

Cooma Christmas Day Service 10am 25 December 2023

Introduction

Christmas Candle

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 our Lord, **AMEN**

Carol - Silent night Holy night

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 Savior is born

Christ the Savior 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

Silent night holy night

Wondrous star lend thy light

With the angels let us sing

Alleluia to our King

Christ the Saviour is born

Christ the Saviour is born

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Sentence of the Day

Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. Luke 2:10-12

Prayer of Preparation

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, and worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' Jesus said: 'This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'

Lord, have mercy on us, and write your law in our hearts by your Holy Spirit

Collect

All glory to you gracious God, for the gift of your Son, whom you sent to save us.

With the angels, let us praise your name, and tell the earth his story, that all may believe, rejoice, and proclaim your love; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

Old Testament Reading 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 Savior 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.

Hear the Word of the Lord. **Thanks Be to God**

Psalm 97

¹ The LORD reigns, let the earth be glad; let the distant shores rejoice.

² **Clouds and thick darkness surround him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.**

³ Fire goes before him and consumes his foes on every side.

⁴ **His lightning lights up the world; the earth sees and trembles.**

⁵ The mountains melt like wax before the LORD, before the Lord of all the earth.

⁶ **The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all peoples see his glory.**

⁷ All who worship images are put to shame, those who boast in idols —worship him, all you gods!

⁸ **Zion hears and rejoices and the villages of Judah are glad because of your judgments, LORD.**

⁹ For you, LORD, are the Most High over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods.

¹⁰ **Let those who love the LORD hate evil, for he guards the lives of his faithful ones and delivers them from the hand of the wicked.**

¹¹ Light shines on the righteous and joy on the upright in heart.

¹² **Rejoice in the LORD, you who are righteous, and praise his holy name.**

New Testament Reading: Titus 3:4-8

⁴ But when the kindness and love of God our Savior 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 Savior, 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.

Hear the Word of the Lord. **Thanks Be to God**

Gospel Reading: Luke 2:8-20

Glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, 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 Savior 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 favor 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.

This is the gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ**

Sermon

Most of us have lived through quite a few Christmases in our lives. I have a two year old grandson who will have his 3rd Christmas this year. He was only 2.5 weeks old on his first Christmas, and on his second Christmas, when he was just over a year old, he didn't really comprehend what the excitement was about. All he really wanted was his bottle and cuddles from all the people that were around.

This year will be his third Christmas, and like his second birthday, is an entirely different level of comprehension. He goes to day care, and sees lots of Christmas trees with brightly wrapped Christmas presents looking a lot like the toys he got for his birthday, so he's pretty excited. After learning to rip the wrapping of his birthday presents, it's all we can do to stop him unwrapping any present he sees.

Christmas is very exciting when you are 2, but how do you think things were for the people involved in the first Christmas? Our gospel reading this morning looks at the range of emotions that the shepherds who, apart from Mary and Joseph, were the first witnesses of Jesus' birth, and today I want to see what we can learn from them.

The first thing our shepherds were probably feeling was **boredom and discomfort**. If they weren't, they were probably hoping for boredom and mere discomfort, as the alternative was probably danger and fear of death - danger from wolves or other animals trying to get at their sheep, and themselves. If it wasn't animals, thieves, hail, or snow it was probably the owners of the sheep they were tending who were probably trying to get at them, so a bit of boredom and discomfort would probably be considered bliss!

What they would not have been expecting was angels of the Lord paying them a visit. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they weren't bored anymore, they were **terrified!** This wasn't the mere wolves they might have been expecting, but absolutely terrifying angels! I myself am not aware of ever seeing an angel of the lord, but all of the accounts in the Bible have the witnesses being terrified, so I don't think I want to. It's no surprise the first thing this angel said was 'Do not be afraid' At that point, I imagine the Shepherd were hiding being anything at hand - trees, bushes, even sheep or each other.

The angel told them: Luke 2:10-12 (NIV) *I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.* ¹¹ *Today in the town of David a Savior 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.* I'm not sure what the shepherds would have made of this - I don't even know if they knew their history enough to know that the town of David was another name for Bethlehem, or their theology to understand who or what a Messiah was.

To be honest, I am not sure exactly what the angel meant by Messiah either. From my studies, I know that the Hebrew word Messiah, or Moshiaich means one who had been anointed, which was how kings were appointed in the Old Testament. You may know that the prophet Samuel anointed David to become king in place of Saul after King Saul went rogue.

