

Sunday December 18th 2022

A service of worship for use at home

**Prepared by Phil Colbourn,
local preacher ex Burton Joyce.**

Advent 4

Hymns in Singing the Faith (StF)

Call to worship Psalm 97

The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad!

Lighting the Advent candle - *When God reigns, there is room for all ages and genders*

Advent is a time for us to prepare, but not just us; it is a time for everyone in the world to prepare & a time for all of us to recognise God's message displayed in all living & created things and in the environment around us.

This fourth Sunday in Advent, we make room in our lives for people of all ages and genders; for people who are overlooked; 'second-class citizens'; support workers; people who are ignored or put-upon & taken for granted.

Mary was one of these.

Without her, young, pregnant & unmarried as she was, where would we be?
Because when God reigns there is room for people of all ages and genders.

Without Mary's trust in God, what would we believe?

Because when God reigns there is room for people of all ages and genders.

Without her commitment, vision and faith, what faith would we have?

Because when God reigns there is room for people of all ages and genders.

Without her "Yes", would we even have a Saviour: Jesus, our Emmanuel?

Because when God reigns there is room for people of all ages and genders.

Are we guilty of scorning or shunning others because of age or gender?

Because when God reigns there is room for people of all ages and genders.

We lit our first candle for ourselves and our second candle for people who are different to us and we lit the third candle for the environment. Now, we light a fourth candle. This one is for Mary and for all who are marginalised because of their age or gender. (*Light an Advent candle.*)

Hymn StF 187 - *The angel Gabriel from heaven came*

1 The angel Gabriel from heaven came,
his wings as drifted snow, his eyes as
flame:

'From God, all hail,' the angel said to Mary,
'most highly favoured lady!'

Gloria!

2 'Fear not, for you shall bear a holy child,
by him shall we to God be reconciled;
his name shall be Emmanuel, the long-
foretold:

most highly favoured lady!'

Gloria!

3 Then gentle Mary humbly bowed her
head:

'To me be as it pleases God,' she said,
'My soul shall praise and magnify his holy
name.'

Most highly favoured lady!

Gloria!

4 'And so,' she said, 'how happy I shall be!

All generations will remember me;

for God has kept his promises to Israel.'

Most highly favoured lady!

Gloria!

5 Of her, Emmanuel - the Christ - was born
in Bethlehem, upon that Christmas morn.
And Christian folk throughout the world
will ever say,

'Most highly favoured lady!

Gloria!'

Prayers of Adoration and Thanksgiving

Lord, our God, we bless you with a full heart.

You are joy beyond all joy, peace above all peace, love beyond all love.

All good things come from you.

We praise and adore you and thank you for mercies renewed to us each morning; for your unfailing generosity; for the wonder and diversity of creation; for redemption and forgiveness; for fellowship and for opening up the way to our eternal home. **Amen**

We share in the prayer Jesus taught us. Let us pray:

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.

Readings

Isaiah 7: 10-17

10 Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, "Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights."

12 But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test."

13 Then Isaiah said,

"Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: The young woman of marriageable age will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel. He will be eating curds and honey by the time he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, for before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.

17 For the Lord will bring on you and your people, and on the house of your father, a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah - he will bring on you and yours the king of Assyria."

Matthew 1: 18-23

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. 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. 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 This took place to fulfil what the Lord said through the prophet: "The young woman of marriageable age will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

Hymn StF 173 - *Into the darkness of this world*

Into the darkness of this world;
Into the shadows of the night;
Into this loveless place You came,
Lightened our burdens, eased our pain
And made these hearts Your home.
Into the darkness once again,
O come, Lord Jesus, come

*Come with Your love to make us whole.
Come with Your light to lead us on.
Driving the darkness far from our souls.
O come, Lord Jesus, come.*

Into the longing of our souls;
Into these heavy hearts of stone;
Shine on us now Your piercing light,
Order our lives and souls aright
By grace and love unknown.
Until in You our hearts unite,

Reflection *On the birth of a baby boy*

Christmas is about joy, the joy of knowing Emmanuel, God with us. But I was pulled up short this week by a reading, in Tom Wright's 2017 Advent book, from James 1: "Count it all joy, folks, when things go wrong."

