



Chet Valley Churches



Christmas Day Communion

25th December 2021

Welcome

♫ *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:

O come...

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

O come...

Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning,
Jesu, to thee be glory given;
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing:

O come...

Introduction

'Do I not fill heaven and earth?' says the Lord.
Now the Word is made flesh and laid in a narrow manger.

From eternity to eternity you are God,
and now we see you as a newborn child.

Greeting

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you
and also with you.



Invitation to Confession

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

Silence is kept.

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

Lord, have mercy. **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. **Christ, have mercy.**

Spirit of love, your servant Mary responded joyfully to your call: forgive the hardness of our hearts.

Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Absolution

May the God of all healing and forgiveness draw you to himself, that you may behold the glory of his Son, the Word made flesh, and be cleansed from all your sins, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Collect.

Let us pray in the peace of this Christmas celebration that our joy in the birth of Christ will last for ever.

Silence is kept.

Lord Jesus Christ, your birth at Bethlehem draws us to kneel in wonder at heaven touching earth: accept our heartfelt praise as we worship you, our Saviour and our eternal God. **Amen.**

Old Testament: Isaiah 62:6-12

Upon your walls, O Jerusalem, I have posted sentinels; all day and all night they shall never be silent. You who remind the Lord, take no rest, and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it renowned throughout the earth. The Lord has sworn by his right hand and by his mighty arm: I will not again give your grain to be food for your enemies,

and foreigners shall not drink the wine for which you have laboured; but those who garner it shall eat it and praise the Lord, and those who gather it shall drink it in my holy courts.

Go through, go through the gates, prepare the way for the people; build up, build up the highway, clear it of stones, lift up an ensign over the peoples. The Lord has proclaimed to the end of the earth: Say to daughter Zion, 'See, your salvation comes; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.' They shall be called, 'The Holy People, The Redeemed of the Lord'; and you shall be called, 'Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken.'

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

New Testament: Titus 3:4-7

But when the goodness and loving-kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Carol: Good Christian Men Rejoice

**Good Christian men, rejoice
with heart and soul and voice!**

Listen now to what we say:

Jesus Christ is born today.

Ox and ass before him bow,

and he is in the manger now:

Christ is born today, Christ is born today!

**Good Christian men, rejoice
with heart and soul and voice!**

Hear the news of endless bliss:

Jesus Christ was born for this.

He hath opened heaven's door,

and we are blessed for evermore.

Christ was born for this, Christ was born for this!



**Good Christian men, rejoice
with heart and soul and voice!
Now you need not fear the grave:
Jesus Christ was born to save;
Come at his most gracious call
to find salvation, one and all!
Christ was born to save, Christ was born to save!**

 Gospel Reading: Luke 2:8-20

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

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke
Glory to you, O Lord.

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: I 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.

When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

This is the Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

Sermon [Belinda]

I've just done a survey of the Christmas cards that I've been sent this year and discovered that about forty percent are religious, or at least have something vaguely speaking of Bethlehem about them, while the others have snow and wintry scenes, the ubiquitous robin and quite a few sheep (this is an overlap, because sheep can be both religious, if accompanied by angels or bright lights, and secular, if snow features in their surroundings.)

The Bible is full of references to sheep, from Jacob's flocks in Genesis to Isaiah's 'We had all strayed like sheep, each of us going our own way'. We often hear Jesus spoken of as the lamb of God and as the shepherd of his sheep, and he used the image of the lost sheep being found to show the joy that God feels when one of his children turn to him. In many a Nativity set and children's Bible sheep are well illustrated. Unlike the other contenders for official Christmas animal status, the donkey or the ox (not even mentioned) and the camel (presence assumed, alongside the wise men) they have a starring role in the nativity narratives, even if it is just as 'flocks'.

