



O holy Child of Bethlehem
 Descend to us, we pray
 Cast out our sin and enter in
 Be born to us today
 We hear the Christmas angels
 The great glad tidings tell
 O come to us, abide with us
 Our Lord Emmanuel

(L) The night has passed, and the day lies open before us; let us pray with one heart and mind:

All: As we rejoice in the gift of this new day, so may the light of your presence, O God, set our hearts on fire with love for you; now and for ever. Amen.

(L) The sun of righteousness has dawned with healing in his wings. Let us come to the light of Christ, confessing our sins in penitence and faith.

All: God our Father, you sent your Son full of grace and truth: forgive our failure to receive him. Lord, have mercy.

Jesus our Saviour, you were born in poverty and laid in a manger: forgive our greed and rejection of your ways. Christ, have mercy.

Spirit of Love, your servant Mary responded joyfully to your call: forgive the hardness of our hearts. 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 The Gloria together:

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth. Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father, we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory. Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us; you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer. For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

We now say the collect for Christmas Day:

Almighty God, you have given us your only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin: grant that we, who have been born again and made your children by adoption and grace,

Morning Prayer at 10 am on Christmas Day

If there is more than one person present, someone may wish to read the parts marked (L), everyone says the rest together. You can say alternate verses in the Psalm and in the Canticles. Please have a Bible to hand.

(L) O Lord, open our lips
 All: and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

(L) You laid the foundation of the earth
 All: and the heavens are the work of your hands.

A candle is lit, and this prayer is said, reminding us of the Christ's coming among us:

Blessed are you, sovereign Lord, King of peace: to you be praise and glory for ever. The new light of your incarnate Word gives gladness in our sorrow, and a presence in our isolation. Fill our lives with your light, until they overflow with gladness and praise. Blessed be God for ever.

This carol is said or sung:

O little town of Bethlehem
 How still we see thee lie
 Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
 The silent stars go by
 Yet in thy dark streets shineth
 The everlasting Light
 The hopes and fears of all the years
 Are met in thee tonight.

For Christ is born of Mary
 And gathered all above
 While mortals sleep, the angels keep
 Their watch of wondering love
 O morning stars together
 Proclaim the holy birth
 And praises sing to God the King
 And Peace to men on earth.

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.

may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit;
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.

Read Isaiah 52 v 7 – 10 followed by Psalm 98 concluding with:

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.

Read Hebrews 1 v 1 – 12

This carol may be said or sung:

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
The little lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.
The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay,
The little lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,
But little lord Jesus no crying he makes.
I love thee, lord Jesus! Look down from the sky,
And stay by my bedside till morning is nigh.

Be near me, lord Jesus; I ask thee to stay
Close by me for ever and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in thy tender care,
And fit us for heaven to live with thee there.

(L) Alleluia, alleluia.
The Word became flesh and dwelt among us,
and we have seen his glory.

All: Alleluia.

Now read John 1 v 1 - 14

Here are some thoughts on today's readings from Fr Keith:

Picture yourself, for a moment, walking in the streets of Bethlehem on this day, 2000 years ago. It is early morning, the sun has just come up, and already the streets are coming alive, bustling with the crowds who have come to be registered at the census. The stalls of the traders are already doing brisk business as people begin their work for the day. Soldiers and slaves, the well to do and the poor, all caught up in the comings and goings of life. Friends meeting and greeting, business people hurrying to close a deal, farmers from the countryside with produce to sell, herders of flocks navigating the narrow streets with animals not used to the confines of the town. The noises and smells of the animals, the aromas of food cooking, the shouts and cries all competing to be heard, and people straining to be noticed. Just another day, in a time and place so very different and distanced from our experience.

We have heard a lot in the last few weeks, about how different our Christmas is having to be this year. The traditions that we hold most dear largely fallen by the wayside. We lament the loss of so much that is familiar and delights us. 'It's not a proper Christmas', many people are saying. But pause for a moment and consider what that phrase 'proper Christmas' actually means. What we think of as 'proper Christmas' is actually quite a recent invention. Bringing a tree into your house, the turkey dinner, Christmas cards, covering your house with lights, even most of the carols that we sing – all from just the nineteenth century onwards.

