

# Christmas Eve Service 2024 - St Paul's Christmas Eve 2024

## Leaders' Service outline

1. **Welcome:** Today, in preparation for Christmas, I would like volunteers for what I don't think will be an onerous task. It will be particularly good if children volunteer. On the Christmas tree up the front you will see there are a number of Christmas presents, they are marked with a number. As we progress through the service I'll ask volunteers to get the next numbered present, open it and read the word on the present inside. The present will be for the volunteer to have. And don't worry, if there are more volunteers than presents during the service, I have extras for those who miss out.
2. **Gift 1: Readiness.** So let's get started, who would like to volunteer to find and open present #1.  
The first present is "Readiness" - before Jesus came, God sent John the Baptist so we would be ready. John told people to repent, to turn away from their sins in readiness for Jesus. As we make ourselves ready for this Christmas, let's say together a prayer of preparation which is in your outlines:

## Prayer of preparation

**Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: as your servant John the Baptist came to prepare people for the coming of your son Jesus, so 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.**

3. **Gift 2: Light:** The second gift is light. Jesus came to be the light of the world, and there is a tradition in many churches that we light candles during Advent, the month leading up to Christmas. I'd like our volunteer to light our Advent candles as Martin says a special prayer.

## 4. **Collect/Advent Candles**

Almighty God of light and life - let the first candle remind us of the hope we have that Jesus will return again to restore the world to the way it was meant to be. Let the second candle remind us of your love in sending your prophets and John the baptist to prepare us when Jesus first came in Bethlehem. Let the third candle remind us of the Joy that Jesus brings into our lives, and the fourth candle to peace that Jesus, the prince of peace will bring to the world. Let the final candle remind us always of Jesus, your Son, our Lord, who came to die and rise again to save the world. Amen.

Continuing the theme of light, let us now stand and sing our first carol, "O Come O Come Immanuel". A hymn of expectation of the Lord of Light.

### **Carol. O come O come Emmanuel**

O come O come Emmanuel, And ransom captive Israel  
That mourns in lonely exile here, Until the Son of God appear

#### *Chorus*

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you O Israel

O come, O come, great Lord of might, who to the tribes on Sinai's height  
in ancient times did give the law, in cloud and majesty and awe. *Chorus*

O come, O key of David, come, and open wide our heavenly home;  
make safe the way that leads on high and close the path to misery. *Chorus*

O come, O branch of Jesse, free your own from Satan's tyranny;  
from depths of hell your people save and give them victory o'er the grave. *Chorus*

O come, O dayspring, come and cheer Our spirits by your advent here.  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night And death's dark shadows put to flight *Chorus*

5. **Gift 3: God's word:** Bible Readings. The third gift is God's word. Our God speaks to us through his word the Bible, and now we have a reading from the Bible, from Matthew 1:18-25.

Matthew 1:18-25 (NIV) 18 This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. 19 Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 25 But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

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

### **Message**

In today's world, the first thing that many people think about at Christmas time is presents, and giving presents is a worthy way to celebrate Christmas, since God gave us the greatest present of all on the first Christmas - the gift of his Son Jesus Christ that we might have forgiveness of sins and eternal life with God. Just as I hope that the presents you receive this Christmas will be much more impressive than my feeble attempts at biscuit baking and decorating for tonight, so do I know that the first Christmas present is much more impressive than anything our families could ever give us. By sending his own dear Son Jesus we don't just get more stuff, we can get life in all its fullness. Only Jesus brings us true love, joy, hope and peace, and he is the greatest gift of all.

6. **Gift 4: Prayer:** Intercessions. The 4th gift is the gift of prayer. Our God wants two way communication with us, and as we saw with the third gift, he speaks to us through his word, the Bible. But he also wants us to speak to him through prayer, to bring our needs and desires and hopes to him. And now I'd like to ask Col to pray to God on our behalf, to bring our intercessions to God.

