Written Service Sunday 21st December 2025
A service of worship for use at home
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Welcome to the last Sunday before Christmas!
The name on the label

I'm Jane Edwards, one of the local preachers who usually worships at Sherwood, and together we're celebrating this forth Sunday of Advent 2025. Wherever and whenever you're using this material be aware that you're sharing together with others who are also worshipping at different times and in different locations across Nottingham North East Circuit. The prayers and liturgy that I'm sharing in this service are based on those published by the Methodist Church of Great Britain for this year, so we're also sharing with Christians up and down the country. Every week we're asked to reflect on an item, and this week it's the turn of the gift tag - as the image at the top of this page suggests.

Advent is an important time in our Christian calendar, where we anticipate Christ coming, not just as a baby in a manger, but as a King returning in glory to His Kingdom. It's a time of watching and waiting, of excitement and a bit of soul searching as we think about how we prepare for his return. We remember that we join with a great tradition of those who have come before us who have lived in this expectation, and we join them in our worship in one continuous line of praise.

To begin with let's focus on words of scripture, putting our thoughts of Jesus's birth into the context of eternity.

Scripture
John 1 v 1 – 5, 14
1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 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. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Song
Being a local preacher gives me the privilege of choosing some of my favourite hymns. In my opinion this is the most wonderful advent hymn, with a beautiful melody that echoes the words of the passage. Let us share it together.

Of the Father's love begotten
ere the worlds began to be,
he is Alpha and Omega,
he the source, the ending he,
of the things that are, that have been,
and that future years shall see,
evermore and evermore.

By his word was all created;
he commanded, it was done;
earth and sky and boundless ocean,
universe of three in one;
all that sees the moon's soft radiance,
all that breathes beneath the sun,
evermore and evermore.

This is he whom seers in old time
chanted of with one accord,
whom the voices of the prophets
promised in their faithful word;
now he shines, the long-expected;
let creation praise its Lord,
evermore and evermore.

O you heights of heaven, adore him;
angel hosts, his praises sing;
all dominions, bow before him,
and extol our God and King;
let no tongue on earth be silent,
every voice in concert sing,
evermore and evermore!

Aurelius Clemens Prudentius (348-c413)
translated by John Mason Neale (1811-1866)

Prayer
We join in the prayer from the Methodist Church for the UK set for this week:

Gift-giving God, may Advent be for us a time of giving and receiving.
Holy God, as Advent draws to a close, your gospel shines all the more brightly with messages of hope and promise, of love and care, of gifts already given and gifts for the present and for the future.

Gift-giving God, may Advent be for us a time of giving and receiving.
Holy God, remind us afresh of the Angel's appearances, of the sparkle and shine that their words and their messages add to our everyday lives.
May we be able to offer their messages and gifts with love, compassion and care.

Gift-giving God, may Advent be for us a time of giving and receiving.
Holy God, sharing your love is work that is often hard. But when we sit back and look at what a difference we've made we rejoice that we are made with love and live to love in your name.

Gift-giving God, may Advent be for us a time of giving and receiving.

Amen

Scripture
We read together the scripture passage from the lectionary this week. It means that Christians up and down the country are all prayerfully reflecting on the same passage together. It's the description of the conception of Jesus from the gospel of Matthew. This gospel doesn't give us the dramatic story of shepherds, angels, stables and mangers. Instead it tells the story from Joseph's perspective. As you read this familiar story ask that the Holy Spirit gives you the message that you need today.

Matthew 1 v 18 - 25
18 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. 19 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.
20 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. 21 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."
22 All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").
24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 25 But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Song
The Angel declared that Immanuel is coming. God is with us. Let's pause and reflect on that amazing gift that we have been given. Let's sing again.

Light of the world,
you stepped down into darkness,
opened my eyes, let me see
beauty that made this heart adore you,
hope of a life spent with you,

So here I am to worship,
here I am to bow down,
here I am to say that you're my God,
and you're altogether lovely, altogether worthy,
altogether wonderful to me.

King of all days oh so highly exalted,
glorious in heaven above.
Humbly you came
to the earth you created,
all for love's sake became poor.

So here I am to worship ...
here I am to bow down,
here I am to say that you're my God,
and you're altogether lovely, altogether worthy,
altogether wonderful to me.

And I'll never know how much it cost
to see my sin upon that cross.
And I'll never know how much it cost
to see my sin upon that cross.

So here I am to worship ...
here I am to bow down,
here I am to say that you're my God,
and you're altogether lovely, altogether worthy,
altogether wonderful to me.

Tim Hughes 2000 Thankyou music

Reflection
You may have noticed the pink gift tag at the top of this worship sheet. Gift tags are one of the smallest, most underrated things at Christmas. Yet where would we be without them? We'd have a pile of presents under the tree with no idea who sent what or who each one was meant for. Chaos! Every gift needs a name written on it.

