



**Preparation for Worship:** A Christmas Hymn (To the tune of 'Come, Thou Fount')

**Watch on YouTube** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lf3gdMnbRPE>

<p>Come now see the Lord of Heaven          In a lowly manger laid          King deserving of a throne room          Born a poor powerless babe          Oh the mystery oh the wonder          Somehow God is one of us          Such is greatness in His kingdom          He descended to our dust</p> <p>Christ the Word holy expression          Of the humbleness of God          Herald of a prideless kingdom          One of sacrificial love          Mighty One who made the heavens          Knelt to wash his brother's feet          And the earth that He created</p>	<p>He bestowed unto the meek          King of glory became nothing          Humbled to the point of death          Stretched His arms out like a          beggar          And forgave with His last breath          What God started with a manger          Ended with an empty grave          Suffering servant now exalted          Jesus name above all names</p> <p>Light eternal in the darkness          He shall not be overcome          Shining over all our shadows          Every curse has been undone</p>	<p>Heaven breaks forth like the          springtime          Through the winter of our souls          Now His life is life abundant          Is forever ours to know</p> <p>Come now church let us adore Him          Tune your heart to sing His grace          Streams of mercy never ceasing          Call for songs of loudest praise          Teach me some melodious sonnet          Sung by flaming tongues above          Praise the mount I'm fixed upon it          Mount of God's redeeming love          Praise the mount I'm fixed upon it          Mount of God's redeeming love</p>
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Chris Llewellyn, Savannah Locke CCLI Song #7271381 © 2025 Capitol CMG Paragon, Rend Family Music(Admin by Capitol CMG Publishing) North Petway

**Hymn:** StF 202 Hark the Herald Angels Sing    Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1IGP68i3JvU>

<p>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.</p>	<p>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!          Please as man with men to dwell,          Jesus our Immanuel:          Hark! The herald-angels sing          glory to the new-born King.</p>	<p>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.</p>
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**Reading:** Matthew 1 v. 18-25

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us"). When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

**Prayer :** Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVAIqqT8XTM>    © 2025 Sammy Davies

When we find ourselves in the midst of our brokenness,  
 When our world and our loved ones have let us down  
 Where will we look? To whom will we turn?  
 We need a rescue, we need one with us, for us, one who will not forsake us  
 How wonderful your promises, how precious your activity

That Jesus, our Emmanuel, would come near to save us and keep us.

God in the highest heaven, then laid lowly in a manger. God who has been trespassed, becoming the God who would make amends.

What precious news, worthy of our remembering and celebrating.

What a precious God, worthy of our obedience and worship.

Lord, have Your way amongst us, a better way than our scheming and dreaming, your wisdom and purposes, work them out in our lives. **Amen**

**Hymn:** StF 222 Who would think that what was needed? Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kD44CacPPbl>

Who would think that what was needed	Shepherds watch and wise men wonder,	Centuries of skill and science
To transform and save the earth	Monarchs scorn and angels sing;	Span the past from which we
Might not be a plan or army,	Such a place as none would reckon	move,
Proud in purpose, proved in worth?	Hosts a holy helpless thing;	Yet experience questions whether,
Who would think, despite derision,	Stable beasts and by-passed	With such progress, we improve.
That a child should lead the way?	strangers	While the human lot we ponder,
God surprises earth with heaven,	Watch a baby laid in hay:	Lest our hopes and humour fray,
Coming here on Christmas Day.	God surprises earth with heaven	God surprises earth with heaven
	Coming here on Christmas Day.	Coming here on Christmas Day.

### Message

Should you go to the Portuguese island of Madeira, you can see there a 14m high statue of Jesus, standing on the edge of a cliff looking out to sea with his arms outstretched. The name of the statue is Cristo Rei or Christ the king. You probably don't need me to describe it for you because the design is very similar to the statue of Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro. I've seen claims it's a replica of that statue but it was actually erected four years prior to its Brazilian counterpart.

We were in Madeira recently, stood under the statue and eavesdropping a conversation between two passersby that went something like this.

'There are quite a few Christs like this around the island.'

'There are but most of the others are smaller than this.'

'How big does a Christ need to be?'

