

## AN EVENING SERVICE ON CHRISTMAS EVE

*If more than one person is present someone may wish to read the leader part (L) and the others make the responses.*

(L) I bring you good news of great joy:  
**All: a Saviour has been born to us. Alleluia.**

(L) Unto us a child is born,  
**All: unto us a Son is given. Alleluia.**

(L) Today we remember Jesus  
and the story of his birth;  
**All: Jesus is our King.**

*A candle or candles may be lit before each response:*

(L) Jesus Christ is the light of the world;  
**All: Jesus is our Way.**

(L) With Jesus even dark places are light;  
**All: Jesus is the Truth.**

(L) In Jesus we shall live for ever:  
**All: Jesus is our Life.**

*This Carol may be said or sung:*

**Once in royal David's city,  
Stood a lowly cattle shed,  
Where a mother laid her baby  
In a manger for His bed:  
Mary was that mother mild,  
Jesus Christ her little child.**

**He came down to earth from heaven,  
Who is God and Lord of all,  
And His shelter was a stable,  
And His cradle was a stall;  
With the poor and meek and lowly,  
Lived on earth our Saviour holy.**

**And through all  
His wondrous childhood,  
He would honour and obey,  
Love and watch the lowly mother,  
In whose gentle arms He lay.  
Christian children all should be,  
Mild, obedient, good as He.**

**For He is our child-hood's pattern,  
Day by day like us He grew,  
He was little, weak, and helpless,  
Tears and smiles like us He knew,  
And He feeleth for our sadness,  
And He shareth in our gladness.**

**And our eyes at last shall see Him,  
Through His own redeeming love;  
For that child so dear and gentle,  
Is our Lord in heaven above,  
And He leads His children on,  
To the place where He is gone.**

**Not in that poor lowly stable,  
With the oxen standing by,  
We shall see Him, but in heaven,  
Set at God's right hand on high;  
When like stars  
His children crowned,  
All in white shall be around.**

(L) That this evening may be holy, good and peaceful, let us pray with one heart and mind.

**All: As our evening prayer rises before you,  
O God, so may your mercy come down upon us  
to cleanse our hearts and set us free to sing  
your praise now and for ever. Amen.**

(L) Christ the light of the world has come  
to dispel the darkness of our hearts.  
In his light let us examine ourselves  
and then confess our sins.

*A moment of silence is kept*

(L) You were born for our salvation:  
Lord, have mercy.

**All: Lord, have mercy.**

(L) You came as Saviour to bring wholeness and  
peace: Christ, have mercy.

**All: Christ, have mercy.**

(L) You come to bring light into the darkness of our  
lives: Lord, have mercy.

**All: Lord, have mercy.**

(L) May God who loved the world so much  
that he sent his Son to be our Saviour  
forgive us our sins  
and make us holy to serve him in the world,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.**

*We now say Psalm 113 together:*

- 1 **Alleluia.**  
Give praise, you servants of the Lord, ♦  
O praise the name of the Lord.
- 2 **Blessed be the name of the Lord, ♦**  
from this time forth and for evermore.
- 3 **From the rising of the sun to its setting ♦**  
let the name of the Lord be praised.
- 4 **The Lord is high above all nations ♦**  
and his glory above the heavens.
- 5 **Who is like the Lord our God, ♦**  
that has his throne so high, ♦  
yet humbles himself to behold  
the things of heaven and earth?
- 6 **He raises the poor from the dust ♦**  
and lifts the needy from the ashes,
- 7 **To set them with princes, ♦**  
with the princes of his people.
- 8 **He gives the barren woman a place in the  
house ♦ and makes her a joyful mother of  
children. Alleluia.**