If you go to the Holy land today then the chances are that you will be taken to the Shepherds Fields church, south west of Bethlehem, in a heavily built-up area of the West Bank, the Palestinian area. It is nothing like we imagine the shepherds' fields would have been at the time of Jesus' birth, or at least not how I imagine them. There is a view across the valley, but it's a view to more buildings, so it would be quite a feat of imagination to envisage lonely shepherds out on that particular hillside. Inside the church there are a series of paintings going around the walls of the dome, showing the story, from the angels appearing to the shepherds round to their return to the field, looking transformed by what they have seen. The sheepdog is particularly noteworthy, having been cringing away from the angels, but ending up positively frolicking on the return journey.

It's all very attractive, but is it a bit too cosy? I think this is just one of many ways in which we have prettified the Christmas story. From her earliest depictions Mary has been beautiful, slim and finely dressed. The baby is always looking suspiciously large for a new born child, the age when they look delightful, as opposed to the red and squealing stage. Joseph is seen leaning on his staff, as if there was nothing that needed to be done- tell me of any new family when that can happen- and the stable, if ruined (to signify

the broken world which Jesus came to renew) is at least picturesque. The ox and ass are docile, the cattle lowing peacefully.

The real story, if we could go back in time and look, was almost certainly entirely different. Mary and Joseph had travelled a long way, over rough terrain. They would not have looked or felt clean and tidy and their accommodation would have been very basic. As for the shepherds- shepherds were not drawn from the high end of society, they were people who lived on the margins, often rather despised by town dwellers. And yet it was to these lowly characters that the angels came, not to the well to do citizens of the town. They were not thrilled to hear the message either, not at first- they were scared. The angel had to reassure them- Do not be afraid, I bring you good news.

God's message is sometimes very challenging and difficult to hear, for us as well as the shepherds.

Who might the angels take their message of great joy to in our times? A world leader, the chief executive of a major company, someone with real clout in society? Or could it be a homeless person, a refugee, a Big Issue seller or someone that the rest of us would avoid talking to?

There are some wonderful paintings of the Nativity from the Renaissance, often stiff with gold leaf, Mary in her blue robes (blue was the most expensive pigment to produce, so was the obvious choice for the Queen of heaven) the shepherds looking bucolic but respectable, and as for the wise men- what gorgeous fabrics they were decked out in! Totally impractical for camel travel, of course.

While these pictures are beautiful to look at, what message are they giving the viewer? You mustn't look scruffy if you're expecting to have a relationship with God. No outcasts here. Indeed, the donor of the painting often had himself and his family included in the scene, in their best outfits, showing their wealth and (naturally) their piety too. It's a small step from there to buying indulgences and making sure of a comfortable berth for the afterlife. As we know, Jesus had recognised and spoken about the dangers of wealth, but that didn't stop people through the ages from trying to buy a place in heaven.

The story of Jesus birth is about God's gift to the world, his love for the world that is so great that he was willing to come to earth as a humble, ordinary child. By doing that he could learn what human life was like from

the inside, as one of us, God with us, Emmanuel. No one is excluded from receiving that gift.

The shepherds didn't rush to Bethlehem to see a person with influence. They rushed because they were so overwhelmed by the sight and sound and message of the angels that they could do nothing else. God had sought them out and given them- ordinary, humble, peasant people that they were- the responsibility of being the first people outside his birth family to see God incarnate. The message of the angels was not for the elite, it was for everyone.

What does the message of the angels mean for us, in these strange and difficult times? All of us have been living with the stress of the pandemic for a year and 9 months: some of us have been ill, or anxious and uncertain. We have seen appalling suffering caused by wars and famine or greed for power, with tens of millions of people 'displaced'. There is a terrible pessimism, an almost fatalistic attitude, in much that we hear or see on our screens.

The angel told the terrified shepherds 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news, news of great joy for the whole nation.' That is the message that we, too, need to hear: Do not be afraid. God has not forgotten us. He is with us.

