

Service for 25 December 2021

Hymn 268 Joy to the world

The Lord be with you.

The Lord be with you. And also with you .

--

This is the moment. This is the day of gladness,

The rebirthing of love! listen, listen for the sounds of joy

Among our everyday places. among our ordinary lives is the emerging grace.

watch, watch for the signs of the Holy

In his time, in every time, we hold our breath in awe.

for the wonder of the Christ. For this is Christmas Day.

The time of waiting is over; our Lord is born.

Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love are to be found in God's greatest gift, His Son, Jesus Christ.

Almighty God, we thank You for the gift of Your Son, born of the Holy Spirit and of Mary.

Upon Him rests all Your grace, through Him comes all Your mercy.

Help us to make Your church the light of the world.

We ask in the name of the One born in Bethlehem. Amen

Sentence

I bring you good news of great joy for all people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, Christ the Lord. Luke 2.10–11

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ our Lord. Amen

Prayer of the Day

Good and gracious God, who gave us your Son, the Lord of the universe, wrapped in swaddling clothes, the Saviour of all, lying in a manger: on this holy day draw us into the mystery of your love.

Join our voices with the heavenly host that we may sing your glory on high.

Give us a place among the shepherds that we may find the one for whom we have waited,

Jesus Christ, the Messiah and Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Isaiah 62.6-12

⁶ I have posted watchmen on your walls, Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest, ⁷ and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth.

⁸ The Lord has sworn by his right hand and by his mighty arm: 'Never again will I give your grain as food for your enemies, and never again will foreigners drink the new wine for which you have toiled; ⁹ but those who harvest it will eat it and praise the Lord, and those who gather the grapes will drink it in the courts of my sanctuary.'

¹⁰ Pass through, pass through the gates! Prepare the way for the people. Build up, build up the highway! Remove the stones. Raise a banner for the nations.

¹¹ The Lord has made proclamation to the ends of the earth: 'Say to Daughter Zion, "See, your Saviour comes! See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him."'

¹² They will be called the Holy People, the Redeemed of the Lord; and you will be called Sought After, the City No Longer Deserted.

Psalm 97

- ¹ The Lord is king; let the earth rejoice: let the multitude of islands be glad.
- ² Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.
- ³ Fire goes before him: and burns up his enemies on every side.
- ⁴ His lightnings light the world: the earth sees it and quakes.
- ⁵ The mountains melt like wax before his face: from before the face of the Lord of all the earth.
- ⁶ The heavens have proclaimed his righteousness: and all peoples have seen his glory.
- ⁷ They are ashamed, all those who serve idols and glory in mere nothings:
all gods bow down before him.
- ⁸ Zion heard and was glad, and the daughters of Judah rejoiced:
because of your judgements, O God.
- ⁹ For you, Lord, are most high over all the earth: you are exalted far above all gods.
- ¹⁰ The Lord loves those that hate evil: the Lord guards the life of the faithful,
and delivers them from the hand of the ungodly.
- ¹¹ Light dawns for the righteous: and joy for the true of heart.
- ¹² Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous: and give thanks to his holy name.

Titus 3.4-8a

⁴ But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

⁸ This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

Hymn While shepherds watched TIS 299

Luke 2.8-20

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields near by, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

¹⁰ But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

¹¹ Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ¹⁴ 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.'

¹⁵ 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.'

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Sermon

Creed

We believe in God, who lives and speaks in sunsets,
in love-wrapped gifts, and fleeting butterflies;
in women weeping strongly for still born dreams and hopes never conceived.
We believe in God indwelling wholly in suffering and celebration.
We believe in Christ, honouring our humanness, who took nourishment from a woman;
who climbed trees, skinned knees, who laughed and cried, loved and wept, bled and died.
We believe in Christ sanctifying life and death.

Prayers

As our Saviour Christ has taught us, we are confident to pray:
Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

Confession

Christ the grace of God has dawned upon the world with healing for all.
Let us bring our weaknesses and infirmities to him, confessing our sins in penitence and faith.

O God, all around us we find situations which take away our faith in the birth of love among us.
If we have lost our sense of wonder and delight and believe these things belong in children's stories alone:
If we no longer expect surprises and take the gifts of others for granted.
Forgive us, God of babies in mangers, in stables and shepherds in fields.
If we have forgotten how to love you and our neighbour and fail to see your love reflected in our family and friends.
Forgive us, God of the Angels who came to tell us of your love.
When love for the world seems an impossible dream and we give power to cynicism and a spirit of defeat;
Forgive us, God of the shining star of hope.

Declaration of forgiveness

Jesus Christ came into the world as it was and is, in all its humanness so in every generation, love will come again. Almighty God, pardon you and set you free from all your sins, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Peace

The peace of the Lord be always with you. And also with you.

Hymn Love Came down at Christmas TIS 317

Offering

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have these gifts to share.
Accept and use our offerings for your glory and for the service of your kingdom.
Blessed be God for ever.

Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.** Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

All glory and honour be yours always and everywhere, mighty Creator, everliving God.
We give you thanks and praise for your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ,
who by the power of your Spirit was born of Mary and lived as one of us.
In your Word made flesh you have caused a new light to shine in our hearts,

to give knowledge of your glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

By his death on the cross and rising to new life, he offered the one true sacrifice for sin and obtained an eternal deliverance for his people.

