

Christmas at Home

25th December 2024

(Rachel Mitchell – South Devon Circuit)



Today is Christmas Day and I invite you to start your day, after wishing those around you 'Happy Christmas' by lighting a candle or by switching on some other light(s) at home as a sign that it's Jesus' birthday.

*As we celebrate today, let us affirm with joy: **We welcome this light as a sign of Christ coming to dwell with us, to live in the neighbourhood of vulnerable humanity, as a vulnerable child.***

May the light of Christ warm our hearts and light our way as we share the joy of God's salvation wherever we go. Amen

STF 212: O come all ye faithful

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q8dqI4-bVPU>

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 (x3) ... 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: *O come...*

3] Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation, Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above:

'Glory to God in the highest': *O come...*

4] Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning,

Jesus, to thee be glory given. Word of the Father,

Now in flesh appearing: *O come...*

18th century - Attributed to John Francis Wade

Let us pray:

Lord God, Child in the manger, Light of the world,

We welcome you

Whether or not the road to our hearts is made ready

We welcome you

Come King of creation, come be our guest and know

We welcome you

Come again to our hearts and our world, where your ways and your grace is so needed,

We welcome you

Move in and be with us we pray

O come, O come Emmanuel. Amen

As we celebrate Christ's birth we remember the words of the prophet Isaiah:

Isaiah 9 verses 2-4 and 6-7

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness on them light has shined.

You have multiplied the exultation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders, and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Great will be his authority, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore.

The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

STF 330: Joy to the world <https://youtu.be/L7tE-0NYq5I>

1] Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King;
let every heart prepare him room, and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven, and heaven, and nature sing.

2] Joy to the world, the Saviour reigns!
Let all their songs employ; while fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

3] He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness, the wonders of his love, the wonders of his love,
the wonders, the wonders of his love.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

Luke 2 verses 8-18

Now in that same 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.

STF 191: Away in a manger <https://youtu.be/3dxzdsfJp2s>

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 you, Lord Jesus! Look down from the sky, and stay by my side until morning is nigh.

Be near me, Lord Jesus: I ask you to stay close by me forever and love me, I pray.

Bless all the dear children in your tender care, and fit us for heaven to live with you there.

Verses 1 & 2 unknown. Verse 3 J. T. McFarland. (c. 1906)

Thought for today:

I recently picked up a book that challenged me, the reader, to find three words to describe a particular event. This set me thinking about what three words I would use to describe Christmas, and to wonder what words you would choose too?

You might think of what you do, who you will be with, or even some of the things you eat, to find these words, resulting in something like: stockings, family, Brussels-sprouts! Yet, even as I suggest these three words, I know this isn't right; I feel in my bones that the very heart of Christmas is missing.

So, what if we use words to describe how we feel at Christmas? Words like joy, excitement, gratitude... but again I feel the heart seems to be missing.

Then I wondered if, rather than choosing three unconnected words, a three-word phrase would be better. Something that cuts through all the glitter and glitz to what is at the true heart of the Christmas story; a simple phrase, like... "*Christ is born.*"

The more I think about it, the more I like this. Each word speaks of what is at the heart of Christmas:

Christ – which means 'Messiah', is so much more than just a title for Jesus. It encompasses the longing of people as they waited for God's promised one to come and save his people. It also speaks to us of the risen Christ (would there be Christmas if we had no Easter?) who will come again, which leads us on to....

Is – this is not just the connecting word between the first and the last. Even though it is small (as baby Jesus was small) it still has something to say. It would have been easy to replace it with 'was', which would have limited Christ to one place and time – but that would be to deny the truth of who Christ IS – God come to save us. 'Is' tells us He is with us today, just as he was with Mary and Joseph and the shepherds that first Christmas day and reminds us how he IS the beginning and the end. In him we find our true home.

Born – a word that speaks of a new beginning and is the reason for our celebration. New birth usually brings joy and hope. To be born is to enter a new existence, with much to discover, explore and learn. It is also to become vulnerable – reliant on others for so much. For Christ to be born among us, as one of us tells us of God's incredible love, his desire to make himself known to us, and his plan to redeem us.

How incredible that Christ should be born. How wonderful that he is still being born in the hearts and lives of his people today. His choice to come and be with us, to be born then and now, and to come to save us – this for me is the heart of Christmas.

Prayers for ourselves and others:

Lord Jesus,

today we thank you that you came to earth as one of us, to show us your love and to share with us your vision for all your world.

We thank you that you came full of grace and truth. Not to condemn us or give us what we deserved, but to show us your love and to save us.

We thank you for the hope we have, because you came and are still with us today – our Emmanuel.

Help us, in the middle of our celebrations today, to not lose sight of you and your promises, which should be at the heart of Christmas.

- Comfort those who miss loved ones today.
- Befriend the lonely and show them your love.
- Bring your healing to the broken;
- Fill us anew with your love, joy, hope and peace,

...so that your grace and glory may be seen in us and through us in the days to come.

We thank you Lord Jesus, that because you are born, we can know you and see you at work, even now, in us and in all your world. Amen

STF 202: Hark! The herald-angels sing <https://youtu.be/y6oKsxqmozc>

1] 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 host proclaim,
'Christ is born in Bethlehem.' *Hark! The herald-angels sing glory to the new-born King.*

2] Christ, by highest heaven adored,

Christ, the everlasting Lord, late in time

behold him come, offspring of a virgin's womb. Veiled in flesh the Godhead see!

Hail, the incarnate Deity! Pleas'd as man with men to dwell,

Jesus, our Immanuel: *Hark! The herald-angels sing glory to the new-born King.*

3] 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.*

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Blessing

May the joy of the angels, the gladness of the shepherds, the wonder of the wisemen and the peace of the Christ child be yours this Christmas and for ever more; and may the blessing of God the Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, rest on you and those you love, today and always. Amen