### **Intercessions**

7. **Gift 5: forgiveness** The fifth gift is forgiveness. Jesus came into our world that we might be forgiven for the times we have sinned against God. It is important we confess our sins to him to receive the forgiveness we need. Let's say together the prayer of forgiveness on the screen, after which Martin will declare God's forgiveness that we all so desperately need.

### The Confession

**Merciful God, our maker and our judge, we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, and in what we have failed to do: we have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves; we repent, and are sorry for all our sins. Father, forgive us. Strengthen us to love and obey you in newness of life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Almighty God, who has promised forgiveness to all who turn to him in faith: pardon you and set you free from all your sins, strengthen you in all goodness and keep you in eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

8. **Gift 6: peace.** The sixth gift is peace, the true peace between humankind that Jesus came to bring. Christians have a tradition that after we corporately confess our sins to God and hear his forgiveness, we express our newly restored peace with one another in what we call the greeting of the peace, greeting our forgiven brothers and sisters in Christ with a shake of the hand and the words 'peace be with you'. Before we do that we say the introduction to the greeting of peace that is in on the screen.

### **Greeting of peace**

We are the body of Christ. **His Spirit is with us.**

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

Continuing with the theme of peace, let us stand and sing that favorite of Christmas carols, the carol that calls us to sleep in heavenly peace, While shepherds watched their flocks by night.

**Carol: While shepherds watched their flocks by night**

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 henceforth from heaven to men begin and never cease

9. **Gift 7:Memory** The seventh gift is the memory we have with thanksgiving, for the world God created, and the salvation we have through Jesus death and resurrection as we share a simple sort of meal that reminds us of Jesus body and blood. Martin says a special prayer, called the great thanksgiving that reminds us of all these good things, using the responses on the screen.

**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.**

You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, making us in your own image. We praise you for your son, our saviour Jesus Christ, who by his death on the cross and rising to new life offered the one true sacrifice for sin and obtained an eternal deliverance for his people. Therefore, we lift our voices to praise you, saying,

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

And now, gracious God, we thank you for these gifts of bread and wine, and pray that we who receive them in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit according to our Saviour's word, in remembrance of his suffering and death, may share his body and his blood.

On the night before he died, Jesus took bread, and when he had given you thanks, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying 'Take and eat. This is my body which is given for you.

We who are many are one body in Christ,  
**for we all share in the one bread.**

After supper, he took the cup, and again giving you thanks, he gave it to his disciples, saying 'Drink from this all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

We eat this bread and drink this cup **to proclaim the death of the Lord.**  
We do this until he returns. **Come, Lord Jesus!**

Father, as we recall his saving death and glorious resurrection, may we who share these gifts be renewed by the Holy Spirit, and united in the body of your Son. Bring us with all your people into the joy of your eternal kingdom, there to feast at your table and join in your eternal praise.

**Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive praise and honour and glory and power for ever and ever. Amen**

10. **Gift 8: God's love:** The eighth gift is God's love, which we remember by sharing in the special meal that Jesus gave us to remember his death and resurrection, his body and his blood.

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.

Our next carol reminds us that Jesus the Son of God is Love's pure light:

**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

11. **Gift 9: Hope:** Our next gift is Hope, the hope of God's blessing in this life and the next in perfect fellowship with God in trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit:

**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**

12. **Gift 10: Joy:** The great thing about Christmas is that we get the gift of joy. Christianity isn't about rules and commandments, it is about a relationship with Christ, our Lord who came into our world to save us. As we think with you of this special relationship we have with God, let us sing 'O Come all ye faithful.'

**Carol: O Come, all ye faithful,**

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;

**CHORUS**

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,  
lo, He abhors not the virgin's womb;  
very God, begotten not created; *Chorus*

Sing, choirs of angels, Sing in exultation,  
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above;  
Glory to God, glory in the highest *Chorus*

Yea Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning

Jesus to thee be glory given

Word of the Father Now in flesh appearing *Chorus*

13. Our final gift is the greatest gift of all. Without opening a present, who can tell me what it is? It, or rather He, is Jesus.

**Dismissal**

Go in the risen Christ's peace to love and serve the Lord:

**In the name of Christ. Amen.**