How big does a Christ need to be? The main thrust of what I want to say is that a Christ needs to be big enough to serve the purpose for which it was intended – and Jesus Christ most certainly is big enough. That's very obvious when you think about it in terms of physical statues. The Cristo Rei statue in Madeira looks out towards the sea. One purpose of its design was to be seen by fishermen in their boats and others sailing towards Madeira, reminding them of Jesus' protection over them. If you want to build something on land that is seen by those out at sea then you need to build it pretty big. On the other hand, there are roadside statues of Christ around the island. You can walk right up to them. How big do they need to be? Clearly not as big as the huge Cristo Rei statue. They serve a different purpose.

That's from an architectural perspective but what about from a spiritual perspective and particularly as we look at our reading today? Matthew and Luke give us two different accounts of the birth of Jesus from which we have constructed our traditional grand scale nativity story that begins with Mary and the angel Gabriel, has shepherds and wisemen, more angels, sheep and camels and which throws in for good measure a stable and an innkeeper and even an innkeeper's wife if you're lucky. It's a big presentation!

By contrast, what we have before us today seems quite sparse and small.

- Mary is pledged in marriage to Joseph;
- She's found to be pregnant;
- Joseph wants to divorce her because he is righteous; and do so quietly because he is kind;
- An Angel appears to him in a dream and tells him it's OK because this is God's doing;
- So, Joseph does marry Mary and she gives birth to a son called Jesus;
- End of story!

Surely, the birth of Jesus the Christ should be presented in a bigger way than that. Except that we know the Christ in this account is big enough to satisfy the purpose for which he was sent because we are told the reason he receives that name of Jesus. It comes from the angel in Joseph's dream:

"She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

This may seem a pathetically small way of telling the Christmas story. You may even feel short-changed in having the birth of Jesus recounted for you on the Sunday before Christmas rather than having to wait 'til Christmas morning. Yet the Christ contained within the story is absolutely big enough for your needs and my needs and the needs of everyone on this planet. He is big enough to fulfil God's purposes for the world. This Jesus will save his people from their sins.

If you're listening to this and thinking 'Am I one of his people? Am I one of those he came to save?', then let's unpack this.

At first glance we might say that this refers to Jewish people. After all, Jesus was born in Israel as a Jew. Read the beginning of John's Gospel, though, and something different comes into focus. John wrote:

*He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*

Now, of course, it isn't true that the entire Jewish people rejected Jesus. Almost all of his initial followers were Jewish. But it is true that when we talk about 'his people' we're talking about Jews and non-Jews alike. 'Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.' If you have received him; If you have believed in him, then you are included within that sentence 'He will save his people from their sins'. He has given you the right to be included within his family and God's family. Even if you're only thinking about believing in him right now, that sentence still refers to you. He holds that invitation out to you if you're prepared to accept it.

And what does it mean by saying that he saves us from our sins? In Greek, the word for a saviour is Soter. It was originally the name of a minor Greek deity who was the personification of deliverance from peril and harm. In the years before Jesus' birth, soter also became a title claimed by kings and emperors wanting to impress upon people the peace, security and deliverance from harm that came through their military victories. To call Jesus a soter or saviour, though, is to say something entirely different. He did not wage wars or win military victories. Rather, he became our saviour by giving up his life on a wooden cross. Neither is the resultant peace that he brings to be seen purely in earthly terms. The most significant peace he has won for us is spiritual. When we choose to follow Jesus we are no longer spiritually at war with God. The sins that stood as obstacles between us and God are removed. We truly can find our place within God's family rather than apart from it – now and also after we have died.

Let's finish by returning to the Cristo Rei statue. Madeira was first colonised by the Portuguese. Prior to the late-18th century, only Catholics could be buried in consecrated ground on the island and there are reports of the dead bodies of non-Catholics being thrown into the sea from the very same cliffs that now bear the statue of Jesus. Fishermen might well have looked towards his image and prayed for protection and salvation but Jesus is Lord of both the living and the dead. This statue wasn't there in the 18th century but Jesus was and I picture him watching over those below whether they were alive or dead.

This is a Christ big enough to satisfy God's purposes for us, now and through all eternity. He is watching over you with open arms and invites you to follow him in life and to follow him through death. Jesus will save his people from their sins. That's the message at the heart of Christmas, Easter and all points in between.