Therefore with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we proclaim your great and glorious name, for ever praising you and saying:

**Holy, Holy, Holy Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.**

Therefore we do as our Saviour has commanded: proclaiming his offering of himself made once for all upon the cross, his mighty resurrection and glorious ascension, and looking for his coming again, we celebrate, with this bread and this cup, his one perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

Renew us by your Holy Spirit

Renew us by your Holy Spirit, unite us in the body of your Son and bring us with all your people into the joy of your eternal kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord, with whom, and in whom, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, we worship you, Father, in songs of never-ending praise:

Blessing and honour and glory and power are yours for ever and ever. Amen.

The gifts of God for the people of God.

Come let us take this holy sacrament of the body and blood of Christ in remembrance that he died for us, and feed on him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving.

God of heaven, dwelling among us, we thank you for feeding us with this holy food.

By your grace keep us ever faithful to your Word made flesh

that as his body in the world we may bring your presence to all people.

God of heaven, dwelling among us, we thank you for feeding us with this holy food.

By your grace keep us ever faithful to your Word made flesh that as his body in the world we may bring your presence to all people.

Father,

we offer ourselves to you

as a living sacrifice

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Send us out in the power of your Spirit

to live and work to your praise and glory.

Hymn O come all ye faithful TIS

Blessing

Christ the Son of God, born of Mary, fill you with his grace to trust his promises and obey his will; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord:

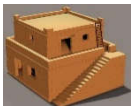
In the name of Christ. Amen



It's Christmas! After all the build up both in church and in the shops, it is finally here. So much to do today, people to be with and food to eat but first let's take some time to remember the reason we celebrate and then we can go back to the fun and busyness.

Some things are traditional, and we do them to celebrate Jesus' birth, but they are not totally accurate. We have a lovely crib or nativity scene in the church and the four themes of Advent as nativity scenes on the altar, but did you know that what they all depict is very unlikely to be historically accurate?

In those days there was no such thing as an 'inn' as we would think of it. It was part of the culture that anyone who had room would take travellers in and be hospitable. So, they arrived in Bethlehem and probably went to some of Joseph's relatives, but other relatives had got there first, and all the guest rooms were full. There was no email or phones to book ahead in those days.



Houses were typically two stories, with the rooms upstairs for the people and a large space downstairs for the animals. The owners of the house would have been mortified to not have a guest room to offer the young couple so they would have offered them the space downstairs. I'm sure they made it as comfortable as possible, possibly confined the animals or housed them elsewhere and looked after Mary and Joseph and the baby when he was born. I'm not saying it wasn't pretty basic and rustic but they were not left abandoned in some drafty shed.

The feeding trough would have been right there and made a very suitable crib for a new-born. The manger gets mentioned 3 times in our reading, why is that? The manger isn't important in itself. It's a signpost, to the identity and task of the baby boy who's lying in it. The shepherds, summoned in from the fields are made privy to the news, so Mary and Joseph, hearing it from this unexpected source, will have extra confirmation of what has been up until now their own secret.



You should know that I collect nativity scenes, and I love them, especially ones from other cultures. I love them because they do tell us the truth about Christmas. Jesus came to earth as a tiny, helpless baby, he came for everyone, not just the Jews, not just the white people, so however we choose to picture it is fine. He did not come in some lovely palace or even some posh mansion, he came to an ordinary carpenter and his wife, in a borrowed stockroom, and the first ones to know were a bunch of ragtag shepherds.



In those days shepherds were rather low-class people, because they had to look after the sheep all the time, they were not able to attend temple worship and do all the required rituals, plus they had a reputation for grazing their flocks on other people's land. It is all rather ironic because the Jews rather liked the picture of God as the good shepherd and were looking forward to the

Messiah who would shepherd them. Plus being so close to Jerusalem the lambs these shepherds were looking after may well have been destined for temple sacrifice.



The angels announce the *Good News*. The verb here is the same one that is used for the pronouncement of the gospel. The same good news that John the Baptist pronounced, and that Jesus preached his whole ministry, it is good news, news of joy to all

people. Just because we have heard those words so often before let us not miss what they actually mean, the birth of Jesus was a sign of God's abundant grace for all people. If God sent his messenger to direct these disfavoured shepherds to find the baby, why would anyone think that God would turn anyone away.



Joy and celebration are the only appropriate responses. The child is the Messiah. The words of the prophet Isaiah have been fulfilled in an even more wonderful fashion than he could have imagined. The Lord, the saviour of God's people, all people, had been born. The angels and the whole of creation celebrates. God had the resources, he could

have caused his son to be born in a palace, even created the palace especially, with all the staff to run it but he choose to come to a simple carpenter and his wife so that none of us would be afraid to approach him.

There was a European monarch who worried his court by often disappearing and walking incognito amongst the people. When he was asked not to do so for security reasons he replied, 'I cannot rule my people unless I know how they live.' It is the central theme of our faith that we have a God who knows the life we live, because he too lived it and claimed no special advantage because he was God.



When you see a manger, don't stop at the crib. Don't worry about whether it is historically accurate; see what it is pointing to. It is pointing to the explosive truth that the baby lying there is already the true king of the world, who came to live and die for everyone no matter how poor, despised, or

ordinary they might be. This birth reveals a new world order, a world not ruled by politicians but ruled by God's direction in people's hearts. In this world, God's word is heard by the humble, there is a place even for shepherds. There is hope for the oppressed and those who hear what God is doing are filled with joy.