

The Bride Valley Service for Christmas 2021

At the lighting of the Christmas candle: Lord Jesus, light of light, you have come among us.
Help us who live by your light to shine as lights in your world. Glory to God in the highest.

Amen.

Words of Introduction

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises. Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody. With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord. *Psalms 98 verses 4-6*

Carol: O Come all Ye Faithful.

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,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
Christ the Lord.*

2 God of God, Light of Light;
lo, he abhors not the virgin's womb;
very God, begotten not created;
O come, let us adore him

3 Sing, choirs of angels,
sing in exultation,
sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!
Glory to God in the highest:

O come, let us adore him

4 Yea, Lord, we greet thee,
born this happy morning:
Jesus, to thee be all glory given;
word of the Father,
now in flesh appearing;

O come, let us adore him

Translated from the Latin (18th century)

by Frederick Oakely (1802-1880) CCLI Licence 2370586

Invitation to Confession

The sun of righteousness has dawned with healing in his wings. Let us come to the light of Christ, confessing our sins in penitence and faith.

Kyrie Confession

God our Father, you sent your Son full of grace and truth: forgive our failure to receive him.
Lord have mercy, **Lord have mercy**

Jesus our Saviour, you were born in poverty and laid in a manger: forgive our greed and rejection of your ways. Christ have mercy, **Christ have mercy**

Spirit of Love, your servant Mary responded joyfully to your call: forgive the hardness of our hearts. Lord have mercy, **Lord have mercy**

Absolution

May God who loved the world so much that he sent his Son to be our Saviour forgive us our sins and make us holy to serve him in the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Collect for Christmas Day

Lord Jesus Christ, your birth at Bethlehem draws us to kneel in wonder at heaven touching earth: accept our heartfelt praise as we worship you, our Saviour and our eternal God.

God our Father, whose Word has come among us in the Holy Child of Bethlehem: may the light of faith illumine our hearts and shine in our words and deeds; through him who is Christ the Lord.

Readings 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.

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.'

Carol: Once in Royal David's City

1 Once in royal David's city
stood a lowly cattle shed,
where a mother laid her baby
in a manger for his bed:
Mary was that Mother mild,
Jesus Christ her little child.

2 He came down to earth from heaven
who is God and Lord of all,
and his shelter was a stable,
and his cradle was a stall;
with the poor and mean and lowly
lived on earth our Saviour holy.

3 And through all his wondrous childhood
he would honour and obey,
love and watch the lowly Maiden,
in whose gentle arms he lay:
Christian children all must be
mild, obedient, good as he.

4 Not in that poor lowly stable,
with the oxen standing by,
we shall see him; but in heaven,
set at God's right hand on high;
where like stars his children crowned
all in white shall wait around.

Cecil Frances Alexander (née Humphreys) (1818-1895)

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

Brian Cox said something interesting earlier this year in the trailer to his BBC 2 programme called 'Universe'. You may have noticed it. He revealed he'd made the programme because he is desperate for people to take seriously the existential threat to our planet that comes from the warming of the globe. He said something along the lines of: **"If humans died out, the galaxy might lose all meaning."** I found that an intriguing thought. I wondered what he meant by 'meaning'. And I found myself thinking about times that have held great meaning for me. I remembered a time when I was a young child in Pembrokeshire with a friend by the coast, sat on the rocks watching dolphins playing and putting on a show for us. And another time when I was watching little chicks hatch out of their eggs ... Or a moment lying in a field watching a meteor shower. Or my wedding day. Or the last words I exchanged with someone before they died. Or the birth of my children.

I thought about Brian Cox himself standing in awe when he was present at the landing of one of the space capsules bringing someone who had been manning the space-station back to earth. Or Rose and Giovanni at the Strictly final or semi-final and Rose saying there would be a space in her heart for Giovanni for life.

I wondered whether it is those times when we are deeply absorbed in the moment that carry the most meaning for us. Times when profound communication takes place because we entrust ourselves completely to the other. Moments of unabashed self-giving, with nothing held back. Moments of utter vulnerability because we're not hiding, we're not self-conscious. We give ourselves entirely and we feel no judgement. Only delight. In those moments something very precious and meaningful emerges. And I thought, inevitably because I am a vicar, of this passage from the gospel of John where he is grappling with the same wonderment and ideas as Brian Cox. In the beginning, writes John, was the Word. A word is a vehicle of meaning. In John's thinking, at the very inception of the universe, is this vehicle of meaning. The very thing that sets creation in motion is an expression of meaning. God is consistent in creating, in becoming incarnate, in redeeming. Yet the way God chooses to create and redeem us allows us the option of ignorance about our very existence. The incarnation, which Hebrews describes in such grand and eloquent terms, still comes down to this ... **a child in a manger!** If we are saying that meaning is found in the moments of utter self-giving and trust and vulnerability, then here you have it. At the heart of the universe is the self-giving of God. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

So, we are here to receive again the most profound self-giving of God. In a mystery of wonder that is beyond our ability to put into words, God entrusted Godself to us in the most complete act possible of self-giving, vulnerability and communication, in a baby born of a woman. As we receive that gift a reciprocal deep sense of worth and meaning emerges in us.

This Christmas, in awe and wonder, may we receive again the gift of God's own self in the babe of Bethlehem. And may the meaning we find in reciprocal self-giving emerge in us for the salvation of the world, the galaxy, the universe. It is a great gift that we carry.

Affirmation of Faith

Let us declare our 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

Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given. Let us bring before God the needs of the world.

Wonderful counsellor, give your wisdom to the rulers of the nations.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Mighty God, make the whole world know that the government is on your shoulders.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Everlasting Father, establish your reign of justice and righteousness for ever.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Prince of peace, bring in the endless kingdom of your peace.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty Lord, hear our prayer and fulfil your purposes in us, as you accomplished your will in our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Carol: Joy to the World ACNY 15

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 nature sing,

and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.

2 Joy to the earth! The Saviour reigns!

Your sweetest 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,

and wonders of his love,

and wonders of his love,

and wonders, wonders, of his love.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748) (Public Domain)

Acclamation

The people who walked in darkness **have seen a great light.**

For to us a child is born **to us a Son is given.**

His name will be called Wonderful counsellor, mighty God, **the everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**

Glory to God in the highest **and peace to his people on earth.**

Blessing

May the humility of the shepherds, the perseverance of the wise men, the joy of the angels, the faith of Joseph and Mary and the peace of the Christ-child be God's gift to all of us this Christmas. And the blessing of the God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be with you and all you love forevermore. **Amen.**

May we take this opportunity to wish you a Blessed Christmas and a healthy and happy New Year. The Bride Valley Ministry Team.