

Christmas Carol Service

Welcome

Welcome to our service for the last Sunday in Advent, from the benefice of Rural East York, serving the communities of Dunnington, Stockton-on-the-Forest, Warthill and Holtby.

Thank you for being part of this congregation, around the benefice and beyond.

As we share this time together,
let us welcome one another,
old friends whose faces we miss,
those we have never met,
those sitting quietly,
those rushing around,
we are one family,
we are all loved,
we are all welcome,
in the name of the Father, the Son,
and the Holy Spirit.

We gather to reflect on the year which is now drawing to a close,
and to retell the story of God becoming human,
of God dwelling with us,
rejoicing with those who rejoice,
and weeping with those who weep.

In this is love, not that we loved God but that God loved us.
This is our comfort and this is our joy.

Collect

Almighty God,
as we prepare with joy to celebrate the gift of the Christ-child,
embrace the earth with your glory
and be for us a living hope
in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Preparation

In the darkness of the year, we look for the light.
In a year where nothing happened, and everything changed;
when nothing changed, and what already was, was revealed;
hidden alone, thrown together,
in a year of anger and frustration,
our time of restriction and pain,
singly bound and double locked,
walking in darkness
we look for the light.

As the green blade rose and life returned,

time turned an undifferentiated blur,
three days lost,
an hour stretched and months compressed,
laying low, furloughed,
by law and the customary, once unusual,
the new, now normal,
the warm evening's applause on quiet roads,
beneath empty skies,
muted memories of another lifetime,
with uncertainties forgotten,
facing the faceless sun,
we seek meaning
and a moment's joy.

And there was summer,
and there was harvest,
and remembrance.
And there was evening: the first year,
brings a quiet feast at the last,
brings us circling round,
searching for comfort,
searching for joy.

Carol: In the bleak mid-winter

In the bleak mid-winter
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 mid-winter
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 mid-winter
a stable-place sufficed
the Lord God Almighty —
Jesus Christ.

Angels and archangels
may have gathered there.
Cherubim and seraphim
thronged the air.
But only his mother
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.

Reading: The angel comes to Joseph

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel',

which means, 'God is with us.'

To Bethlehem!

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way.

An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream.
The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth.
And he came to Mary and said, 'Greetings, favoured one!'
All went to their own towns to be registered.
Joseph went to the city of David called Bethlehem.
And Mary gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth.
Wise men from the East came to Jerusalem.
Herod called for the wise men and he sent them to Bethlehem.
Then an angel of the Lord stood before the shepherds.
And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host.

So much departing, travelling.
So many men, summoning, hastening.
So nearly overlooked, and in a few words is over.
She gave birth to her firstborn son.
And nothing changes, and everything is changed.
The Ancient of Days laying in a hay box.
God dwells with us, and we have seen his glory.
This child, destined for the falling and the rising of many,
a sign that will be opposed.
This child, a sword to pierce your soul.
Let us go now to Bethlehem.
So they went with haste.

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:
 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.

Sing, choirs of angels,
sing in exultation.
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above.
Glory to God
in the highest.

Reading: The angel comes to Mary

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.'

The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.' Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.

Poem

The Nativity by Godfrey Rust

Was it necessary
to go to this extreme?
To take for a carrier
a village girl
unmarried and disgraced,
nine months pregnant
on an exhausting journey
to a strange town
with nowhere to stay,
in a century
with no healthcare
or sanitation?

What purpose was achieved,
except to show

how the weight of his love
is so exhausting
it will break the back
of our most stubborn pretensions
and how in a manger
would be the last straw to do it?

Carol: Infant holy

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!

Reading: The shepherds

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.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 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: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

'Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'

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.' So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Intercessions

Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her

that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid.

Through the darkness, we dare approach the stable,
but with hands empty, barefoot down the streets,
feet guided by the outline of light.
Where shepherds walked, we follow.

Untangling the doors secured by leaves we let grow,
the mistletoe and ivy of our lives,
even so we dare approach the manger,
but on our knees, head bowed,
through the darkness, we dare speak.

We pray for those who suffer violence at the hands of those who hate them,
or those who should love and care for them;

for those excluded by loneliness,
by poverty,
by discrimination,
by the judgement of the ignorant;

for the cycles of pain and suffering,
this inequality and injustice brings;

for those who are worried for the future,
for their health, and the health of those they love,
for their financial security,
and their ability to care for those who look to them;

for the sick, the despairing, those in anguish;
for those who watch over them;

for those who sit with the dying,
and for those who mourn.

We pray for healing for the world;
for its people and every created thing.

In the uncomprehending darkness,
the dayspring from on high breaks forth,
and bids us stand, and sing, and lifts our chin,
pours blessings in our hands.

May we receive that comfort and joy
that springs from knowing God's love for us.
And may the light which filled the stable,
through us, fill the world.

And the ransomed of the Lord shall return with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Carol: O little town of Bethlehem

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 streets shineth
the everlasting light.
The hopes and fears of all the years
are met in thee tonight.

O morning stars, together
proclaim the holy birth.
And praises sing to God, the king
and peace to those on earth.
For Christ is born of Mary
and gathered all above
while mortals sleep, the angels keep
their watch of wondering love.

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.

Reading: The wise men

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.' When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

“And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.”

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him

homage.' When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Candle Song

Like a candle flame
Flickering small in our darkness
Uncreated light
Shines through infant eyes

God is with us, alleluia
God is with us, alleluia
Come to save us, alleluia
Come to save us
Alleluia!

Stars and angels sing
Yet the earth sleeps in shadows
Can this tiny spark
Set a world on fire?

Yet his light shall shine
From our lives, Spirit blazing
As we touch the flame
Of his holy fire.

Prayer for peace

O Prince of Peace,
whose promised birth the angels sang
with peace on earth,
peace be to us and all beside,
peace to us all,
peace to the world this Christmastide.

O child who found to lay your head,
no place but in a manger bed,
come where our doors stand open wide,
peace to us all,
peace to the world
peace in our homes this Christmastide.

O Christ whom shepherds came to find,
let joy be ours in heart and mind.
Let grief and care be laid aside
peace to us all,
peace to the world,
peace in our homes,
peace in our hearts this Christmastide.

O Saviour Christ, ascended Lord,
our risen prince of life restored,
our love who once for sinners died
peace to us all
peace to the world,
peace in our homes,
peace in our hearts,
peace with our God this Christmastide.

Reading: The word

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

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

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

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.

Carol: Hark the herald angels

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 Virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see.
Hail the incarnate Deity.
Pleased as man with man to dwell.
Jesus, our Emmanuel!
Hark! the herald angels sing
Glory to the new-born King!

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 lay his glory by.
Born that man no more may die.
Born to raise the sons of earth.
Born to give them second birth.
Hark! the herald angels sing
Glory to the new-born King!

Blessing

I would like to offer an enormous thank you to everyone who has been involved in creating today's service: planning, writing, singing, recording and editing. We have been creating these services for about nine months now, and I've been blown away by the resourcefulness, creativity and commitment that so many people have shown, and the generosity with which they have contributed..

We shall be taking a break online next Sunday, and then on Sunday 3rd January we shall be joining the York Methodist Circuit in their Covenant Service.

This has been a difficult year for so many of you, but it feels as though we are turning a corner, and that there is a dawning light where there was once just a dark cloud. As we ask for God's blessing, may I wish you all a very happy Christmas, and a New Year full of hope and joy!

May you be filled with the wonder of Mary,
the obedience of Joseph,
the joy of the angels,
the eagerness of the shepherds,
the determination of the magi,
and the peace of the Christ child.

May Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit
bless you now and forever. Amen.