Names are central in the Bible too, and our reading from Matthew's gospel is a powerful example. An angel appears to an ordinary carpenter and turns his world upside down. Joseph learns that his young fiancée will give birth to God's Son — and the child is to be called Immanuel, which means God with us.

All babies are precious gifts, but this child is something entirely new. This is God's gift of God's very self: choosing to inhabit our world with all its joys and all its sorrows. God with us.
Let that phrase settle into your heart for a moment.

The Bible doesn't just tell us that names matter to God; it shows us that names matter for everyone. In the Old Testament we often hear why a name was chosen and what it meant. We don't always think this way today, but perhaps sometimes we should.

I wonder: Do you know the meaning of your name? You might consider you first names, or surname, a nickname, or a name you've adopted.
Was it chosen for you, or did you choose it yourself?
How do you feel about it?

Shortly before I was born, my parents were running out of ideas for baby names. In desperation they asked my brother, who was three years old and just beginning to read his Ladybird books. He

suggested I be named after the girl in the Peter and Jane stories — and that's how I became "Jane." Looking back, I think I had a lucky escape. At three years old his choices could easily have been "Spot" or "Spiderman." Somehow it seems fitting that I later went on to marry a Peter!

However we got our name, and whatever we think of it, Scripture reminds us that God calls us by name. In Isaiah 43 God says: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine."

We are not just part of a crowd to Him. His love is not vague or general. God knows us — the real us — with our strengths, weaknesses, quirks, and scars. Calling us by name is a sign that he knows us as an individual. We are precious and important to Him. And still He loves us so deeply that He gives His Son, born as a child, living and dying and rising again, so that we might be saved. Like a careful giver, God writes your name on the gift tag.

You may have seen the advert for Disneyland Paris this winter. Beautifully wrapped presents sit under the tree, but the gift tags get muddled. A serious-looking young man accidentally receives tickets meant for a child - tickets for Disneyland! Instead of reacting with horror, he breaks into a huge, childlike grin and bursts with joy.

No one would have guessed — perhaps not even him — that this was exactly the gift he wanted. Perhaps God's gift in Jesus is like that for you: something you didn't realise you needed, or weren't expecting.

As we move through this week, maybe take time to wonder:
What might "God with us" mean for you, by name, today?
And as you reflect on that gift, remember too that there are people around us who don't yet know that the gift is for them as well — that their names are written on the tag just as clearly.

This week, may you know deep in your heart that God calls you by name — and may you be ready to share that good news with someone who needs to hear their name spoken in love. Amen.

Prayer
We respond in prayer, thinking of the needs of ourselves and others.

If you have a gift tag in your home why not hold it now? Use this physical object as a prompt for prayer. Reflect on how God loves you and calls you by name. Who can you share that love with this week?

We pray too based on those prayers suggested by the Methodist Church:

In the middle of the slums of Nairobi, one Methodist Church posts a sign saying: "A place where everybody is somebody." This sums up the ministry of service and the message of God's love for all, to which Methodists throughout Africa are committed. We pray that we too share that commitment.

We pray for those who are experiencing difficulty, especially in this advent time when there is so much expectation to be 'jolly.' We pray for those who are ill, or facing money worries, or relationship problems. We pray that they may understand they are known by name by a God that loves them,

Lord, we give you thanks that you love every person and for all who witness to your love in every place and especially today in Africa.

We give thanks for Methodist Church transforming the lives of people with disabilities in Tanzania; for the presence of the Methodist Church amongst the tribal peoples of northern Kenya, enhancing water conservation and social justice; for Church health and educational institutions throughout the continent; and for all who serve the poor and marginalised in countless ways.
May we your Church always be a gift to the world, a beacon of light, of hope and of healing and life. Amen.

Hymn
Our final hymn is a great celebration, as we look forward to Christ's return. I expect you to sing your hearts out!

Sing we the King who is coming to reign;
glory to Jesus, the Lamb that was slain!
Life and salvation his empire shall bring,
joy to the nations when Jesus is King:

Come let us sing: praise to our King,
Jesus our King, Jesus our King:
this is our song, who to Jesus belong:
glory to Jesus, to Jesus our King.

All shall be well in his kingdom of peace;
freedom shall flourish and wisdom increase;
justice and truth from his sceptre shall spring;
wrong shall be ended when Jesus is King:
Come let us sing …

Souls shall be saved from the burden of sin;
doubt shall not darken his witness within;
hell has no terrors, and death has no sting;
love is victorious when Jesus is King:
Come let us sing…

Kingdom of Christ, for your coming we pray;
hasten, O Father, the dawn of the day
when this new song your creation shall sing;
Satan is vanquished and Jesus is King:
Come let us sing…

Charles Silvester Horne (1865-1914)

Blessing

God, you have called us by name in love.
May we remember that call and share your love with others this week.
Amen.