**Hymn:** StF 169 Come thou long expected Jesus Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFloWX1yuyQ>

Come, thou long-expected Jesus,  
born to set thy people free,  
from our fears and sins release us,  
let us find our rest in thee.

Born thy people to deliver,  
born a child and yet a king,  
born to reign in us for ever,  
now thy gracious kingdom bring.

Israel's strength and consolation,  
hope of all the earth thou art,  
dear desire of every nation,  
joy of every longing heart.

By thine own eternal Spirit  
rule in all our hearts alone;  
by thine all-sufficient merit  
raise us to thy glorious throne

### **A Reflection**

How do you know when to listen to your dreams? When are your dreams truthful and when are they simply ridiculous? When does the trickster or the devil or your own malformed desires undermine your journey toward the good and lovely? How soon after falling through a trapdoor into a wider consciousness can you scramble to your feet, find your balance and head in the right direction?

How did Joseph know to turn aside from righteousness as he knew it, to follow a dark, non-rational, alternative righteousness? Something in his life must have prepared him to pay attention to that particular dream that night: do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. Such a statement can make perfect sense in the context of a dream. But not upon waking. What is more likely, really, that Mary experienced sexual relations (welcome or unwelcome) OR that she is pregnant by the Holy Spirit? But the messenger in the dream sweetens the message with a scripture passage familiar to the dreamer: "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us."

Joseph, like his ancestor Joseph the son of Jacob, must have trusted his dreams. But even more than his dreams, in order to embrace Mary's unusual pregnancy Joseph must have trusted the voice of God in the prophets, the thread of narrative tales of reversals of power, and the psalms: Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free; the LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. The LORD watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. *Psalm 146:5-9*

A poor man working as an artisan (probably building for the Roman oppressors) Joseph drew hope from these texts, this promise, this dream of all dreams. What righteous dreamer upon waking would not lay down his prejudices for such a dream? Give us your dream, O Holy One. Guide us and give us courage, like Joseph, to live toward Your dream's fulfilment. © Suzanne Consiglio (from the Blog 'At the Edge of the Enclosure')

**Prayer :** Lord Jesus, we praise you as the one who saves us from our sins and as Immanuel – God with us. Through your death on the cross you have taken away the power of all those things that would separate us from God and have brought us into your Father's presence in a very real way. Give us the assurance that our sins are forgiven and that we are now part of your family; children of God. We thank you that you are our soter, our saviour, but not in the way that earthly kings used to claim that title. Yours is not the way of war or domination. Show us the way to lasting peace for the world and show each of us how to live as servants rather than seeking for other people to serve us.

We pray for those who need peace, security or deliverance from harm in their lives right now. For those caught up in war and conflict; those needing shelter, food or healthcare; those caught in domestic violence or abusive relationships; those suffering from depression and anxiety; those facing uncertain futures because of global warming and all those others who have been on our hearts and minds. Cristo Rei – Christ the King – we trust to your power and your compassion; bring the peace and security of your Kingdom, we pray. Amen.

**The Lord's Prayer :** Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name; your kingdom come; your 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 yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

**Hymn:** StF 213 O little town of Bethlehem      Watch on YouTube [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H\\_q430z13oc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H_q430z13oc)

O little town of Bethlehem,  
How still we see thee lie!  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep  
The silent stars go by.  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth  
The everlasting Light;  
The hopes and fears of all the years  
Are met in thee tonight.

O morning stars, together  
Proclaim the holy birth,  
And praises sing to God the King,  
And peace to men on earth;  
For Christ is born of Mary,  
And gathered all above,  
While mortals sleep, the angels keep  
Their watch of wondering love.

How silently, how silently  
The wondrous gift is given!  
So God imparts to human hearts  
The blessings of His heaven.  
No ear may hear His coming;  
But in this world of sin,  
Where meek souls will receive Him, still  
The dear Christ enters in.

O holy Child of Bethlehem,  
Descend to us, we pray;  
Cast out our sin, and enter in;  
Be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels  
The great glad tidings tell;  
O come to us, abide with us,  
Our Lord Immanuel!