**The first reading - Isaiah 9 v 2 to 7:**

<sup>2</sup> The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—  
on them light has shined.  
<sup>3</sup> You have multiplied the nation,  
you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as with joy at the harvest,  
as people exult when dividing plunder.  
<sup>4</sup> For the yoke of their burden,  
and the bar across their shoulders,  
the rod of their oppressor,  
you have broken as on the day of Midian.  
<sup>5</sup> For all the boots of the tramping warriors  
and all the garments rolled in blood  
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.  
<sup>6</sup> For a child has been born for us,  
a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders;  
and he is named  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
<sup>7</sup> His authority shall grow continually,  
and there shall be endless peace  
for the throne of David and his kingdom.  
He will establish and uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time onward and forevermore.  
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

***This Carol may be said or sung:***

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 so sad,  
Since our Redeemer made us glad:  
Then why should we on earth be so sad,  
Since our Redeemer made us glad:  
When from our sin He set us free,  
All for to gain our liberty?

When sin departs before his grace,  
Then life and health come in its place;  
When sin departs before his grace,  
Then life and health come in its place;  
Angels and earth with joy may sing,  
All for to see the new-born king.

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 and peace to men,  
Now and forevermore. Amen.'

(L) The Word became flesh and dwelt among us,  
full of grace and truth.

**All: The Word became flesh and dwelt among us,  
full of grace and truth.**

(L) And we have seen his glory,  
the glory as of a father's only son,  
**All: full of grace and truth.**

(L) Glory to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit.

**All: The Word became flesh and dwelt among us,  
full of grace and truth.**

**The second reading - Luke 2 v 1 to 20**

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup>This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup>All went to their own towns to be registered. <sup>4</sup>Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. <sup>5</sup>He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup>While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. <sup>7</sup>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.

<sup>8</sup>In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup>Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup>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: <sup>11</sup>to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup>This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup>And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host,<sup>[b]</sup> praising God and saying,

<sup>14</sup>"Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!"

<sup>15</sup>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." <sup>16</sup>So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup>When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; <sup>18</sup>and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup>But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup>The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

***Some thoughts from Revd. Carol:***

We have all known for quite some time that Christmas around the whole world was going to be different this year, and whilst mulling over what I

was going to talk about for this Christmas Eve service, I began to draw some parallels with what was going on at the time of Jesus' birth. Parallels in that just the same as what is happening around us today was not expected this time last year, Mary and Joseph, a year prior to Jesus' birth could not have expected to be in the situation they found themselves in.

Firstly, we have Mary and Joseph planning that they would be married and looking forward to their future together in Nazareth. Joseph, perhaps hoping to do well in his carpentry business and being able to provide for his wife to be and maybe children in the future. Mary excited at the prospect of being married and having a home to share with her new husband, and like Joseph, looking forward to the possibility of having a family one day. Then, out of the blue comes the unexpected, an encounter with an Angel who gives Mary the message that will turn both hers and Joseph's world upside down. Mary would become pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit, and the baby she conceives would not be her fiancé Joseph's, but God's! As for Joseph, well he would go through the struggles of his love for Mary, yet here was she saying she was pregnant and knowing most definitely it was not his child. How could he, and Mary for that matter, face the uncertainty of how people would react. We have to remember that in those times they would be made to feel ashamed and face ridicule for their behaviour. Who would believe either of them?!

Once they had both got their head around the situation that confronted them and accepted what God had put in place for them. They continued to plan the wedding whilst Mary went away to stay with her cousin in the countryside for a while. Hopefully, by the time she returned all the rumour and speculation will have died down and they could just get on with their lives. However, as is often the case in life, that was not the end of the upheaval, because the census was called and, no, it wasn't any old census where you registered in the town you happened to live, they had to be registered in the town where Joseph came from, Bethlehem. By this time Mary was heavily pregnant and not in an ideal state to be travelling. But she had to go with her husband so they could both register – this was a journey made on foot, with the aid of a donkey, and took some 3-5 days depending on what speed you walked, and I am guessing in Mary's condition their pace was on the slower side.

