Carol Service 2021 December 19th
Proclaiming - Immanuel God with us
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Welcome
Welcome to our Carol Service.

We begin with words from John's Gospel John 1 v 1 - 5
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Carol – StF 212 O come all ye faithful
So come, come to Bethlehem and see Immanuel – God with us.

1O 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

2True God of true God
Light of Light eternal
Lo he abhors not the virgin's womb
Son of the Father,
Begotten, not created
O come…

3Sing, choirs of angels,
Sing in exultation;
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!
Glory to God,
In the highest;
O come…

Prayer of adoration
And so we travel once again to Bethlehem to meet the one who is begotten, not created; the one who is born king of Angels: the one who is True God of True God and Light of Light eternal.
But we come too, knowing the middle of the story, of your life and influence on earth, and knowing the end, of the sacrifice on the cross followed by the resurrection of new life and meaning.
And running through this beginning, middle and end is Love, your love for us and the world.

We give thanks that
Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, love divine;
Love was born at Christmas,
Star and angels gave the sign.

And so we worship
The Godhead,
Love incarnate, love divine;
Worship we our Jesus:
But wherewith for sacred sign?

And we pray that
Love shall be our token,
Love shall be yours and love be mine,
Love to God and to all men,
Love for plea and gift and sign. **Amen** *Christina Georgina Rossetti*

Reading – **The prophets proclaim (Isaiah 9 v 6-7) Easy to read version**
This will happen when the special child is born. God will give us a son who will be responsible for leading the people. His name will be “Wonderful Counsellor, Powerful God, Father Who Lives Forever, Prince of Peace.” His power will continue to grow, and there will be peace without end. This will establish him as the king sitting on David’s throne and ruling his kingdom. He will rule with goodness and justice forever and ever. The strong love that the LORD All-Powerful has for his people will make this happen!

Carol – StF 171 Hark the glad sound

[1]Hark, the glad sound! The Saviour comes,
the Saviour promised long;
let every heart prepare a throne,
and every voice a song.

[2]He comes, the prisoners to release,
in Satan’s bondage held;
the gates of brass before him burst,
the iron fetters yield.

3He 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 thy belovèd Name.

Philip Doddridge

Reading - **The angel proclaims to Joseph**
While he was thinking about this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, descendant of David, do not be afraid to take Mary to be your wife. For it is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived. She will have a son, and you will name him Jesus—because he will save his people from their sins.”

Now all this happened in order to make come true what the Lord had said through the prophet, “A virgin will become pregnant and have a son, and he will be called Immanuel” (which means, “God is with us”).

The birth place of Jesus is proclaimed
But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
are the smallest town in Judah.
Your family is almost too small to count,
but the “Ruler of Israel” will come from you to rule for me.
His beginnings are from ancient times,
from long, long ago.

Jesus is born
So Joseph left Nazareth, a town in Galilee, and went to the town of Bethlehem in Judea. While Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have the baby. She gave birth to her first son. She wrapped him up well and laid him in a box where cattle are fed. She put him there because the guest room was full.

Carol – StF 213 O little town of Bethlehem

[1]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.

[2]O morning stars, together
proclaim the holy birth,
and praises sing to God the King,
and peace to all the earth!
For Christ is born of Mary;
and, gathered all above,
while mortals sleep, the angels keep
their watch of wondering love.

[3]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.

[4]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.

Phillips Brooks (1835-1893)

Reading - The angel proclaims to the shepherds
"I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you"

Carol – StF 221 While Shepherds watched

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

[2]'Fear not,' said he - for mighty dread
had seized their troubled mind -
'Glad tidings of great joy I bring
to you and all mankind:

[3]'To you in David's town this day
is born of David's line
a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.
And this shall be the sign:

[4]'The heavenly babe you there shall find
to human view displayed,
all meanly wrapped in swathing bands
and in a manger laid.'

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

[6]'All glory be to God on high,
and to the earth be peace;
goodwill henceforth from heaven to earth
begin and never cease!'

