

Worshipping Together

West Sussex Coast and Downs Circuit

Advent & Christmas 2020

Worshipping Together is an offering from the circuit to you, and has been collated by local preachers, ministers and worship leaders from across the circuit. If you are well enough, we invite you use this resource each week, at a time to suit you, and spend a few moments with God, knowing that you are **Worshipping Together** with other people who are also sharing in this act of worship with you.

Share these resources with others to use in their own way as we worship and grow together despite the pandemic.

Available at: www.westsussexcoastanddownscircuit.co.uk



Sunday 29th November 2020¹ | Advent 1

GATHERING

As we come to worship, you may like to have a time of silence and light a candle. Let us remember that wherever we are, God is with us.

Gathering

Its here! We have arrived at Advent, so let us draw near to God, to feel His Love and to worship His Name as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

Hymn: StF 169: Come , thou long expected Jesus²

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

Israel's strength and consolation
Hope of all the earth thou art
Dear desire of every nation
Joy of every longing heart

Born thy people to deliver
Born a child and yet a king
Born to reign in us forever
Now thy gracious kingdom bring

By thine own eternal spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone
By thine own sufficient merit
Raise us to thy glorious throne

¹ Preparation and original material by Malcolm Lindo

² Charles Wesley - Reproduced from Singing the Faith Electronic Words Edition, number 169

Prayer of thanks and praise

Loving God, we thank you for this time of year, this Advent season which reveals to us so wonderfully the extent of Your Love. As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus, we remember all the wonderful things that You have given us, all the ways that You have come into our lives. We thank You for bringing us joy when we have been upset, hope when we have been in despair and faith when we have doubted.

We praise You for this time of expectation, with its message of hope and its call to prepare ourselves for the coming of Jesus. But, as we look forward, we also look back and remember all those things we have failed to do. Forgive us that we so easily lose sight of the message of Advent and allowed its wonder to be swamped by the concerns of our day to day lives, including our worry about how we are going to celebrate Christmas this year. Lord, forgive us that we have forgotten Your promise that You will be with us always. We have lost sight of Your Love.

So Loving God, as we worship You today, open our hearts that through the name of Jesus, we can not only feel but also share Your Love with the world around us. Amen

RECEIVING

Reading: Mark 13:1-8, 24-36

Reflect

There are around the world many iconic views and I remember that when we visited the Holy Land, we saw one of them, the view from the Mount of Olives across the Kidron Valley towards the city of Jerusalem. It is a view that we also know that Jesus and His disciples had seen, because it was across the Kidron Valley that, in the days after the first Palm Sunday, they escaped from the crowds in the city celebrating the Passover. There is therefore no doubt that it was the view that the disciples were looking at one evening as they remembered that, earlier in the day, Jesus had said that all the buildings that they were looking at would be destroyed.

It was for them no different than, if a year ago, someone had said to us that in 2020, our churches would be closed and that we would be restricted as to who we could see, where we could go and that we would not be able to see friends and family. There is perhaps a strange irony that now, we would know that the Covid pandemic did lead to the foretold closures and restrictions, just as the early Christians knew that what Jesus was foretelling came true. In the time between Jesus's warning and when Mark wrote



his Gospel, the whole of Jerusalem had been destroyed as the Romans took revenge for the uprising by the Jews against the occupation.

When the disciples asked Jesus when the buildings would be destroyed, He warned them that there would be difficult times ahead, "...There will be wars and rumours, there will be earthquakes, there will be famines "and I guess He may well also have added ...there will be a Covid 19 Virus pandemic. But he also promised that "in those days, after that suffering, ...they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory.

But does that mean that we need to wait until the end of the world, that final day of judgement before we receive relief from our suffering, our pain. The simple answer is "No".....What we know, what the disciples didn't know, as they sat on that hillside, is that God has sent us the Holy Spirit to guide and comfort us.

We know that we don't have to wait to feel His Love and be given His strength to endure our pain, because we have the Holy Spirit around us every day. We know that we only need to open our hearts, like opening the curtains to let in the light, to feel the love of God in our lives.