We also know that the Old Testament has numerous prophecies about a specific person, or perhaps two or three specific people, or Messiahs, who would come to save Israel and the world from its troubles, a bit like the way King David saved Israel from her enemies and set the kingdom of Israel on stable ground. There were many movements around the time when Jesus was born that were led by messianic figures who rose up to throw out the oppressive Romans who had subjugated Israel at the time. John the Baptist was probably considered one such figure, as was Barabbas, whom the crowds wanted released instead of Jesus. None of them, apart from Jesus, actually fulfilled all the messianic prophecies in the Old Testament, but it is likely that the shepherds had some idea from those prophecies, and from the people who claimed to be Messiahs of what they should expect from the Messiah.

In any case, when the throng of angels praised God and said: Luke 2:14 (NIV) ⁴ "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." they knew that something pretty special was going to happen, even if they weren't sure of the details.

Nevertheless, it is likely that what had been terror on seeing the angels turned into **curiosity**, so much that they agreed to go to Bethlehem and see this thing that had happened, that the Lord had told them about.

Their curiosity must have really motivated them, because it says they "hurried" off and found Mary and Joseph, with Jesus in a manger. We don't know the details of how the shepherds found the little family, except that the shepherds were in fields nearby, and it seems they arrived within a few days, before Jesus was circumcised when he was eight days old.

Also, their curiosity turned into **excitement**, the sort of excitement you have when you can't stop telling absolutely everyone about what you've seen. It says Luke 2:17-18 (NIV) ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.

This excitement they had must have been infectious. No matter how much it sounds to us that they were annoying name droppers, all who heard it were **amazed** at what the shepherds said to them.

You can just imagine the texts they would have sent if they had mobile phones! "OMG, and I literally mean *OMG*. We've seen the Messiah, the Lord, and his whole family, in Bethlehem. It was so amazing. He's just a baby, in a manger, food trough of all things! You just had to be there. There was a great company of heavenly host all praising God and everything! No, really, you just had to be there!!! O-O-OMG."

Everyone who heard would have responded "That's so amazing. *OMG* excited smiley face emoticon"

So, in this short period of time, probably no more than a couple of days, these shepherds went from boredom and discomfort to terror, to curious to excited to amazed.

Now, some 2000 years later, many people have the same range of feelings about Jesus.

Some are just bored and disinterested, you think it is all a fuss about nothing.

Others have a sort of general sense of discomfort about Jesus and his claims, but not enough to do anything about them.

Some are absolutely terrified that the claims of Jesus may be right, but are terrified into inaction. They suspect the truth, but the truth is too scary to do anything about.

If you feel that any of these are where you are at, can I suggest to follow the example of Mary, Jesus' mother? Our passage said she treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. As we read the gospels we see how her understanding grew of who her Son Jesus really was, even though it seems that this took some pondering and quite some time.

Otherwise, perhaps you are at the curious stage - you've heard the claims of Jesus, and you want to find out more. You want to check out Jesus's claim, perhaps do some reading, or talk to some people, but perhaps you are not sure where you can start. If this is where you are now, please talk to me after this service, or one of the other older Christians here. There will never be a better opportunity for you to investigate further, and we are more than happy to help you do that in the way that best suits you. Just catch me after the service.

Finally, you might be excited. You have heard the claims about Jesus and they have struck a chord in your heart and you are convinced that they are not only true, but that they demand a response from you. You want to take the next steps to becoming a follower of Jesus, but you might not be sure of what this means or how to go about it. Again, talk to me, or another older Christian here tonight, and we will help you understand and take these steps. They are not hard or onerous, and quite frankly, they are the most important steps you can ever take. Catch me after the service, or grab my details so I can help you out.

Finally, perhaps you have been through all the preceding steps, and you are still amazed about who he is and what that means for you. Like the shepherds, you want to grow in your own understanding of

Jesus and God's word, the Bible, you talk to anyone who will listen about Jesus, and you want to help others to get to the stage the God has brought you to. Once again, if you are in this situation, catch me after the service, grab my details and we can get together in the next week or so and help you and encourage you to do this.

SO, this morning, on this Christmas morning, as the shepherds moved from boredom and discomfort to terror, to curious to excited to amazed, please ponder where you are at, but don't let it stop at pondering. As I discussed, there are a lot of things you can be doing, whatever stage you are at, and we are more than happy to help you in the way you find most helpful.

Let me pray.

Father God, today as we remember the day your Son Jesus was born of Mary, everyone of us here is in boredom, discomfort, terror, curious, excited or amazed at the claims of Jesus.

No matter where we are in our faith journey, there are things we can and should do to help as in our journeys.

I pray that everyone here will honestly evaluate where they are, and take real action.

Give every the courage and honesty to understand where they are, to make contact with me or others who can help, and to make the effort to meet, talk, and move forward in the way that best helps them.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ
Amen.

