

Welcome

A child is born. A child to save us. **We share the news with great joy.**
A child is born. A child to challenge us. **We share the news with great joy.**
A child is born. A child for the world. **We share the news with great joy.**

Christ – the child is born. The Lord of Light, the Prince of Peace, the king of love,
We share the news with great joy. Amen

Circuit Advent Liturgy (Christmas Day)

Today we light all the candles of the Advent wreath. The first candle is for HOPE, the second candle is for PEACE, the third candle is for JOY, and the fourth candle is for LOVE. The centre candle is the Christ candle.
The candles are lit.

(Isaiah 9:6): For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Let us pray.

O God of hope, peace, joy, and love. As Mary and Joseph welcomed you into the world, now help us welcome you into our lives. Give us courage to hope; strength to seek peace. Fill our spirits with joy; and our hearts with love. Through Jesus Christ, the Lord of all. **Amen.**

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you that when the world was very dark, you came, to bring light into our darkness. You came in the night, to bring light into the lives of Mary and Joseph. You came to Bethlehem, then as now a very troubled town, bringing light to all, who came to trust you.

You come to us now, into our lives and into our world, bringing light still to your people. We ask now once again to accept this worship, that we bring as we come again to the manger. Help us to see there, the light that will shine for us, not just as Christmas, but every day of the year.
Amen.

Reading: Luke 2: 1 – 20

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. 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. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 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. 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.

Carol: STF 214 - Once in Royal David’s City

1 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.

2 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 needy, poor and lowly
lived on earth our Saviour holy.

3 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.

4 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;
there his children gather round
bright like stars, with glory crowned.

Cecil Frances Alexander (1818–1895)

Christmas Day Talk

Unto us a Child is Born, We shall call him Jesus, A mighty king, Wonderful Counsellor, Prince of Peace
Emmanuel – God with us ...

Once I found myself, in the middle east, in a very unpromising situation. The family I was visiting were underfed, with very little prospect of being able to improve their circumstances. They were desperate to go back to Syria, but recognised that this was unlikely any time soon. And their tiny baby, who slept in my arms, faced growing into adulthood in a foreign country, in poverty.

And yet. When I asked the father of the family what he wanted for the future, instead of talking about better housing, more food, or even a return to Syria, said "I want my children to be the best people that they can be". It was breath-taking. A family who were facing immense poverty and dislocation, yet had the highest hopes for the character and contribution of their children.

A similarly unpromising set of circumstances surrounded another young family less than 50 miles away in Bethlehem two millennia ago. A young girl had given birth to a baby, far from her home and her family, in an outhouse, shared with animals. She had become pregnant outside marriage, and was only rescued from shame and rejection by her fiancé taking on a baby that wasn't his. Ahead lay real danger, as the ruler of the area would soon order his soldiers to slaughter all the baby boys. A dirty, shameful, dangerous

situation. An unpromising set of circumstances. And yet. This is exactly the place the Messiah, the son of God, was born into.

Emmanuel – God with us ...

But should we really be surprised? This is a God who said that the kingdom of heaven belonged, not to the rich or powerful or religious, but to little children. This is a God who chose women, tax collectors, fishermen to begin a worldwide movement for the salvation of all people. The apostle Paul, when writing to the Corinthians, said "But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God." (1 Corinthians 27-19)

We are living in times which might be described as hopeless and dark, and yet Emmanuel – God is with us ... We face great uncertainty in our politics, our economics, our relationships with one another. Around the planet there is apparently relentless violence, and the poorest, as ever, bear the consequences of our inability to restrain our use of resources. And yet **God is with us**, in the child, Jesus Christ.

Our faith surely prompts us not to turn away purely because any situation looks depressing or unworthy of our energy. This doesn't mean facing it with blind and passive optimism. Instead we have a hope which is grounded in the foolishness of God, which is wiser and stronger than the wisdom and strength of the world. And God is at work in our world, and invites us to join in. As the theologian Ken Leech said: "hope isn't a state of mind; it's a piece of work". Where is God asking us to see the treasure that is hidden within the clay jars? Where is God asking us, not to be optimistic, but rather to be hopeful?

A few years ago one of the churches I ministered in decided to try holding a Christmas Tree Festival – God called them to sit outside of their comfort zones, to try something new. God called them in expectant hope to invite people to decorate Christmas trees, to put the rota's in place to steward the trees over two days. And because they responded to that call, God drew 21 organisations to decorate a tree, and hundreds of people came into our church, many for the first time, to experience the warmth of hospitality, love and Christmas joy. And a local charity received over £1000 in donations. Quite remarkable at their first attempt.

If God is with us a new this Christmas Day – I wonder what God has install for us as a worshipping community in the year to come. Might new faces appear, for us to make contact with. Can we pray that they will come again, to experience and be part of God's kingdom here in this place. What is God Already doing for us and with us here at Dorset South and West Circuit? How much more will God do in the coming year, as long as we prayerfully join in, with his mission to this place.

As I draw to a close, may I take this opportunity to pray that you will have a happy and peace-filled Christmas, and that you will know the love of God who acts through **Emmanuel, God with us**, in the most unpromising things and people to bring about his kingdom of holiness and justice.

Amen.

Intercession Prayers

We come before you, Christmas Child, in silent amazement. May we welcome you among us.
Child of Bethlehem **Hear our prayers.**

As Mary welcomed you and rejoiced in God's holiness and mercy, we pray for the church as Christmas approaches. Child of Bethlehem **Hear our prayers.**

As shepherds welcomed you, giving you a home and a name, we pray for all who seek shelter in our community today / tonight. Child of Bethlehem **Hear our prayers.**

As angels welcomed you, singing of glory and peace, we pray for all who seek healing and hope. Child of Bethlehem **Hear our prayers.**

As Simeon welcomed you, recognizing in you his journey’s fulfilment, we pray for those who have died and for all who love them and miss them . . . Child of Bethlehem **Hear our prayers.**

The love of God is in us: The spirit of joy is with us, Emmanuel, Jesus, Now and always. **Amen.**

Carol: O Come all ye faithful (including the final verse)

1 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!*

2 True God of true God,
Light of Light eternal,
lo, he abhors not the Virgin’s womb;
Son of the Father,
begotten, not created:

3 See how the shepherds,
summoned to his cradle,
leaving their flocks, draw nigh to gaze;
we too will thither
bend our joyful footsteps:

4 Lo, star-led chieftains,
Magi, Christ adoring,
offer him incense, gold, and myrrh;
we to the Christ-child
bring our hearts’ oblations:

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

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

Latin, 18th century, possibly by
John Francis Wade (c. 1711–1786)

Blessing

Light of God, **Lead us**
Power of God, **Hold us**
Joy of God, **Heal us**
Laughter of God, **Bless us**

May the joy of the world, light into darkness, our prince of peace,
Surround you, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
May his love remain with you, with those you love and those you are called to love,
Now in the name of Christ. **Amen.**