Jesus means God to the rescue and there's nothing better than letting God come to your rescue. James explains how exercising your faith develops patience. Now, I like to think of myself as a patient man, but I know for a fact this is not true. It doesn't take much to irk me and having read that on Thursday morning I was thoroughly put to the test. I'm still recovering.

A boy is born and this boy is a sign that God is acting in history. God is active even when we doubt it. And that was Ahaz's problem in our reading from Isaiah. Ahaz did not really believe that God could act on his behalf.

I don't know if it changed anything. Probably not. I think what happened next was probably going to happen anyway but the choice for Ahaz was whether he was going to face it alone or with God and we have the same choice: to face the future – whatever it is – with God or on our own.

Seeing that the future is likely to be tough, facing it with God is better than without God. It was tough for Ahaz and his people: it was Assyria! And the future was going to be tough for

O come, Lord Jesus, come.
Come with Your love...

Holy Child, Emmanuel;
Hope of the ages, God with us,
Visit again this broken place,
Till all the earth declares Your praise,
And Your great mercies own.
Now let Your love be born in us,
O come, Lord Jesus, come.

Come with Your love...

Coda:

Come in Your glory; take Your place.
Jesus, the Name above all names.
We long to see You face to face,
O come, Lord Jesus, come.

the people of Judah when Jesus was born: the wholesale destruction of the temple (& the nation) by the Romans.

The future is going to be tough for us and for coming generations. Climate change is not going away, floods, storms and wildfires are more and more likely and the consequent migration and displacement will impact all of us. Ecological diversity and biosphere breakdown may become irretrievable.

Do we want to face it with God or without God?
Are we going to walk in the Spirit or are we going to go our own way?
This is the choice of Christmas. This is the choice the baby Jesus brings.

Mary trusted God. Joseph trusted God. Jesus walked in the Spirit. It did not stop the destruction of Jerusalem but it did give the people who trusted God a way to live through the crisis and help each other and, especially, a way to help other people: the people who were displaced and made destitute, the people who had lost everything. And this is still our calling today.

Are we ready? Christmas is a call to mobilisation, and to patience.

Amen

Meditation

Are we ready, here & now, together, to live out the love of God?
Sing, quietly, *Give me oil in my lamp* (extra verses available at StF 76!)

Give me oil in my lamp, keep it burning
Give me oil in my lamp I pray
Give me oil in my lamp, keep it burning
Keep it burning till the light of day
Sing "Hosanna", sing "Hosanna"
Sing "Hosanna to the King of Kings!"
Sing "Hosanna", sing "Hosanna"
Sing "Hosanna to the King!"

Give me joy in my heart, keep me praising,
Give me joy in my heart, I pray,
Give me joy in my heart, keep me praising
Keep me praising 'till the break of day.
Sing "Hosanna", sing "Hosanna"...

Give me love in my heart, keep me serving
Give me love in my heart I pray
Give me love in my heart keep me serving
Keep me serving till the break of day.
Sing "Hosanna", sing "Hosanna"...

Prayers of Intercession

We pray:
For those in need
For those in our hearts
For our neighbourhood and community
For refugees and everyone displaced by war or weather
For young women and for mothers in hard times

For everyone who cannot afford food and fuel

For ourselves, that we know our responsibilities and our privilege

For each one who lives out your life of love in difficult circumstances

For ourselves, that we are prepared when the time comes to do the same

Silence

Help us speak out your creative word into the darkness - healing & grace; peace & hope; truth without favour - to teach, to encourage and to comfort.

Hear our prayers for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

Hymn StF 169 - *Come, thou long expected Jesus*

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 forever,
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.

Closing prayers

Thank you, Father, for your grace which is sufficient for us. May we catch your vision of a kingdom of love and live out the vision together. **Amen.**

Blessing

The blessing of God, who makes all things new and who gives grace upon grace and love beyond love, be upon you and remain with you, and with all whom you love and care for, this day and always. **Amen.**