Nahum Tate (1652-1715)

Reading – **The Magi proclaim the birth of Jesus**
Well we made it at last.
After all the setbacks,
all the frustration,
we finally found the one we were looking for –
our journey over,
the quest completed.
And I can't tell you how relieved we were.
You see, we had begun to fear that we were too late
the time for celebration long since past

by the time we eventually arrived.
It was that business in Jerusalem which caused the delay,
all the waiting
while Herod and his entourage rummaged around
trying to discover what we were on about.
They were unsettled for some reason,
taken aback, it seemed, by the news that we brought,
apparently unaware a king had been born among them.
A rival claimant they must have thought,
and who could tell what trouble that might stir up?
Anyway, they pointed us in the right direction if nothing else,
but we had wasted time there we could ill afford,
and although the star reappeared to lead us again
we were almost falling over ourselves with haste
by the time we reached Bethlehem.
It was all quiet,
Just as we had feared –
No crowds,
No family bustling around offering their congratulations,
No throng of excited visitors,
Just an ordinary house –
So ordinary we thought we'd gone to the wrong place.
But we went in anyway,
and the moment we saw the child we knew that he was the one –
Not just the king of the Jews,
but a prince among princes,
a ruler among rulers,
a King of kings!
We were late,
much later than intended,
the journey was far more difficult than we ever expected,
but it was worth the effort,
worth struggling on.
For, like they say, "Better late than never!"

Nick Fawcett
No Ordinary Man Book 2
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Carol - StF 224 As with gladness Men of Old

[1]As with gladness men of old
did the guiding star behold,
as with joy they hailed its light,
leading onward, beaming bright:
so, most gracious Lord, may we
evermore be led to thee.

[2]As with joyful steps they sped
Saviour, to your lowly bed,
there to bend the knee before
thee, whom heaven and earth adore:
so may we with willing feet
Ever seek thy mercy seat.

[3]As they offered gifts most rare
at thy cradle rude and bare,
so may we with holy joy
pure and free from sin's alloy,
all our costliest treasures bring,
Christ, to thee, our heavenly king.

[4]Holy Jesus, every day
keep us in the narrow way,
and when earthly things are past,
bring our ransomed souls at last:
where they need no star to guide,
where no clouds thy glory hide.

[5]In the heavenly country bright
need they no created light
thou its light, its joy, its crown,
thou its sun which goes not down;
there for ever may we sing
alleluias to our king.

William Chatteron Dix

Message

Strange as it may seem, the title for this carol service came to me almost a year ago. During advent last year I used a book of reflections entitled "At home in Advent" by Gordon Giles. It was in some ways similar to our circuit advent booklet in that it took everyday objects or circumstances, not necessarily related to Christmas though, and used them as a focus to see what they might say as I journeyed through advent. On 22nd December the focus was a birth certificate and this reflection spoke to me so much that I wrote the idea on a sticky note and stuck it in my diary for the beginning of this December – "good idea for a carol service!"

We all have a birth certificate don't we, even if we don't know where it is! It may surprise you to know that registration of a birth, and the associated issue of a birth certificate, only became law in the UK in 1875. Prior to that records of births were found predominantly in the baptism records of the local parish church.

While our birth certificate doesn't give any indication of our personality, our characteristics, of what we will do with our lives it nevertheless gives us an identity. It says when and where we were born. And of course this document continues to be just that throughout our lives as it is one of the documents which can be used as proof of identity. In a sense, it can be used to proclaim who we are! Sad to say, that up to a quarter of children born worldwide in 2021 still do not have a birth certificate, despite the United Nations Convention in 1989 stating that every child has a basic human right to a name and a nationality – something which proclaims, at the very basic level, that they exist!

Jesus didn't have a birth certificate. Mary and Joseph had gone up to Bethlehem for a census, a way for the authorities to, in essence, do a population count for the purposes of taxation, rather than proclaiming that you are a person with an identity, a person who exists. We don't even know whether Jesus would have been counted in this – maybe Mary and Joseph had already registered before Jesus was born. And yet despite this, Jesus' birth, his identity has been proclaimed for over 2000 years, well over 2000 years because, as we have heard, his birth and indeed the place of his birth was proclaimed hundreds of years before by God's prophets. His existence was proclaimed to Mary and Joseph before his birth, when the angels told them both that Mary was carrying the Son of God. And it was angels again who proclaimed his birth to those shepherds on the hillside, "to you in Bethlehem is born a saviour". The wise men recognised that the star in the sky was proclaiming the birth of the Messiah and they then proclaimed that news to Herod and to the Jewish advisors of the time. What they chose to do with that news is of course another story. The birth of Jesus, Messiah, the Christ, King of Kings, Prince of Peace was proclaimed through God's messengers.

But of course that wasn't the end of the story. Jesus' identity hasn't been lost, or forgotten, or put to the back of a drawer like some of our birth certificates. His birth, the good news continues to be proclaimed. In our circuit advent reflections we have been seeing how the birth and person and character of Christ can be proclaimed through many different things; stockings and socks, Christmas trees, Chocolate Oranges, Crackers etc.