Just as Jesus told the disciples to 'Beware, keep alert' and 'keep awake'! The challenge for us all in this time of Advent is to watch for the Lord and to be alert to God's presence in all we see. So, as we wait for the coming of our Lord in this Advent time, let us watch, be alert and respond as active agents in bringing about God's Kingdom.

RESPONDING

Sing, read, pray, or proclaim – Longing for Light³

Longing for light, we wait in darkness
Longing for truth, we turn to You.
Make us Your own, Your holy people
Light for the world to see.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in Your church gathered today.

Longing for peace, our world is troubled
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has pow'r to save us.
Make us your living voice.

Christ, be our light! etc

Many the gift, many the people

Many the hearts that yearn to belong.

Let us be servants to one another

Making Your kingdom come.

³ Longing for Light, Bernadette Farrell, OCP Publications, StF706

Prayers of Intercession

Lord God, we pray for our world and its people. There are so many different cultures, so many languages, so many different types of people but we know that we are all the same in your eyes. So today, we pray that You will teach us how-to live-in harmony with each other, to realise that some people do things differently to us. Lord, help us to listen to what other people say, and to recognise that someone halfway around the world can still be our neighbour. Far or near, we are all Your children.

We pray for people who have little or nothing. For those who feel trapped, feel locked in, and can't even see a glimmer of light that their lives may grow better. We pray for those who are hungry, for parents who struggle to feed their children and themselves. We pray, especially at this time, for all those agencies and foodbanks who seek to bring comfort and relief to those who suffer. We pray that they will all have the resources to continue their work and pray for a time when their work will be completed.

Lord, open our eyes to those around us, both those we know and to strangers. We pray for those whom we see every day, and those who we simply hear on the end of a phone or through the internet. We pray for those who are far away and with whom we only have occasional contact. We especially pray for our families, our friends and those in our churches. Help us to see and understand the burdens they are all carrying. Give us the strength and wisdom to care, and to pass onto them Your Love. Amen

The Lord's Prayer: *Our Father*

The Grace

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all forever more. Amen





As we come to worship, you may like to have a time of silence and light a candle. Let us remember that wherever we are, God is with us.

Call to Worship

From the exile of complacency, God calls us home.
From the exile of failure, God calls us home.
From the exile of suffering, God calls us home.
From the exile of all that separates us, God calls us home.
Together, let us come home and worship the God who calls.
In Jesus' name. Amen.

We pray...

God of all ages and all travellers, we praise and adore your faithfulness.
Despite our half-heartedness, you give your whole self to us.
To challenge our complacency, you give us the urgent message of John the Baptist.
To prepare us for Christmas, you bless us with the season of Advent.
To show your love for us, you call us home.
We praise and adore you.

God of Advent,
I confess that I have been reluctant to speak out your message of hope,
and to live out your promise of salvation.
Give me the generosity of heart and the wisdom of spirit
to be your messenger in your world today,
that others may know that you love them and call them closer to you.
I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Reading: Mark 1:1-8

Reflect

I am a newcomer to Sussex and was, in September, reminded of the county of my birth. Whilst walking the tunnel of trees to Halnaker windmill my route took a path new to me but steeped in history. I walked Mill Lane that follows an ancient track

⁴ Preparation and original material by Rev Michael Lewis

along the route of Stane Street, the London to Chichester Roman road. It brought to mind Ermine Street and the Foss Way, Roman roads through Lincolnshire. The roads, we inherited, were built by Roman centurions as they sought to bring order to an empire that covered Europe. They sought to tame the wilderness.

Where we live cannot be described as 'wilderness' almost every part of our environment has been domesticated by human hands. However, when Isaiah cries out from exile, 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord', it is said in full awareness of how dangerous the lonely places can be. The people for whom he speaks - living in exile in Babylon - long for things to be as they once were, familiar comfortable and safe.

