

24 December 2020: Midnight Communion

Theme: Jesus and the Angels

Call to Worship

The grace of God is dawning upon the world, with healing for all mankind.

Hymn StF 217 Silent night <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bledvtczSbk>

- 1 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.
- 2 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 !'
- 3 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 (1792–1848)

translated by Stopford Augustus Brooke (1832–1916)

Prayer

Fragile child, born in the night –
We listen in the clarity of the cold night air.
We hear the hoofs clopping in the dust,
a man's soft voice reassuring a tired woman.
We hear his voice inquiring,
"Is there room?"
"Is there room for us?"
Fragile child, born in the night –
We know the story.
We know that you are coming.
"Is there room?"
"Is there room for you?"
Fragile child, born in the night –
We see the shadowy figures finding the stable.
"There is no room."
We see the man preparing a place in the hay.
He makes room.
We see the woman moving heavily,
The hours of labour, the sweat, the tears, the cries,
the moans, the crushing grip of the hands.
We hear the insistent cry of the child wail out, born at last!
"Make room!"
"Make room for me!"
Fragile child, born in the night –
We hear your cry.
We hear from the hills and the pastures,
your cry as a newborn child ringing out in the still air,
your cry echoed
in the thunderous announcement from the skies.
We see you in the manger.

Christ Church, Woodley

We travel across the miles to see,
your glory as a newborn child lying in a manger,
your glory reflected in the star we follow.
Fragile child, born in the night –
We have room for you, whoever we are;

We are poor scruffy shepherds and elegant educated kings.
We are waiters and directors, students and teachers;
We are villagers hauling water and
We are survivors, struggling to rebuild lost lives.

Fragile child,
meet us here in the lighting of our small lights,
that we may know your awesome power making room among us
as the light that shines in the darkness,
the fragile light that the darkness cannot overpower.
Fragile God, there is room in our inn.
Be born in our night.
Amen.

Lord's Prayer.

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.

Reading Luke 2:1-7

¹ In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to their own town to register.

⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Reading Luke 2:8-16

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of

David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.”

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

Hymn StF 706 Longing for light <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrpJw9yX6y0>

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| <p>1 Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
light for the world to see.
<i>Christ, be our light !
Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light !
Shine in your Church gathered today.</i></p> <p>2 Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice.</p> | <p>3 Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others,
shared until all are fed.</p> <p>4 Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
walls made of living stone.</p> <p>5 Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
making your kingdom come.</p> |
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Bernadette Farrell (b.1957)

Address

My message to you this evening is carried in three quotations.

Isaiah 9:2-3, 6

² The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

³ You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy;
they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest,
as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder.

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.

Titus 2:11-14

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹² It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

So, the first two quotations tell us what we have received, and do so with the authority of Biblical texts. My third quotation is imaginative. It takes the situation we have heard of so often – no room at the inn – and re-interprets it not as a story of meanness and privation, but as one of generosity. Of course, this is just one way of looking at it, and we cannot know the detail of what actually happened.

The innkeeper was used to saying ‘no’. He’d been saying ‘no’ all night.

“No, you can’t get a room here tonight. No, you can’t have more towels. No, you can’t have another pudding. No, you can’t invite your mother-in-law and family to share your room. No, no, no, NO!”

It had made him very grumpy. In fact, he was often grumpy. And then the door went one more time.

“Oh no”, he said. “Don’t they know by now that there is no more room?”

He swung open the door and was about to launch into his usual speech about there being no more room, when he hesitated and stuttered. He could feel himself trying to say ‘no’ as usual, but the man standing there looked so concerned and it was obvious that the woman was about to give birth. His lips started to move differently, and he found himself saying ‘yes’. He was amazed how good that felt.

Mary and Joseph, who were the ones standing at the door, looked at each other and then at the innkeeper, and said, “but we haven’t asked you anything.”

The innkeeper just said, “Yes”.

“So you do have room?” asked Joseph.

“Yes”, said the innkeeper, who was feeling much better now.

“For the two of us and perhaps a baby?”

“Yes”, said the innkeeper, and a smile grew around his face. “in here?” asked Joseph, “or round the back?”

“Yes”, said the innkeeper, who by now was positively beaming.

“Which?” asked Joseph.

“Sorry”, said the innkeeper, coming out of his daze. “Round the back”.

So, he took them to a stable where it was warm. And having let Mary and Joseph in, he stood by the door while Jesus was born, guarding it.

Later, as a bundle of shepherds arrived, asking to see the new baby, the innkeeper found himself saying only one thing: “yes, come in, There is room. There is always room.”

And such has been the way of all those caught up in the Christmas story. Mary, Joseph, shepherds, travellers, and now the innkeeper.

The answer at Christmas is ‘yes’, and it changes everything.