Let's listen to the words of a Bethlehem resident, penned once again by Nick Fawcett.
Have you heard the news?
They're saying the Messiah has been born
right here in Bethlehem
Honestly – that's what I was told,
the Christ,
God's promised deliverer,
come at last to set us free.
Do I believe it?
Well, I'm not sure.
It's hard to credit, I admit,
but this friend I spoke to seemed pretty certain.
Heard it from a shepherd apparently,
some chap who claimed to see the child for themselves
and by all accounts he was delirious with excitement,
absolutely full of it.
He may have been mistaken, of course,
or simply spinning some old yarn –
you never can be sure, can you?
And believe me – I don't go around hearing everything I hear.
But this friend of mine,
the one who heard it from the shepherd,
he was full of it too.
You would have thought he'd been there
in the stable,
beside the manger,
from the way he spoke.
He was utterly convinced, there's no question about that,
and as I listened to him chattering on,
I felt the urge welling up inside me,
just as he had done,
to tell someone else,
to share the good news with those around me.
If he was right then this wasn't something to keep for myself,
not for the privileged few,
but a message for everybody,
one they all needed to hear.
But before I say anything else,
risk making a fool of myself,
there's something I have to do,
something my friend should have done
and which the shepherds presumably did –
and that is go and see for myself.
Call me a cynic if you like, but I believe that it's important –
no, more than that, vital –
for if you are going to accept something,
let alone expect others to do the same,
you have to be sure of your ground,
as certain as you can be that it's not all some grand delusion.
So I'm going now,
off to find out the truth for myself,
off to see this child.
if he really exists, with my own eyes.
And if I find everything just as I have been told,
the baby lying in a manger,

wrapped in strips of cloth,
then I shall go and tell others what I have seen –
for let's be honest, what else would there be to do?
What else could anybody do in my place?

Nick Fawcett
No Ordinary Man Book 1
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I just think there is so much in this meditation. There is the excitement and joy cascading down from the shepherds to the friend, and then to this resident who is proclaiming to us. There is the invitation to come and see for ourselves, to experience the manger scene, to witness the identity of this baby who is our saviour, to find out the truth. And finally there is the challenge. What do we do now? Do we believe? Do we keep it to ourselves? Or do we proclaim to others the birth of the Messiah?

Realistically - what else can we do?
Amen

Carol – StF 202 Hark the herald angels sing
So let's proclaim with the Angels – "Glory to the new born king"

[1]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 th'angelic host proclaim:
"Christ is born in Bethlehem."
Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new-born King!"

[2]Christ by highest heav'n 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,
Pleased as man with man to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel.
Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new-born King!"

[3]Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Son of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings,
Ris'n 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!"

Charles Wesley

Prayers – for those needing to hear the proclamation of Immanuel – God with us

Mary and Joseph had to make a long journey in difficult circumstances.
We pray for those who still today have to make difficult journeys as they flee war, persecution, poor living conditions or who are just seeking a better life. We pray that people may be put in their path to help them on their journey without exploitation but helping them to journey in a safe way.
Give us the hospitality of the innkeeper to welcome and accept those who arrive in this country.

Help us to proclaim the good news through our actions and words

The angels proclaimed the good news to the shepherds, people who were generally outcasts of society.
We pray for those who feel they are outcasts in today's society through poverty, gender, addiction, low self-esteem, illness or status. We give thanks for the various agencies working with those in need particularly at this season when many people are able to enjoy company of friends and family, giving and receiving of gifts and sharing food. Give us the generosity of Mary and Joseph who accepted the shepherds into the joy of their new arrival.

Help us to proclaim the good news through our actions and words

The wisemen proclaimed the good news to King Herod, thereby challenging authority.
We pray for those who are prepared to speak out for the various injustices in our world. Guide them in how they get their opinions across and in the words they say. We pray too for those in authority; politicians and governments around the world, those seeking peace, those administrating and co-ordinating charities both here and abroad, those working for climate change. Give us the courage of the wiseman to challenge authority, actions and preconceptions when it is needed.

Help us to proclaim the good news through our actions and words.

As we prepare to leave the stable at Bethlehem and go out into your world, we thank you that we have once again been able to see for ourselves Immanuel, God with us. Help us to go out and proclaim this to those we meet through actions and words.
Amen.

Carol – StF 330 Joy to the world
As we leave, we proclaim "Joy to the world, the Lord ***IS*** come

[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.

2Joy to the world! the Saviour reigns;
Let men their 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

Blessing
Lord Jesus,
may we be messengers of celebration;
may our lives proclaim peace on earth;
may our actions invite those around us
to go and discover the Saviour
who waits for them.
Amen.

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