*Still through the cloven skies they come
With peaceful wings unfurled,
And still their heav'nly music floats
O'er all the weary world;
Above its sad and lowly plains,
They bend on hov'ring wing,
And ever o'er its Babel sounds
The blessed angels sing.*



The 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 from the Holy Spirit
and the Virgin Mary
and was made man.**

**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 worshipped 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.



Prayers of Intercession

In peace let us pray to the Lord.

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

Holy God, **hear our prayer.**

On this holy day 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.

Holy God, **hear our prayer.**

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

Holy God, **hear our prayer.**

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

Holy God, **hear our prayer.**

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

Holy God, **hear our prayer.**

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

Holy God, **hear our prayer.**

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

Holy God, **hear our prayer.**

On this holy day 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.

Holy God, **hear our prayer.**

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

Holy God, **hear our prayer.**

Father, on this holy day 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.**

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

The Peace

Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given,
and his name shall be called the Prince of Peace.

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

♪ Carol: Joy to the World

**Joy to the world! the Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King;
Let ev'ry heart prepare him room,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.**

**Joy to the world! the Saviour reigns;
Let men their songs employ,
While fields and floods, 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.**

The table is prepared and bread and wine are placed upon it.

Word made flesh, life of the world,
in your incarnation you embraced our poverty:
by your Spirit may we share in your riches.
Amen.

The Eucharistic Prayer

The Lord is here.
His Spirit is with us.

Lift up your hearts.
We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give thanks and praise.

All glory and honour be yours always and everywhere,
mighty creator, ever-living God.

We give you thanks and praise for your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ, who for love of our fallen race
humbled himself, was born of the Virgin Mary
by the power of your Spirit, and lived as one of us.

In this mystery of the Word made flesh
you have caused his light to shine in our hearts,
to give knowledge of your glory in the face of Jesus Christ.
In him we see our God made visible and so are caught up
in the love of the God we cannot see.

Therefore with all the angels of heaven
we lift our voices to proclaim the glory of your name
and sing our joyful hymn of praise:

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

**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

Accept our praises, heavenly Father,
through your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ,
and as we follow his example and obey his command,
grant that by the power of your Holy Spirit



these gifts of bread and wine may be to us his body and his blood;
who, in the same night that he was betrayed,
took bread and gave 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.

In the same way, after supper
he took the cup and gave you thanks;
he gave it to them, saying:
Drink 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.

Therefore, heavenly Father, we remember his offering of himself
made once for all upon the cross;
we proclaim his mighty resurrection and glorious ascension;
we look for the coming of your kingdom,
and with this bread and this cup we make the memorial
of Christ your Son our Lord.

Great is the mystery of faith:

Christ has died:

Christ is risen:

Christ will come again.

Accept through him, our great high priest,
this our sacrifice of thanks and praise,
and as we eat and drink these holy gifts
in the presence of your divine majesty, renew us by your Spirit,
inspire us with your love and unite us in the body of your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord.

Through him, and with him, and in him,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
with all who stand before you in earth and heaven,
we worship you, Father almighty, in songs of everlasting praise:

**Blessing and honour and glory and power
be yours for ever and ever. Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
thy will be done on earth
as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

We break the bread of life,
and that life is the light of the world.

**God here among us,
light in the midst of us,
bring us to light and life.**

Christ is the true bread
which has come down from heaven.
Lord, give us this bread always.

The Communion

Post Communion Prayer

God our Father, whose Word has come among us
in the Holy Child of Bethlehem:
may the light of faith illumine our hearts
and shine in our words and deeds;
through him who is Christ the Lord. **Amen.**



**Almighty God, we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work to your praise and glory. Amen.**

📖 Carol: *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*

**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 hosts 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 Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,
Risen with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays 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 & Dismissal

May the Father, who has loved the eternal Son from before the foundation of the world, shed that love upon you his children. **Amen.**

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

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

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. Proclaim the Word made flesh.

Glory, thanks, and praise to God.

