

The Bride Valley Service for Christmas 2020

In Church we will be lighting the candles, you may wish to light a candle of your own if it is safe to do so.

May we take this opportunity to wish you a happy and blessed Christmas and a healthy New Year.

Welcome in the name of Christ. God's grace, mercy and peace be with you. **And also with you.**

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing. (Psalm 98.4)

Confession

Hear the word of the Angel to Joseph: "You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." Let us seek the forgiveness of God, through Jesus the saviour of the world.

Christ came in humility to share our lives, forgive our pride. Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Christ came with good news for all people, forgive our silence. Christ, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

Christ came in love to a world of suffering, forgive our self centredness. Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Absolution

May the God of love bring us back to himself, forgive us our wrongdoings, and assure us of his eternal love in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Collect

Almighty God, you have given us your only begotten Son to take our nature upon him and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin: grant that we, who have been born again and made your children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit; though Jesus your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Old Testament Reading Isaiah 52.7-10

How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,
who brings good news,
who announces salvation,
who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'
Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices,
together they sing for joy;
for in plain sight they see

the return of the Lord to Zion.
Break forth together into singing,
you ruins of Jerusalem;
for the Lord has comforted his people,
he has redeemed Jerusalem.
The Lord has bared his holy arm
before the eyes of all the nations;
and all the ends of the earth shall see
the salvation of our God.

New Testament Reading: Hebrews 1.1-12

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

For to which of the angels did God ever say,
'You are my Son;
today I have begotten you'?
Or again,
'I will be his Father,
and he will be my Son'?
And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says,
'Let all God's angels worship him.'
Of the angels he says,
'He makes his angels winds,
and his servants flames of fire.'
But of the Son he says,
'Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever,
and the righteous sceptre is the sceptre of your kingdom.
You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness;
therefore God, your God, has anointed you
with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.'
And,
'In the beginning, Lord, you founded the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands;
they will perish, but you remain;
they will all wear out like clothing;
like a cloak you will roll them up,
and like clothing they will be changed.
But you are the same,
and your years will never end.'

Gospel Reading: John 1. 1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Reflection. The Word Made Flesh: How else could God have revealed himself to the world?

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. Jesus is not a symbol, **He is God**. He is the visible image of an invisible God. In John 14.9 we read: "Jesus said to him, whoever has seen me has seen the Father." This means that when we look at Jesus we see God. If we want to know what God is genuinely like, what he is interested in, what he is passionate about, how he shows his compassion which is way beyond our human understanding then we must look at what he has revealed to us, this image of the invisible God that is Jesus Christ. Not just the baby, but the whole person of Jesus: fully human and fully divine.

When we hear a modern world view, a description of an unpredictable God who plays the world and people as his pawns we can respond with what has been revealed to us through God the Son, Jesus Christ: God who cares deeply about us as individuals and deeply about the world. We are reminded in Hebrews 1.3 "He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."

For me, put very crudely this means that Jesus was 'God, with skin on', think about it – **The Word made Flesh** – showing us what we could not see and revealing to us what love is all about, not in a flowery, wordy sense, but with authenticity. Showing us compassion, but not in a way that any scholars who articulate with the finer points can demonstrate, but in a very real sense. Showing us how to love, how to pray, how to have a genuine relationship with our heavenly Father, **the Lord God Almighty**. This is how we are able to behold his glory, his majesty and his grace.

So, here we all are, waiting for God's great Word to come to us again, listening closely for it, waiting for it to be revealed to us again in all its love and all its glory and all that means in our relationship with God.

In a life and a death and then a new life God's previously unspoken Word reaches us. Revealing to us God's breath, God's spirit, God's power. Waiting for the Word to put on lights again in our head and in our heart. Waiting for the word to enthuse us and show us the way to be fully human.

And that Word is Jesus: God's most perfect and most precious Word – Jesus, the Word who became flesh and lives among us. As you receive from God this Christmas 2020, maybe more than ever before, draw yourself closer to Jesus and let him be alive in your life once again. **Amen.**

Affirmation of Faith

We declare our shared faith in God:

We believe in God the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.

We believe in God the Son, who lives in our hearts through faith, and fills us with his love

We believe in God the Holy Spirit, who strengthens us with power from on high.

We believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Holy and lowly One, Jesus, Friend and Brother
We rejoice in your coming amongst us
You came down to lift us up
You came as the Light to our darkness and we welcome and adore you.

Holy God, **hear our prayer**

Prince of Peace, we pray for peace and goodwill on earth. Guide the leaders of our world, strengthen all those who work for peace and justice.
We pray for the communities to which we belong, for our places of work, for our schools - that all may know your presence and your peace. Help us to bear witness to our faith, knowing that you call us all to live lives of courage, love and reconciliation.

Holy God, **hear our prayer**

Lord, we pray for your church here and throughout the world.
Strengthen us in faith and fill us with the desire to do your will, that we may reveal your saving power and abide in your love.

Holy God, **hear our prayer**

Jesus born in Bethlehem, we pray for our families and for those with whom we will share this Christmas time.

We rejoice in their love and in your love for us all.

We bring before you all those who are prevented through Coronavirus considerations from sharing Christmas with family and friends. May they know your presence today and be comforted.

Holy God, **hear our prayer**

At this time of joy and rejoicing, we remember, all whose lives are filled with sorrow, fear or darkness.

We pray for all who are in care and all who are sick in mind, body or spirit in hospital or at home.

Through your healing power, give to all who suffer your gift of wholeness and peace.

Holy God, **hear our prayer**

We pray for friends and loved ones departed and rejoice with all who have entered into the fullness of your presence and are at peace in your kingdom.

Holy God, **hear our prayer**

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Father, full of the Spirit. Hear our prayer. Receive our praises, fill our lives. **Amen.**

Blessing

May Christ the Son of God perfect in you the image of his glory and gladden your hearts with the good news of his kingdom, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be upon you and all those you love and care for, now and forevermore. **Amen.**

Sources: This week's reflection was prepared by the Reverend Jane Williams with liturgy adapted from Common Worship: Times and Seasons, copyright @ The Archbishop's Council 2006 and New Patterns for Worship, copyright @ The Archbishop's Council 2008 2nd Edition, published by Church House Publishing. Our intercessory prayers were prepared by Heather Goffee from St Mary's Church, Litton Cheney.