I started these thoughts by trying to paint a sketch of the circumstances of the very first Christmas Day, and that

certainly wouldn't have seemed to us to be a 'proper Christmas' either. No turkey and tinsel for Mary and Joseph, no gathering with family and friends, no tree, not even a house to celebrate in, and only the angels to do the singing! Not many people in Bethlehem would have even noticed what had happened in that stable, tucked away behind one of the inns on one of those busy, noisy, smelly streets. Not noticed, and so not cared about the world changing birth that had occurred, during the night, to an unknown couple from another town miles away.

Only a few shepherds had been let in on the event by God. They were the only ones that we read about, who would have known what had happened early that morning. But, that wasn't to remain the case. Luke tells us that the shepherds returned to the fields 'glorifying and praising God, for all that they had heard and seen, as it had been told them'. No doubt they were asked to explain their joy by others, and so gradually news would have got out. But, even so, we can be fairly certain that it was only a handful of people who, along with Mary and Joseph, actually celebrated 'Christmas' that year, and, moreover, without any of the 'essentials' that we think are necessary today.

For Mary and Joseph, and those shepherds, what was important on that first Christmas day was simply their encounter with Jesus Himself and what that told them about the nature of the God they worshipped. Here, in a little town, in a small province of a mighty empire, lying in an animal's feeding trough, was the Creator of everything that ever was and ever will be. The 'Word made flesh' as John the evangelist puts it. Here is shown a God who loves, and who cares about us more than we can ever fully comprehend.

'He came to what was his own' John 1 v 11 – just think about what those few words mean. Strip away all those things that we have put together over the years to create our familiar Christmas, and what are we left with? The profound truth that to God, we are 'his own'. We are so special to Him that He came in person to repair the damage that our greed, selfishness, violence, prejudice and hatred of each other had done to the perfect world that he had made.

So, this Christmas, perhaps more than any other, is a great opportunity to focus on what Christmas is really all about, an encounter with Jesus. The offer of friendship and salvation that the Baby of Bethlehem holds out to us is not obscured, as it often is, by the other things that can distract us. This is our chance to do what the shepherds did – to go, in our mind's eye, 'to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us' (Luke 2 v 15), and experience the joy that they felt long ago.

Next year we are all hoping for a more usual celebration, but even if that is so, let's not forget the focus that this Christmas will have helped us to have. And let's spread the true joy of Christmas to those who, today, are as unaware, as were the majority of people in Bethlehem 2000 years ago, of the great thing that came to pass that wonderful night. Let's do our bit in sweeping away any ignorance of the true meaning of Christmas, and let the Love of God take centre stage every year in the future. Amen.

Now pause for your own reflections.

(L): We now affirm our faith in the words of the Creed:

All I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,

suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;

he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.

(L) The Word of life which was from the beginning
All: we proclaim to you.

(L) The darkness is passing away
and the true light is already shining;
All: The Word of life which was from the beginning.

(L) That which we heard, which we saw with our eyes,
and touched with our hands,
All: we proclaim to you.

(L) For our fellowship is with the Father,
and with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.
All: The Word of life which was from the beginning
we proclaim to you.

We now say 'The Benedictus' together:

All: To us is born a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord,
and all the heavenly hosts now sing,
Glory to God in the highest.

- 1 Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel, ♦
who has come to his people and set them free.
- 2 He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour, ♦
born of the house of his servant David.
- 3 Through his holy prophets God promised of old ♦
to save us from our enemies,
from the hands of all that hate us,
- 4 To show mercy to our ancestors, ♦
and to remember his holy covenant.
- 5 This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
- 6 Free to worship him without fear, ♦
holy and righteous in his sight
all the days of our life.
- 7 And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the
Most High, ♦
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
- 8 To give his people knowledge of salvation ♦
by the forgiveness of all their sins.
- 9 In the tender compassion of our God ♦
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
- 10 To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the
shadow of death, ♦
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

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: To us is born a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord,
and all the heavenly hosts now sing,
Glory to God in the highest.

*Now we turn to God in a time of prayer, adapted from
Common Worship by Fr Keith:*

Let us pray to our incarnate Lord,
who has brought us out of darkness
and into his own marvellous light.

Christ born for us,
Son of God given for us:
help us to know you,
to worship and to serve you.

