

DS&W Circuit Written service Christmas Eve 2023 by Revd Steph Jenner

Christmas Eve this year is also the 4th Sunday in Advent so, using the Out of the Ordinary liturgy I invite you to light your fourth candle:

Advent 4

We listen as Advent reaches its fulfilment, we listen to the frenzied activity that is all around us, we listen to the travail and the trauma, we listen to joys and celebration.

God of all, listen to my cries and let me hear your voice.

We listen in the midst of noise and silence. We listen in aloneness and togetherness. We listen to the everyday, the ordinary, and there within it all, we listen to the voice of God.

God of all, listen to my cries and let me hear your voice.

We listen to messages new and old, from friends far and near. We listen to familiar words, hymns and songs, Bible stories telling all.

God of all, listen to my cries and let me hear your voice.

On this Christmas Eve, let us open our selves afresh to listen ever more to the messages of God that lighten our paths, confirm our faith, embrace our being and call us to be messengers ourselves.

God of all, listen to my cries and let me hear your voice.

Advent God, as we prepare to celebrate Christmas, that most extraordinary of gifts, let us open our ears to listen, our eyes to see, our hearts to love and our very beings to be enfolded in your Spirit. Let us listen and be open to our inner selves, to the world around us, to the sights, the sounds, the senses and the needs that surround us. Let us listen to your still small voice and be open to your indwelling Spirit. Let us be messengers of your good news that we have heard and let us be open, too, to listen to your good news that others share with us.

Amen.

Hymn StF 188

There's a light upon the mountains,
and the day is at the spring,
when our eyes shall see the beauty
and the glory of the King;
weary was our heart with waiting,
and the night-watch seemed so long;
but his triumph-day is breaking
and we hail it with a song.

There's a hush of expectation,
and a quiet in the air;
and the breath of God is moving
in the fervent breath of prayer:
for the suffering, dying Jesus
is the Christ upon the throne,
and the travail of our spirit
is the travail of his own.

He is breaking down the barriers,
he is casting up the way;
he is calling for his angels
to build up the gates of day:
but his angels here are human,
not the shining hosts above;
for the drum-beats of his army
are the heart-beats of our love.

Hark! We hear a distant music,
and it comes with fuller swell;
'tis the triumph-song of Jesus,
of our King, Immanuel:
Zion, go now forth to meet him;
and, my soul, be swift to bring
all your finest, and your noblest
for the triumph of our King.

Henry Burton

Prayers of Praise and Confession

On this day of expectation, we come before you, Loving God, in adoration as did those first visitors, as we wait in awesome wonder for the promised gift of the Prince of Peace and God with us. We praise you that you chosen participants listened to your word and accepted their parts in the wondrous story of love and hope entering into our world. And we know that if we listen with our hearts and minds, they can re-enter through us. O God of phenomenal presence, we humbly approach the manger once more this year and stay to feel our spirits lifted in the potential of your Son.

But we confess in the busyness we forget the true meaning of Christmas; the essence of hope, peace, joy, and love represented in our Advent candles. We get caught up in the trappings of the things we think are important and neglect the people at the hearts of God's love for the world. Forgive us our apathy, through tiredness, through financial restrictions, through family pressures, through physical limitations, and help us to find time and space to allow the Christ child into our hearts and homes to bring peace through forgiveness. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Luke 1: 26 – 45

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." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. 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, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, 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. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with 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.

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."



Hymn StF 186

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumbered blessings, give my spirit voice;
tender to me the promise of his word;
in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!
Make known his might, the deeds his arm
has done;
his mercy sure, from age to age the same;
his holy name – the Lord, the Mighty One.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!
Powers and dominions lay their glory by;
proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to
flight,
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
to children's children and for evermore!
Timothy Dudley-Smith

Luke 2: 1 – 7

In those days a decree went out from Caesar 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 in the guest room.

Hymn StF 193

Born in the night, Mary's Child,
a long way from your home;
coming in need, Mary's Child,
born in a borrowed room.

Clear shining light, Mary's Child,
your face lights up our way;
light of the world, Mary's Child,
dawn on our darkened day.

Truth of our life, Mary's Child,
you tell us God is good;
prove it is true, Mary's Child,
go to your cross of wood.

Hope of the world, Mary's Child,
you're coming soon to reign;
King of the earth, Mary's Child,
walk in our streets again.

Geoffrey Ainger

Reflection

When I was able, I used to like going to the midnight service on Christmas Eve. The anticipation was always palpable, but entering that little bubble of words and music, candlelight and warm joy gave a chance to remember what we were there to celebrate.

But my favourite part of this Christmas ritual was the walk home, whether across my childhood village, through the city of my adulthood, or now from town. There is something in the air, often cold, Christmas lights punctuating the darkness, but the noticeable part for me is the silence. A silence of expectation. I love that. It gives precious time to listen to our surroundings, clear our heads, still our minds and, before the chaos of Christmas Day erupts, gives us the opportunity to take a breath and take in the whole awesome beginning of a baby born to change the world.

Our Christmas Story has all manner of people listening to God, to angels, to each other, and thus the narrative unfolds. Too often these days listening is a half-hearted effort because we are busy multitasking; the world is noisy and rude; small voices cannot be heard, and loud voices upset us by what they say.

So let's help ourselves and each other this Christmas to find the room where we can focus on the still small voice, take it into our essence and project the Good News into all lives.

May you have a blessed Christmas, however you celebrate.

Prayers of Thanksgiving

Incarnate God, for all that Christmas brings, for all that Christmases past and present mean to us, we give you thanks. For giving us the space and time to remember; for the renewal of hope for the future, we give you thanks. For the gift of kind words, reconnection with family and friends, for necessities and frivolities, we give you thanks. For all that Christmas enables for us and from us we give our unending thanks. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

In our prayers, let us take a moment of quiet to ourselves and our world.

We pray for those, including ourselves, who will not celebrate and share this year because of bereavement, poverty, ill-health, difficult circumstances, war, oppression, injustice...

silence

We pray for those, including ourselves, who will celebrate and share this Christmas. Our church families and communities, our villages, towns, and cities, those who travel and those who wait for arrivals.

silence

We pray that we can give ourselves permission to join and enjoy, even though we know we are the fortunate, but let us remember too all that Christ came to do on the earth and let us promise to carry Jesus with us, let the Spirit work through us and allow God to reign in our lives. Amen.

Hymn StF 217

Silent night, holy night:
sleeps the world; hid from sight,
Mary and Joseph in stable bare
watch o'er the child beloved and fair
sleeping in heavenly rest.

Silent night, holy night:
shepherds first saw the light,
heard resounding clear and long,
far and near, the angel-song:
'Christ the Redeemer is here!'

Silent night, holy night:
Son of God, O how bright
love is smiling from your face!
Strikes for us now the hour of grace,
Jesus, Lord at your birth.

Joseph Mohr trans.
Stopford Augustus Brooke

Blessing

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