Wilderness is harsh, uncompromising and terrifying and, in our own experience, the fear and uncertainty of pandemic is waiting on our doorsteps. We long for things to be as they were.

If Advent is to be taken seriously, we need to treat it as a season of 'exposure' to the challenges and realities being faced by people hungry for hope and comfort in a scary world.

We have to hold on to hope and love. The world is fragile and - when confronted with global crises, or huge local problems it can feel impossible speak words of hope. Isaiah challenges us to do so. He sees that out of the desert and wilderness comes a highway or road for God's good news. It is our job to proclaim and be faithful.

The appearance of the Son of God, in Mark's gospel, signals the ultimate end of exile for the people of God. Mark reiterates the sense of urgency deploying the words of Isaiah. He wants to remind his readers that to point towards Christ is an urgent matter. John prepares a 'highway' for the Lord - that is, a way that enables us to get where we need to be quickly.

The Romans famously made their highways in straight lines. It enabled them to prosecute war and build an empire more easily. But we need to remember that it was the legion that built the road. And so although the path we are invited to walk with God will be holy ground it will also be the road less travelled, made by us. As Brian McDermott titles his book 'We make the road by walking'.

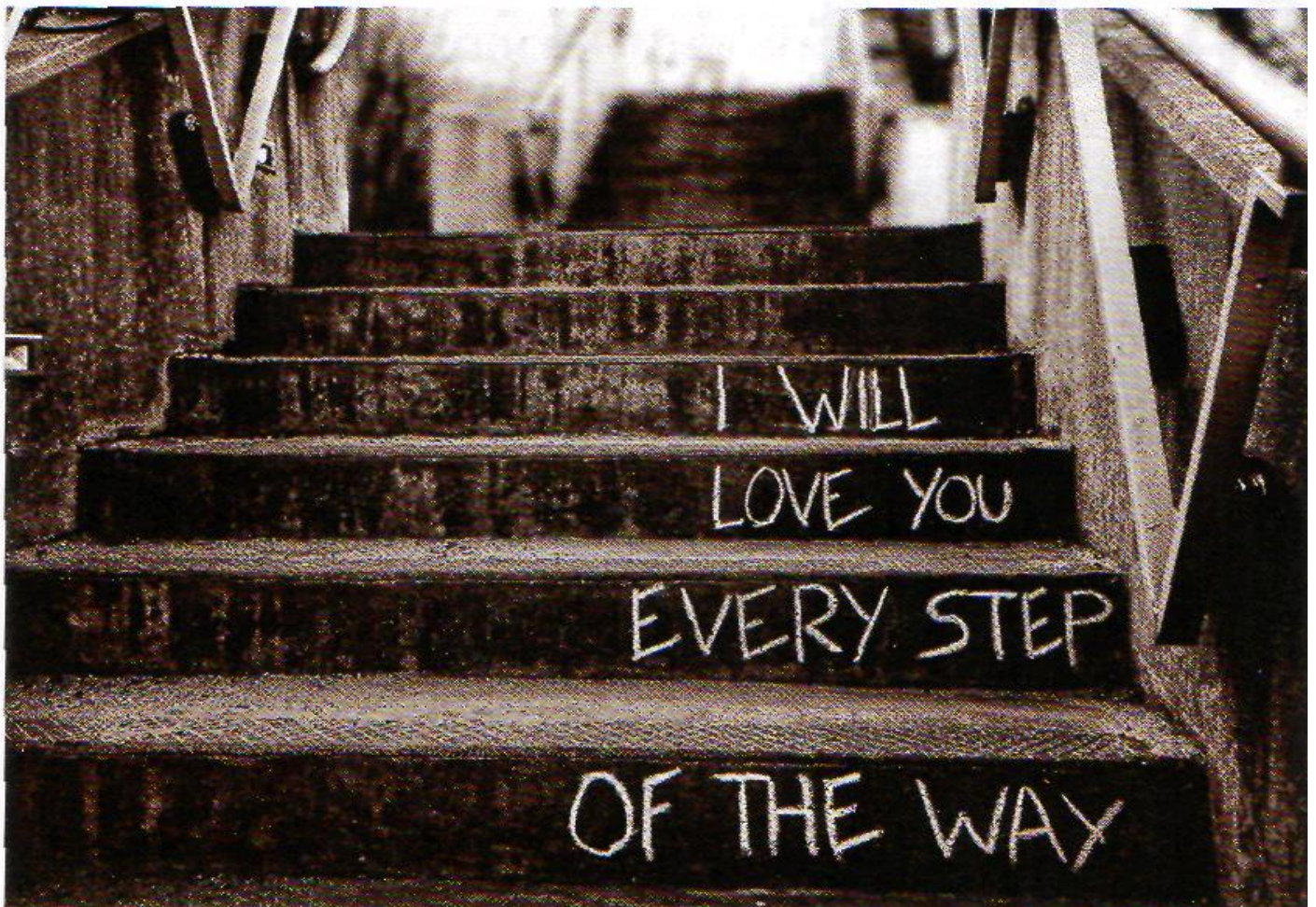
It will take us through dangerous wildernesses as well as places of seeming safety. However, rather than being a self-serving highway (such as those the Romans built for their Empire), the 'Way of God' calls us out of ourselves. Jesus is 'the Way'. Even when we feel very far from 'home', he leads us from exile into truth. We may not find ourselves in familiar comfort. We may never get back to how things were. We will be continually challenged to walk, breaking new ground on the highway of the Lord.