Lord, in your mercy, *hear our prayer.*

Wonderful counsellor,
you order all things with your wisdom:
help the Church to reveal the mystery of your love
and fill her with the Spirit of truth.

Lord, in your mercy, *hear our prayer.*

Mighty God,
the government is on your shoulders:
guide the leaders of the nations
and bring in your kingdom of justice and righteousness.

Lord, in your mercy *hear our prayer.*

Everlasting Father,
you call us to live together in unity:
protect by your mercy all your children,
bless our families and renew our communities.
Give to the lonely and isolated, the knowledge and
assurance of your constant presence.

Lord, in your mercy *hear our prayer.*

Prince of peace,
you bring reconciliation through the cross:
by your healing power give to all who suffer,
especially victims of the Covid pandemic.
your gift of wholeness and peace.

Lord, in your mercy *hear our prayer.*

Merciful Father, accept these prayers, for the sake of
your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Rejoicing in the presence of God here among us,
as our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

Our Father in heaven....

This Carol may be said or sung:

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," he said, for mighty dread
Had seized their troubled minds
"Glad tidings of great joy I bring
To you and all mankind."

“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,
And meanly wrapped in swathing bands
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 to the earth be peace;
Goodwill henceforth from heaven to men
Begin and never cease!”

Let us pray:

God our Father,
today the Saviour is born
and those who live in darkness are seeing a great light.
Help us, who greet the birth of Christ with joy,
to live in the light of your Son
and to share the good news of your love.
We ask this through Jesus Christ,
the light who has come into the world. Amen.

(L) May the Father, who has loved the eternal Son
from before the foundation of the world,
shed that love upon us his children.
Amen.

May Christ, who by his incarnation gathered into one
things earthly and heavenly, fill us with joy and peace.
Amen.

May the Holy Spirit,
by whose overshadowing Mary became the God-bearer,
give us grace to carry the good news of Christ.
Amen.

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, today and always. Amen.

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

All: May the souls of the faithful departed, through the
mercy of God, rest in peace, and rise with Christ in glory.
Amen.



Brighter Visions

A thought for Christmas 2020 from Bishop Andrew

Friends, as we approach a Christmas like no other, a line from a familiar Christmas carol has come to mind: not ‘In the bleak midwinter’, though it may have sometimes felt like that in our gloomier moments. Not ‘O tidings of comfort and joy’, though that’s been the inspired choice of the archbishops this year. But the phrase, ‘Brighter visions beam afar’.

From the beginning of the millennium, you see, this year - 2020 - has been associated with visions. Taking its cue from the world of the opticians, and deploying a rather obvious pun, every self-respecting business, school, hospital and church has had its 2020 Vision Statement, planning and preparing for this very moment, as 2020 draws to a close.

And such planning and preparations are important, of course, if our lives are to be fruitful and purposeful; and 2020 Vision Statements have their place. But what the *real* 2020 has reminded us is that even if our human vision might be proclaimed as faultless – 20/20 – when we next pay a visit to the opticians; there’s something we need that goes way beyond that: the ability, in the words of the apostle Paul, to walk by faith, not by sight:

*‘Sages, leave your contemplations,
‘Brighter visions beam afar’.*

The first Christmas, after all – like the first Good Friday – like the first Easter Day – was entirely unforeseen. No manmade vision statements could have come up with the idea that the world’s salvation would hang on the life of a tiny baby lying in a cattle shed, or an alleged blasphemer nailed to a cross, or an empty tomb and reports of a man risen from the dead. Only the divine vision of the prophets got anywhere the true story, and they ended up being ridiculed or thrown down wells for put in the stocks for their pains. As the first Christians went around proclaiming this message, they too were seen as fools, ‘fools for Christ’, as Paul again put it. But then he added, ‘God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength’.

And as I reflect back on this past year, and as I look forward to Christmas, my original 2020 vision statement – which, speaking personally, involved a sabbatical, and writing a book on Discipleship, and fostering the first tentative signs of church growth across the diocese in the 2019 statistics, may lie in tatters; but perhaps that’s a lesson in true discipleship itself. For following Jesus involves brighter visions than these, as together we choose to leave our human contemplations and ‘Come and worship Christ, the newborn king’.

May God bless you and yours this Christmastime!

+Andrew, December 2020