Carol - Infant Holy, Infant Lowly

**Infant holy infant lowly
For His bed a cattle stall
Oxen lowing, little knowing
Christ the babe is Lord of all
Swift are winging, angels singing
Nowells ringing, tidings bringing
Christ the babe is Lord of all
Christ the babe is Lord of all**

**Flocks were sleeping
Shepherds keeping
vigil till the morning new
Saw the glory, heard the story
Tidings of a gospel true
Thus rejoicing, free from sorrow
Praises voicing, greet the morrow
Christ the babe was born for you
Christ the babe was born for you**

Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Blessing the Offertory

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

Blessed be God for ever. Amen

Intercessions

Let us pray for all people, and for the Church throughout the world.

Response: Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

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 for ever. Amen.

Preparation for the Lord's Supper

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we who would come to the holy communion of the body and blood of our Saviour Christ must consider how St Paul exhorts us to examine ourselves before presuming to eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For the benefit is great, if with a penitent heart and lively faith we receive that holy sacrament.

We then spiritually eat the flesh of Christ and drink his blood; we dwell in Christ and he in us; we are one with Christ and Christ with us. Yet also the danger is great if we receive the bread and cup unworthily.

Judge yourselves therefore, that you be not judged of the Lord. Repent truly of your sins, having a steadfast faith in Christ our Saviour. Amend your lives and love your neighbour.

Above all, give hearty thanks to God for the redemption of the world by the death and passion of our Saviour Christ, truly God and truly human, who humbled himself to death on the cross for us sinners, that he might make us children of God, and raise us to eternal life.

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You who truly and earnestly repent of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbours, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God and walking in his holy ways, draw near with faith, and take this holy sacrament to strengthen and comfort you.

But first, let us make a humble confession of our sins to almighty God.

Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, maker of all things, judge of all people, we acknowledge with shame the sins we have committed, by thought, word, and deed, against your divine majesty, provoking most justly your wrath and indignation against us.

We earnestly repent, and are heartily sorry for all our misdoings.

Have mercy on us, most merciful Father. For your Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, forgive us all that is past, and grant that we may ever hereafter serve and please you in newness of life, to the honour and glory of your name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who of his great mercy has promised forgiveness of sins to all who with hearty repentance and true faith turn to him: have mercy on you; pardon and deliver you from all your sins; confirm and strengthen you in all goodness; and keep you in eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Words of Assurance

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life John 3:16

Carol - While shepherds watched

**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 humankind**

**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 swaddling clothes
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 on the earth be peace
Goodwill hence forth
From heaven to men
Begin and never cease**

The Great Thanksgiving

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**

It is indeed right, and our bounden duty, that we should in all times and in all places give thanks to you, Lord, Mighty and Eternal God. Therefore, with all angels and arcangels, and with all the company of heaven, we proclaim your great and glorious name, forever praising you and saying:

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Glory to you, O Lord most high.

Prayer of Approach

We do not presume to come to your table, merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table. But you are the same Lord whose nature is always to have mercy.

Grant us, therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. Amen.

Consecration

All glory to you, our heavenly Father, for in your tender mercy you gave your only Son Jesus Christ to suffer death on the cross for our redemption: who made there, by his one oblation of himself once offered, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world; and instituted, and in his holy gospel commanded us to continue, a perpetual memory of his precious death until his coming again.

Hear us, merciful Father, we humbly pray, and grant that we who receive these gifts of your creation, this bread and this wine, according to your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ's holy institution, in remembrance of his death and passion, may be partakers of his most blessed body and blood;

who on the night he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given you thanks, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying,

'Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me.'

Likewise after supper he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them saying,

'Drink from this, all of you; for the remission of sins; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

Amen.

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 with thanksgiving.

The Lord's Supper is open to all who love the Lord. Grape juice is available

Please come to the table maintaining appropriate social distancing.

After Communion

Almighty and everliving God, we heartily thank you that you graciously feed us, who have duly received these holy mysteries, with the spiritual food of the most precious body and blood of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ, and thus assure us of your favour and goodness towards us and that we are true members of the mystical body of your Son, the blessed company of all faithful people, and are also heirs, through hope, of your eternal kingdom, by the merits of the most precious death and passion of your dear Son.

And we humbly beseech you, heavenly Father, so to assist us with your grace, that we may continue in that holy fellowship, and do all such good works as you have prepared for us to walk in, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit be all honour and glory, world without end, **Amen**

Carol - Joy to the World

Joy to the world!

The Lord is come;

let earth receive its king;

let every heart prepare him room,

and heaven and nature sing,

and heaven and nature sing,

and heaven, and heaven and

nature sing

**Joy to the earth!
The Saviour reigns;
let us our songs employ;
while fields and streams,
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.**

Notices

The Blessing

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord
In the name of Chris, AMEN