Hold onto hope and love and be led out of the desert and wilderness, on the highway of God's good news, to a destination yet to be revealed. Our purpose is to walk, share the message of hope in a dark world and be faithful to the God who loves us.

RESPONDING

Questions for Reflection

- * If these steps are 'the way home', where might they lead?
- * How do these words make you feel?



Prayers of intercession

Eternal God, we pray for all who feel lost and afraid in a wilderness:
those separated from their family or a long way from home;
may they know the joy of reunion,
and the touch of those they love.

God of all hope we call on you today.

We pray for those who are living in fear:

Fear of illness, fear for loved ones, fear of other's reactions to them.

May your Spirit give us a sense of calmness and peace.

We pray for your church in this time of uncertainty.

For those people who are worried about attending worship.

For those needing to make decisions in order to care for others.

For those in our congregations who feel isolated.

We pray for those lost in the dangerous wilderness of addiction;
may they know the joy of healing and the wonder of being loved.

We pray for those who have found beauty
in the wilderness experience;

those who found strength they didn't know they had -

a closeness to you they didn't know they could experience.

We pray for one another, that when the wilderness threatens our faith and our security, we would find our safety, and our home, in Jesus - in whose name we pray. Amen.

Blessing

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all now and evermore.
Amen**





As we come to worship, you may like to have a time of silence and light a candle. Let us remember that wherever we are, God is with us.

Sing, read, pray, or proclaim

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.

3) He 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 your beloved name.

Prayers⁶

As streets fill with shoppers, bright lights and tempting offers,
Christmas songs and children's laughter, you lead us along a different path.

To a desert river and a Prophetic voice.

A call to repentance. A call to service.

A call to immerse ourselves in living water that will never run dry,

A call to prepare a way in our own lives, for the Saviour of the world to enter in.

To know the touch of tender mercy, And rest in your forgiving love.

For your faithful prophets, and your Living Word, we give you thanks. Amen

Scripture Reading: John 1:19-28

'the one who is coming after me...'

It could be said that John's ministry has hit a bit of a crisis. People are thinking he is the Messiah, the one who would save them. Instead of looking at the one John is trying to point them towards, people are looking at him. *I'm not the Messiah, John says, stop looking at me, but keep your eyes open for the one who is coming.*

⁵ Preparation and original material by Dan Balsdon

⁶ From www.faithandworship.com, by John Birch.

John is there, face to face with these people teaching and baptising them, they can touch him and hear him. John was offering hope for people's lives, so perhaps it is no wonder people were thinking he was the Messiah. But despite all that John offered, the best was yet to come.

