?*

The shepherds rushed to see the baby Jesus, telling Mary and Joseph all that has been revealed about their new baby. If we're not in lockdown who will you rush to see (or rush to phone) what is the news that you want to share for them or is it to say 'I love you'

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 mind -
'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 the sign:

'The heavenly babe you there shall find
to human view displayed,
all meanly wrapped in swathing bands
and in a manger laid.'



'All glory be to God on high,
and to the earth be peace;
goodwill henceforth from highest heaven
begin and never cease!'

Prayer

Goodwill henceforth begin and never cease.

Lord God,

We ask for peace for our world,
goodwill towards all people.

We pray for those we love

That we may shine your light in their lives,
through our presence with them.

Amen.



Sunday 3rd January Epiphany (moved from 6th)

Read: Matthew 2: 1-12 The magi are led to Jesus by a star

Reflect *Where will you allow God to lead you this year?*

The magi

Will you study these signs
as carefully
as you study the prices
in the Christmas catalogues?
Will you seek out the manger
as diligently
as you search for the right scarf
or this year's toy?
Will you examine
your heart's pilgrimage
and be sure towards what stable
it carries its precious gifts?
Will you be a wise fool
to find and follow
the strange star of truth
in a sky full of glittering lies?

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Hymn

WE THREE KINGS OF ORIENT ARE

Bearing gifts, we traverse afar

Field and fountain

Moor and mountain

Following yonder star

O star of wonder, star of night

Star with royal beauty bright

Westward leading, still proceeding

Guide us to thy perfect light

Born a King on Bethlehem's plain
Gold I bring to crown him again
King for ever, ceasing never
Over us all to reign

Frankincense to offer have I
Incense owns a Deity nigh
Prayer and praising, all men raising
Worship Him God most high

Myrrh is mine its bitter perfume
Breathes a life of gathering gloom
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying
Sealed in the stone cold tomb

Glorious now behold Him arise
King and God and Sacrifice!
Al-le-lu-ia, al-le-lu-ia
Heaven to earth replies

Prayer



Guide us to your perfect light

Lord God,
as we think about the journey
of the year past and the year to come:
help us to be guided by your light
to your greatest gift – Jesus;
that we may serve you
in all we think, say and do.

Amen

Epilogue

to *A Christmas Commentary*

Read Philippians 2: 1-12

Our story told, the mystery remains—
God's hiding everywhere. This is the way
the love that made the universe sustains
the broken Eden of our every day.

There's nothing to pay back, nothing to earn,
nothing we need to do; yet it may be
a lifelong enterprise for us to learn
the secret power of humility.

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