



AT HOME SERVICE

Sunday 22nd December 2024

compiled by Rev. Melvyn Cooke

Call to Worship

As we gather, we get ready,
We get ready for the coming season,
We get ready to celebrate Jesus.
We get ready to meet Jesus again.
As we gather, we get ready.

Hymn 171 StF: Hark the glad sound

1] Hark, the glad sound! the Saviour comes,
The Saviour promised long!
Let ev'ry heart prepare a throne
And ev'ry voice a song.

2] He comes the pris'ners to release,
In Satan's bondage held;
The gates of brass before him burst,
The iron fetters yield.

3] He comes the broken heart to bind,
The bleeding soul to cure,
And with the treasures of his grace,
To enrich the humble poor.

4] Our glad hosannas, Prince of Peace
your welcome shall proclaim,
and heaven's eternal arches ring
With your beloved name.

Philip Doddridge (1702-1751)

Prayer

You are King and King and Lord of Lords, Messiah, and Ruler of All, yet you came not as a lion but as a lamb. You came as an innocent baby whose purpose was to walk this earth in complete love and then to sacrificially give his life as an atonement for the sins of His children. Emmanuel. God with us.

Reading: Luke 2: 8 – 18

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths 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,

and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.

Hymn 217 StF: Silent night

1] Silent night, holy night!

Sleeps the world; hid from sight,
Mary and Joseph in stable bare
watch o'er the child belovèd 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 thy face!
Strikes for us now the hour of grace,
Jesus, Lord at your birth!

Joseph Mohr (1792-1916)

Reflection

Christmas is kind of a big deal in Finland. And there's a great tradition there that happens every year. In fact, it has happened almost every year since the 1300s. That's a serious tradition, going on for more than 700 years. It's called the Declaration of Christmas Peace and is read at noon every Christmas Eve.

Tomorrow, God willing, is the graceful celebration of the birth of our Lord and Saviour; and thus is declared a peaceful Christmas time to all, by advising devotion and to behave otherwise quietly and peacefully, because he who breaks this peace and violates the peace of Christmas by any illegal or improper behaviour shall under aggravating circumstances be guilty and punished according to what the law and statutes prescribe for each and every offence separately. Finally, a joyous Christmas feast is wished to all inhabitants of the city.

You'd better not mess with the Finns' Christmas peace or you will be dealt with harshly! But what a great way to usher in Christmas, with a reminder of Christ's coming and the peace He brings into the world!

Suddenly in the middle of a dark and ordinary night in the Bethlehem countryside, an angel appears in the sky and is then joined by a sky full of angels. The New Living Translation calls them, "the armies of heaven," and it's hard to imagine just how magnificent and bright and terrifying and glorious a sight this must have been.

And then there's the sound. All together these incredible angels are praising God, probably singing, and declaring glory to God in heaven and peace on earth to humanity. What language, or languages, were they speaking and singing? What kind of melody and harmony? How loud must it have been? Or could anyone else hear it?

Of course, the audience for this grand announcement and amazing angelic show must have been the most important VIPs, the rich and famous and powerful, the kings and queens and movers and shakers of the world, right?

No! You know this story. It's those shepherds. Those completely ordinary, average-Joe, night shift-working animal tenders who are the unlikely, unexpected recipients of this message of peace, wholeness and God's favour. It's yet another scene in how God is perfectly flipping the script on what we humans would expect and plan and do if it were up to us to save the world.

But the whole experience certainly leaves us asking, "Why shepherds? Why these completely unexpected and unassuming guys?"

The shepherds were the everyman. They were nothing special. They had no entitlement. No pride or arrogance. No religious bloating. They fit right into this process of introducing God's Messiah: a humble carpenter and a peasant girl as parents for the Son of God, a birth in a lowly stable surrounded by animals, rough and rugged shepherds out in the fields on the edge of the more refined civilization. These were the have-nots, examples of God raising and using the humble and turning the world as we know it on its head. Those considered by society to be the "most holy" weren't given a place in the stable to kneel on holy ground and witness the arrival of the Messiah.

God sent His angelic messengers to announce the birth of His Son to shepherds. It certainly reminds us that God's favour is not based on human standards. His favour is on all those who humbly acknowledge their brokenness and accept the gifts of hope, peace, joy and love that Jesus brings. Peace is not based on class, position, occupation, or even circumstances, but on God's purpose and design to bring good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

To the Shepherds - the have not's - the everyone - the untrusted - the lowest of the low - God brought news Peace on earth to men on whom his favour rests.

We may not be the most significant in our neighbourhood - or even in our family - but God says His favour, his love, his mercy, his blessing rests on you and you can experience peace.

Prayers

With the shepherds of Bethlehem
help us, oh Lord, to stand in vigil on the eve of your Coming,
to run with haste to meet you,
to see your face in the faces of others
and to wake from our sleep as a new world is being born.

With the angels of Bethlehem help us,
oh Lord, to tell the whole world of your presence
God is with us!
Let us create peace amongst people
and work for justice amongst nations.

With Jesus, the infant Christ
help us, oh Lord,
to cherish the hope that is born at Advent,
to hear the calling of your people,
to nurture the seeds of your Kingdom
and through our actions to be messengers of your love
in building communities of service and prayer. Amen

Miguel Alonzo Macias from Honduras

We say together the Lord's Prayer in the version, and language you are most comfortable using.

Hymn 210 StF: Love came down at Christmas

1] Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, Love Divine,
Love was born at Christmas,
Star and Angels gave the sign.

2] Worship we the Godhead,
Love Incarnate, Love Divine,
Worship we our Jesus,
But wherewith for sacred sign?

3] Love shall be our token,
Love be yours and love be mine,
Love to God and all men,
Love for plea and gift and sign.

Christina Georgina Rossetti (1830-1894)

Blessing

May the words of the angels ring in our ears
May the gifts of the wise men shine in our eyes,
May the child of the manger live in our hearts
Today and every day. **Amen**

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