We all know the trouble they had finding somewhere to stay when they arrived in Bethlehem. Basically, everywhere was rammed full and they ended up in a cow shed of all places! Jesus was born and there were lots of people visiting, shepherds first, and eventually some exotic men from the east, who had been travelling for months. These visitors all brought gifts that were literally fit for a King. Mary and Joseph had planned on returning to Nazareth, but Joseph was given a message from God to take his family away to another country as Herod planned to have their son killed. So, once again their

lives were not working out as they had planned, they upped stumps and went to Egypt, where they ended up staying for three years, until it was safe to return home.

So, what parallels can we draw from this story. Well, most definitely our world has been turned upside down this year. There are couples who should have been celebrating their first Christmas as husband and wife, but they found that they have had to make the difficult decision to cancel the wedding, initially because the whole country had come to a virtual standstill! Everything had to close, including registry offices, churches, and the venues where receptions could be held. When things were allowed back, numbers were, and still are restricted, meaning family and friends that might have joined in the celebrations are not able to.

There are people who were cut off from their families and homes because they happened to be abroad when lockdown began. Indeed, a friend of ours ended up on his own in another country for three months, because he had travelled ahead of his wife to their holiday home in the Canary Islands. Not a bad place to be stuck you might think, but not much fun when you are not allowed to go anywhere other than to get essential supplies or medical assistance. And there are those who have not been able to see their loved ones, because they are in a care home or shielding, or are in a part of the country that is on a tighter regime than we currently find ourselves in.

When Joseph could not return to Nazareth with his family, it meant he could not return to his work. He had to leave all his carpentry tools, his workshop, and his income behind. This is the same for many people throughout this year and possibly into next too. People have found they have lost their jobs or their business, or they have not been able to work because they have been shielding. Their incomes or businesses have been compromised, yet they still have the pressures of trying to provide for their families.

Mary, Joseph and their new baby son, Jesus, had to make the best of a bad situation. They had to create a new life for themselves in what would have seemed like a whole new world. Egypt was a different country, a different culture, different language, and remember, there was history between Egyptians and Jews – Jews had once been enslaved by them, so to now be escaping to a place that was once a place of captivity for your people, must have put them in a bit of a dilemma. And here we think of those who are fleeing their own countries because of persecution and conflict, going to places they have only heard of and don't really know anything about, they have to learn a new language and culture.

Like Mary and Joseph, some people, maybe you, have had their world(s) turned upside down. All of us have had to learn to live our lives in a very

different way, we have not been able to comfort those who's loved ones have died. We have not been able to gather together in ways that we have always done. Traditions have been broken, those family gatherings that can't take place that we have all got used to year on year, and for those of all faiths, there have most certainly been changes in the way we do things. Here at St. Peter's, we would usually have had literally hundreds of people come to the various services throughout Christmas to celebrate the birth of our Saviour. But like Holy Week and Easter, we are deprived of that too.

Yet, there is hope. Just like Mary and Joseph we can look forward with hope in our hearts. How? Quite simply Jesus! The same as Jesus brought joy to his earthly parents' hearts, and a hope that God would see them through whatever lay ahead, so we too can put our hope in Him. Jesus' birth was the beginning of bringing hope to a troubled world and though the world continues to be troubled, He is here in the midst of it with us. The name Immanuel, one of the names given to Jesus, quite literally means God with us.

As Christians, Christmas is the time when we celebrate Jesus' coming into the world, the fulfilment of the prophets that God Himself will come to save us. Despite all that has happened this year and whatever lies ahead of us, when our worlds are turned upside down, when the unexpected happens, as people of faith we can still hang on to the hope that Christ Jesus brings us.

My own hope this year is that like Mary and Joseph, each and every one of you will know the joy and hope that Jesus brings and may I, on behalf of myself and Fr. Keith, wish you all a joyful, peaceful Christmas filled with hope. Hope in God for today and the future, whatever that holds, because God promised it to us when He sent His son, Immanuel, God with us. AMEN.