Reading on into John 2 we read of the wedding at Cana where Jesus turns water into wine and the bridegroom is asked why he has kept the best wine back. The early wine wasn't bad, but the better wine had been yet to come.

Who was the best that was yet to come? That's the spoiler that Advent points towards – the one who is coming, the best who was to come – is now here, living and active among us.

I often describe advent as a season of watching and waiting. Watching and waiting for what is to come. Christ's birth. Christ's return. The coming kingdom. But also watching and waiting for that which has come. Vigilant for God in the world now. We are not devoid of God's presence in the present. The who was coming after John has come, and God's Spirit remains with us.

As we continue our journey this advent, remember that the best has come. God is with us. Watch and wait for what is coming. Watch and wait with openness for God's presence to be known to us in our daily living.

RESPONDING

Sing, read, pray, or proclaim – Heaven Shall not wait⁷

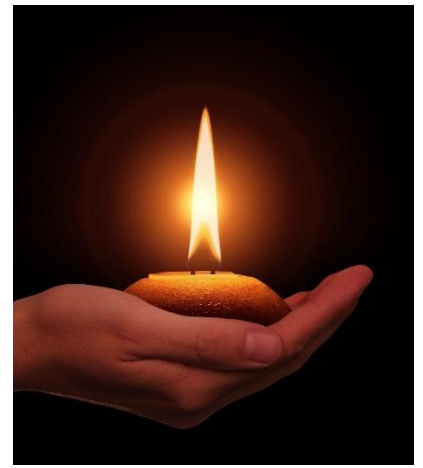
1) Heaven shall not wait for the poor to lose their patience,
the scorned to smile, the despised to find a friend:
Jesus is Lord; he has championed the unwanted;
in him injustice confronts its timely end.

2) Heaven shall not wait for the rich to share their fortunes,
the proud to fall, the élite to tend the least:
Jesus is Lord; he has shown the master's privilege —
to kneel and wash servants' feet before they feast.

⁷ Heaven shall not wait, by John Bell & Graham Maule, Wild Goose, Iona, StF701

3) Heaven shall not wait for the dawn of great ideas,
thoughts of compassion divorced from cries of pain:
Jesus is Lord; he has married word and action;
his cross and company make his purpose plain.

4) Heaven shall not wait for triumphant Hallelujahs,
when earth has passed and we reach another shore:
Jesus is Lord in our present imperfection;
his power and love are for now, and then for evermore.



Prayers⁸

Let us praise God, who sends his messengers before him,
to proclaim the way of his Son.

Your prophet John the Baptist was a witness to the truth.
At whatever cost, may we be witnesses to your truth today.

Open our ears, Lord, and teach us to listen.

Your prophet John the Baptist was a burning and a shining light.
Help us to share that light with all whom we meet.

Open our ears, Lord, and teach us to listen.

Your prophet John the Baptist experienced doubts and uncertainty. In our times of
anxiety help us with him to hear Jesus telling of the signs of his Kingdom.

Open our ears, Lord, and teach us to listen.

Your prophet John the Baptist was faithful to the end. Help us to live the life of faith
to its fullest, confident in the constant love of God through all our strengths and
weaknesses our fears and hopes.

Open our ears, Lord, and teach us to listen.

We pray for people, places and situations which rest on our hearts today.

Blessing

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ keep you & those you love,
today and in the week ahead. Amen.

⁸ From Encircling the Year, Barbara Mosse, p17-18



As we come to worship, you may like to have a time of silence and light a candle. Let us remember that wherever we are, God is with us.

Gathering

Today we remember the willingness of Mary to respond to God's call even though she did not understand why or how the promise would be fulfilled. As God's people today we need to be challenged by Mary's willingness and encouraged to trust as she did and offer ourselves to be part of God's story.

Prayers

God, you approached the world in the words of an angel asking consent and bringing life unexpected. Now we approach you, in the joy of welcome knowing that you will never turn us away. We celebrate you as we turn to you, glad that we are gathered for the feast of kindness and courage.

