



CALL TO WORSHIP

Living God, may the worship we share this Christmas lead to acts of service which transform people's lives; may the carols we sing help others to sing, even in their sadness, may the candles we light remind us that you intend no one to live in darkness, may the new people we meet this Christmas remind us that we meet you in our neighbours, may the gathering together of family and friends make us appreciate anew the gift of loved ones; may the stories we tell again this Christmas be good news of great joy to us and all people on our lips and in our lives for you are our life, our light and our salvation this season and always, because of Jesus Christ our Lord.

HYMN See Him lying on a bed of straw (StF 216)

Watch on Youtube - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79h_5jhzT7Q

See him lying on a bed of straw:
a draughty stable with an open door;
Mary cradling the babe she bore
the prince of glory is his name.

*O now carry me to Bethlehem
to see the Lord of love again:
just as poor as was the stable then,
the prince of glory when he came.*

Star of silver, sweep across the skies,
show where Jesus in the manger lies;
shepherds, swiftly from your stupor rise
to see the saviour of the world!

O now carry me...

Angels, sing again the song you sang,
sing the glory of God's gracious plan;
Sing that Bethl'em's little baby can
be the saviour of us all.

O now carry me...

Mine are riches, from your poverty,
from your innocence, eternity;
mine, forgiveness by your death for me,
child of sorrow for my joy.

O now carry me...

(Michael Perry 1942 - 1996)

PRAYER

Dear God, Help us to keep our focus first on Christ this season. Please forgive us for giving too much time and attention on other things. Help us to reflect again on what Christmas is all about. Thank you that you came to give new life, peace, hope, and joy. Thank you that your power is made perfect in our weakness. Help us to remember that the gift of Christ, Immanuel, is our greatest treasure, not just at Christmas, but for the whole year through. Fill us with your joy and the peace of your Spirit. Direct our hearts and minds towards you. Thank you for your reminder that both in seasons of celebration and in seasons of brokenness, you're still with us. For you never leave us. Thank you for your daily powerful presence in our lives, that we can be assured your heart is towards us, your eyes are over us, and your ears are open to our prayers. Thank you that you surround us with favour as with a shield, and we are safe in your care. We choose to press in close to you today...and keep you first in our hearts and lives.

In Jesus' Name, Amen. *(Debbie McDaniel)*

READING Luke 2: 1 – 20 The Birth of Jesus

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register. 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. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to

be born, 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.

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

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

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

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."

So, they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

HYMN O Holy Night Watch on Youtube - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTFG_nvreol

O Holy Night
The stars are brightly shining
It is the night of our dear Savior's birth
Long lay the world in sin and e'er pining
'Til He appeared and the soul felt its worth
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.

Fall on your knees O hear the angels voices.
O night divine O night when Christ was born
O night divine, O night, O night divine.

Led by the light of Faith serenely beaming,
With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand.
So led by light of a star sweetly gleaming,
Here came the wise men from Orient land.
The King of Kings lay thus in lowly manger;

In all our trials born to be our friend.

He knows our need, to our weakness is no stranger,
Behold your King! Before Him lowly bend!
Behold your King! Before Him lowly bend!

Truly He taught us to love one another;
His law is love and His gospel is peace.
Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother;
And in His name all oppression shall cease.
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful raise we,
Let all within us praise His holy name.

Christ is the Lord! O praise His Name forever,
His power and glory evermore proclaim.
O night divine, O night, O night divine. (*John Sullivan Dwight 1855*)

ADDRESS

Let me ask you a simple question for Christmas Day. How many times have you heard the stories that we have just read from this gospel in Luke?

How many times have you heard the story about the simple shepherds in the field watching over their flocks at night, and suddenly in a starlit sky there comes the angel and the heavenly host proclaiming good news to all of humanity, and the shepherds go and follow the directions of the angels and they find Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus lying in the straw surrounded by the silent, innocent benediction of the animals in the stable?

How many times have you heard that story, and how many times have you seen it portrayed on greeting cards around the Christmas season, in pictures that we see on television-every Christmas-this wonderful, warm, loving image? Isn't it a lot like the swaddling clothes, the bands of cloth that Jesus is described as being wrapped in?

Christmas is like that for us. It is like streamers of warm and wonderful family memories of images that we treasure and hold dear, that we wrap around ourselves every Christmas. It keeps us warm in the winter. It makes us feel comforted and hopeful. It brings us back to childhood - every Christmas, year after year after year.