*This Carol may be said or sung:*

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 th' 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 a virgin's womb.  
Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see;  
Hail, th'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 Sun of Righteousness!  
Light and life to all he brings,  
Risen with healing in his wings  
Mild he lays his glory by,  
Born that we no more may die:  
Born to raise us from the earth,  
Born to give us second birth.  
Hark! the herald angels sing,  
"Glory to the new-born King!"

*We now say Mary's song, the Magnificat:*

*All:* When peaceful silence lay over all,  
and night was in the midst of her swift  
course:  
from your royal throne, O God, down from  
the heavens, leapt your almighty Word.

- 1 My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,  
my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour; ♦  
he has looked with favour on his lowly  
servant.
- 2 From this day all generations will call me  
blessed; ♦  
the Almighty has done great things for me  
and holy is his name.
- 3 He has mercy on those who fear him, ♦  
from generation to generation.
- 4 He has shown strength with his arm ♦  
and has scattered the proud in their conceit,
- 5 Casting down the mighty from their thrones ♦  
and lifting up the lowly.
- 6 He has filled the hungry with good things ♦  
and sent the rich away empty.
- 7 He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, ♦  
to remember his promise of mercy,
- 8 The promise made to our ancestors, ♦  
to Abraham and his children for ever.

*All* Glory to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now  
and shall be for ever. Amen.

*All* When peaceful silence lay over all,  
and night was in the midst of her swift  
course:  
from your royal throne, O God, down from  
the heavens, leapt your almighty Word.

*(L) In peace let us pray to the Lord:*

Father, in this holy night your Son our Saviour  
was born in human flesh.  
Renew your Church as the Body of Christ.

*Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer*

In this holy night there was no room for your Son  
in the inn.

Protect with your love those who have no home  
and all who live in poverty.

*Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer*

In this holy night Mary, in the pain of labour,  
brought your Son to birth.  
Hold in your hand all who are in pain or distress.

*Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer*

In this holy night your Christ came as a light  
shining in the darkness.  
Bring comfort to all who suffer in the sadness  
of our world.

*Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer*

In this holy night the angels sang, 'Peace to  
God's people on earth.'  
Strengthen those who work for peace and justice  
in all the world.

*Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer*

In this holy night shepherds in the field heard  
good tidings of joy.  
Give us grace to preach the gospel of Christ's  
redemption.

*Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer*

In this holy night strangers found the Holy  
Family, and saw the baby lying in the manger.  
Bless our homes and all whom we love.

*Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer*

In this holy night heaven is come down to earth,  
and earth is raised to heaven.  
Hold in your hand all those who have passed  
through death in the hope of your coming  
kingdom.

*Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer*

In this holy night Christians the world over  
celebrate Christ's birth.  
Open our hearts that he may be born in us today.

*Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer*

Father, in this holy night angels and shepherds  
worshipped at the manger throne.  
Receive the worship we offer in fellowship with  
Mary, Joseph and the saints  
through him who is your Word made flesh,  
our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

*(L) Now let us pray in the words that Jesus  
taught us:*

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.  
Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever. Amen.

*This Carol may be said or sung:*

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  
O come, let us adore Him  
O come, let us adore Him  
O come, let us adore Him  
Christ the Lord!

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation  
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!  
Glory to God  
in the highest  
O come, let us adore Him  
O come, let us adore Him  
O come, let us adore Him  
Christ the Lord!

*(L) Let us pray*

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 your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

May the joy of the angels,  
the eagerness of the shepherds,  
the perseverance of the wise men,  
the obedience of Joseph and Mary,  
and the peace of the Christ-child  
be ours this Christmas;  
and the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ,  
the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy  
Spirit, be with us and remain with us, this night  
and always. Amen.

*(L) Let us bless the Lord All: Thanks be to God*

**All: May the souls of all the faithful departed,  
through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.**