Hymn Child in the manger (Tune Bunessan - Morning has Broken)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWWAUcYiFZE>

Child in the manger! Infant of Mary, Outcast and stranger, Lord of all! Child who inherits All our transgressions, All our demerits On him fall!	Once the most holy Child of Salvation, Gentle and lowly Lived below; Now as our glorious Mighty Redeemer, See Him victorious O'er each foe.	Prophets foretold Him -- Infant of wonder; Angels behold him On His throne; Worthy our Saviour Of all their praises, Happy for ever Are His own.
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Mary MacDonald (translated)

Communion Introduction

We come as we are, because Jesus told us only to have a loving heart, and we remember his invitation and his promise:

“Come”, he said, “all ye who travail and are heavy laden, and I will give you peace. Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in spirit, and you will find rest.”

“I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall not hunger; and he that believes in me shall never thirst. I will not cast out the one that comes to me. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness; they shall be satisfied.”

We come today in that peace, to inherit that rest.

Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you
And also with you

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

It is indeed right, it is our duty and our pleasure to give thanks to God for his grace; for his bountiful creation, for the love which has fathered us forth, for his great gift to the world, our Lord Jesus; for his guiding ministry, for his death on the Cross, and for his presence ever with us, alive in the world, we give our heartfelt thanks and praise. Amen

Breaking

In doing this, we follow Jesus's example and command.

On the night when he was arrested, Jesus took bread, and after giving thanks to God, he broke it and said, “this is my body, which is for you; do this in memory of me. Likewise, after supper, he took the cup, and said, “this cup is the new covenant sealed by my blood. Whenever you drink it, do so in memory of me.”

Sharing *Please take bread and wine/juice as you are able*

Grace

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

And also with you

Peace

On the evening of the first Easter Day, when the disciples were together behind locked doors for fear, Jesus came and stood among them. "Peace be with you!" he said; then he showed them his hands and his side. On seeing the Lord, the disciples were overjoyed. Jesus said again, "Peace be with you".

Joyful in the presence of our risen Lord, let us share, as we are able, signs of peace.

Prayers of Intercession & Thanksgiving

Minister

Loving God, tonight help us remember the birth of Jesus,
that we may share in the song of the angels,
the gladness of the shepherds,
and worship of the wise men.

Close the door of hate
and open the door of love all over the world.
Let kindness come with every gift and good desires with every
greeting.

Deliver us from evil by the blessing which Christ brings,
and teach us to be merry with clear hearts.

May the Christmas morning make us happy to be thy children,
and Christmas evening bring us to our beds with grateful thoughts,
forgiving and forgiven, for Jesus' sake.

Lord, take us from the worn clothes of adulthood
And dress us up like children
So that we can dream and imagine and play again;
Let our conversation with you move from formality to friendliness,
Until all of life and all of us become open to your Spirit.
Because you, not we, are God. We need you, God

All

WE NEED YOU, GOD.

Minister

Listen, for the God who created us says,
"Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name; you are mine."

And so, we are that are redeemed respond to your love; we will
walk in your light, we will follow your Son, we will live by your
Spirit. We will not offer to you things that have cost us nothing. We
will use ourselves as your agents to convert wrong into right; to
bring happiness to the afflicted; to seek justice and mercy for all.
Use our hands, use our minds and our energy.

Help us to speak for the voiceless, to defend the persecuted, and to
be advocates for a fairer world. Help us to share our faith in Jesus in
places where faith is suspected.

Hear our prayer, and make participants in your gracious purposes

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, AMEN

Hymn StF 181 Of the Father's Love begotten https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K9JUt_G_Js0

- 1 Of the Father's love begotten
ere the worlds began to be,
he is Alpha and Omega,
he the source, the ending he,
of the things that are, that have been,
and that future years shall see,
evermore and evermore.
- 2 By his word was all created ;
he commanded, it was done ;
earth and sky and boundless ocean,
universe of three in one ;
all that sees the moon's soft radiance,
all that breathes beneath the sun,
evermore and evermore.
- 3 This is he whom seers in old time
chanted of with one accord,
whom the voices of the prophets
promised in their faithful word ;
now he shines, the long-expected ;
let creation praise its Lord,
evermore and evermore.
- 4 O you heights of heaven, adore him ;
angel hosts, his praises sing ;
all dominions, bow before him,
and extol our God and King ;
let no tongue on earth be silent,
every voice in concert sing,
evermore and evermore !

Aurelius Clemens Prudentius (348–c.413)
translated by John Mason Neale (1811–1866)
and Henry Williams Baker (1821–1877)

Lighting of Christmas candles

Blessing

Eternal God; this holy night is radiant with the brilliance of your one true light. Grant that we who have known the revelation of that light on earth may come to see the splendour of your heavenly glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever.

May the joy of the angels, the humility of the shepherds, and the peace of the Christ-child be God's gift to you and all people, this Christmas and always. *Amen*

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Third Quotation: Script Adapted from 'No and Yes', by Roddy Hamilton, in 'Spill the Beans', published in 'Winter'; Wild Goose Resource Group.