You know, the truth is no matter how forward thinking or progressive we may believe ourselves to be as Christians, every Christmas we all turn into traditionalists. If you are like me, you are, just as I am, an absolute sentimentalist whenever it comes to this Christmas season.

I don't want Christmas to ever change. I don't want to ever stop hearing this story in Luke. I never want to stop seeing that image of the baby Jesus in the manger. I want to feel that again and again and again. I am so nostalgic for it. It is so comforting to me. I never ever want my Christmas to change.

Over the past few weeks, I have heard on the radio so many theologians telling me that this didn't happen and that didn't happen with the nativity. In bible studies I have indeed looked at different aspects of it – some not very comfortable, Yes, there is a dark side to this story; yes, there is a terrible and brutal side and yes there is the story of rejection running through it all. But for this one day, just for Christmas day let us not ponder these things in our hearts.

So, what do I suggest that you do on Christmas Day? What do I suggest that you do to celebrate this wonderful moment of change in your life? I suggest that you wrap up in Christmas like I'm going to do. That you once again enjoy those visions of angels and shepherds and the manger and the baby in the straw and the animals and Mary and Joseph and keep it exactly the way it's always been for you.

Just for Christmas day, let it be comforting and traditional. Let it be familiar and warm and loving. There's time enough tomorrow for you and me to step out in our own incarnation and once again pick up our gifts and go to work with God to face change, to face the world that is hell bent on destroying itself and make the changes God requires of us for the glory of His name.

For this one special day, let us relax into the peace that is holy and into a time where time itself seems to stand still and the winds and tides of change are held back with the sounds of angelic voices drifting through a starry, cold night.

We will be celebrating one of the most important days the world has ever known – let us rejoice and be glad in it and sing just as the Angels did – “Glory to God in the highest heaven and peace to his people on earth”

Amen

HYMN Unto us a boy is born : StF 218 Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3InYDohCNSM>

Unto us a boy is born!
The King of all creation,
Came he to a world forlorn,
The Lord of ev'ry nation.

Cradled in a stall was he
With sleepy cows and asses;
But the very beasts could see
That he the world surpasses.

Herod then with fear was filled:
"A prince," he said, "in Jewry!"

And all the little boys he killed
At Bethl'hem in his fury.

Now may Mary's son, who came
So long ago to love us,
Lead us all with hearts aflame
Unto the joys above us.

Alpha and Omega he!
Now let the organ thunder,
While the choir with peals of glee
Shall rend the air asunder. (*Percy Dearmar 1867–1936*)

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

We have come together as the family of God, in our Father's presence, to celebrate the great festival of Christmas. In this service we hear and receive the good news of the birth of Christ and we offer to God our thanksgiving in the joyful singing of carols.

As we gather in the name of Christ, we pray for the world he came to save:

for the Church, that it may be enabled in our generation to surrender anew to God's holy Wisdom, and bear the good news of God's love to a needy world;

for the world, which is already Christ's, that all its peoples may recognize their responsibility for its future, and may be inspired by the message of Christmas to work together for the establishment of justice, freedom and peace everywhere;

for all in special need, the sick, the anxious, the lonely, the fearful and the bereaved, that the peace and light of the Christ-child may bring hope and healing to all who sit in darkness.

We commend all whom we love, or who have asked for our prayers, to the unfailing mercy of our heavenly Father, and say together, as Christ himself taught us:

We say the Lord's prayer together.

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 those who 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.

HYMN While shepherds watch their flocks by night (StF 221)

Watch on Youtube - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EdASbgux6ds>

While shepherds watched their flocks by night,
all seated on the ground,
the angel of the Lord came down,
and glory shone around.

"Fear not," said he, for mighty dread
had seized their troubled mind;
"Glad tidings of great joy I bring
to you and all mankind.

"To you, in David's town, this day
is born of David's line
a Savior, who is Christ the Lord;
and this shall be the sign:

"The heavenly Babe you there shall find
to human view displayed,
all meanly wrapped in swathing bands,
and in a manger laid."

Thus spake the seraph, and forthwith
appeared a shining throng
of angels praising God, who thus
addressed their joyful song:

"All glory be to God on high
and on earth be peace;
good will henceforth from heaven to me
begin and never cease." (*Nahum Tate 1652 – 1715*)

BLESSING

The Blessing of God, The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
Be with us this Christmas time, And for evermore.

Amen