As Mary pondered, O Lord, we gasp with embarrassment.

As Mary pondered, O Lord,

we rely upon common sense and intelligent conversation.

As Mary pondered, O Lord,

we look to what is achievable at the most efficient cost.

As Mary pondered, O Lord,

we expect more of an answer to the mystery than a cross.

Lord, in your mercy hear our confession

and may your forgiveness change our confession into newness of living. AMEN.

RECEIVING

Scripture Reading: Luke 1:26-38

Annunciation by Eric Gill¹⁰

Eric Gill sets the Annunciation in Mary's bedroom. The Angel Gabriel, in a multicoloured robe, rather than the usual white, stands unshod before kneeling Mary. He holds a lily with another in a vase behind Mary. This signifies that the Annunciation took place in the Spring and symbolises Mary's purity.

⁹ preparation and Original material by Dan Balsdon, prayers by Martin Laver

¹⁰ Art and commentary From the Methodist Modern Art Collection

The Holy Spirit is not included (it usually appears in Annunciations as a dove or ray of light). The text of Gabriel's message 'Ave Maria' ('Hail Mary') and Mary's reply 'Fiat mihi' ('Let it be unto to me') appears back to front because the picture was produced for projection through a mirrorscope (a sort of early overhead projector).



Reflect

There is much about Gill's depiction of the annunciation that is 'different' to its traditional depiction. No dove as a nod towards the Spirit, the angel is not in white. The Christmas story is one we've heard many times before, but as this Gill's painting depicts, there was nothing normal about this encounter.

Familiarity can sometimes breed complacency. We may expect it as we read the familiar story unfold, but place ourselves in Mary's position, her day was interrupted to a degree she never expected when Gabriel appeared to her. And yet, Mary didn't run, she didn't panic, she responded 'let it be unto me'. Mary responded with such

grace to the messenger and his message – one that turned her whole life upside down. Think on in the story and there are plenty of other interruptions to come; angels, dreams, shepherds...

2020 has indeed turned life for us upside down, and Christmas 2020 will be different in a variety of ways for many of us. We all may feel Christmas has been interrupted. But I wonder if this helps us to view the Christmas story afresh, and more important still, the interruption of Christ's arrival on earth afresh.

Through recognising the interruption that Jesus was – promised, born, living, dying, rising – all if it! - we can be challenged to recognise the interruption of our day to day routine is what Jesus is about. Sometimes interruption can be a good thing! Through Christ fear is interrupted by hope and rejection is interrupted by love.

Through her gracious 'let it be unto me', Mary must have recognised that this interruption to her day, no matter how costly for her, no matter the many questions she must have had, was a good thing. **Can we respond with that same grace in 2020? Allowing the interruption of the Christ-child to transform us, and the world?**

RESPONDING

Prayers

Lord, thank you for all the ways you break into our lives with your message of love and hope for the future. Thank you for the Angels, who come to us in so many ways. May we be open to recognise and welcome them.

When you want us to love the people we struggle to like, dear God, please help us.
(Silence)

PLEASE HELP US TO SAY 'YES'.

When you want us to keep quiet and we want to argue, dear God, please help us.
(Silence)

PLEASE HELP US TO SAY 'YES'.

When you want us to stand against things that are wrong, dear God, please help us. (Silence)

PLEASE HELP US TO SAY 'YES'.

When you want us to spend time with you and we think, we're too busy, dear God, please help us. (Silence)

PLEASE HELP US TO SAY 'YES'.

When we want to fight back and you want us to turn away, dear God, please help us. (Silence)

PLEASE HELP US TO SAY 'YES'. AMEN.

The Lord's Prayer: *Our Father...*

Sing, read, pray or proclaim - **Song: Tell Out My Soul¹¹**

1. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!

Unnumbered blessings, give my spirit voice;
tender to me the promise of his word;
in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

2. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!

Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;
his mercy sure, from age to age the same;
his holy name — the Lord, the Mighty One.

3. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!

Powers and dominions lay their glory by;
proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

4. Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!

Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
to children's children and for evermore!

Sending Out

As Mary questioned, Lord, may we not be afraid to ask. As you gave her your Holy Spirit, fill us too. As you assured her of your power and presence, be with us always. As you gave her companions to share her journey, send us others to support us. As Mary said: 'Yes', help us to say 'Yes'. AMEN.

¹¹ Tell Out my Soul by Timothy Dudley Smooth, StF186

Christmas Day | 25th December¹²

Our Christmas Day worship takes us through some of the verses of the Christmas Day Carol, as it is sometimes known, 'O come, all ye faithful'. Sung with gusto by thousands each Christmas, the carol has an uncertain history, but likely that some of the carol originated among exiled Jacobite Roman Catholics in the 1740's.

**O 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!**



Reading: Luke 2:1-7

It's Christmas Day, we celebrate, Christ's birth, on earth, for all humanity.

O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord

We proclaim Christ is born, as angels did on the hillside that night.
Immanuel, Jesus, God with us for all eternity.

O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord

We humbly kneel in awe and wonder, as shepherds did in the stable.
Humbled by the baby king, God, made human, with us to dwell.

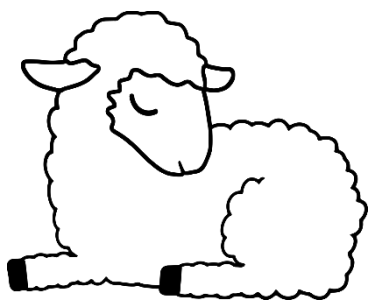
O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord

2000 years on, and Christ is the gift that keeps on giving.
Love, joy, peace, hope, justice, comfort, strength, encouragement.

Living God, Loving God, Holy God,
This Christmas, in worship and in wonder, we come and we worship.

O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord

Reading: Luke 2:8-14



**See how the shepherds, summoned to his cradle,
leaving their flocks, draw nigh to gaze ;
we too will thither bend our joyful footsteps :
O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord !**

¹² Preparation and original material by Rev Dan Balsdon. Extracts from O come all ye faithful, StF212

As I read this verse, I realised I wasn't sure what thither meant. Google tells me; "to or towards that place". It speaks of journeying and having direction. For these shepherds, they lay down the duties of their day to day living and respond with joy to this new direction, this summons to worship.

Reflect: What day to day things do you need to lay down to joyfully worship?

**Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,
sing, all ye citizens of heaven above:**

'Glory to God in the highest:'

***O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!***



Imagine that moment, the shepherd's night has been interrupted by a messenger from God, and then the sound of the heavenly choir breaks out on the hillside singing the Glory to God. What a glorious night for those hillside keyworkers.

Pray: Invite God to interrupt your day with glorious hope and joy.

Reading: Luke 2:15-20

Having seen the Christ child, shepherds join in the song of the angels, praising and glorifying God for all they had seen and heard.

Reflect: What about the Christmas story gives you joy? Give thanks to God.



**Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning,
Jesus, to thee be glory given:**

Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing:

***O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!***

When the waiting is over¹³

When the waiting is over and the child is born
when the shepherds have gone back to the fields
when the Magi have left their gifts and returned to distant lands
when Mary and Joseph have fled Herod's wrath –
keep our hearts open, O God, to the call of your Kingdom. Amen

May you be blessed with peace and hope this Christmas

¹³ When the waiting is over, by Rachel Mann, A Star-Filled Grace, p114 © Wild Goose 2015

As we come to worship, you may like to have a time of silence and light a candle. Let us remember that wherever we are, God is with us.

Sing a favourite carol, or love came down at Christmas¹⁵

Love came down at Christmas, love all lovely, Love divine ;
Love was born at Christmas, star and angels gave the sign.

Worship we the Godhead, love incarnate, Love divine ;
Worship we our Jesus: but wherewith for sacred sign ?

Love shall be our token, love be yours and love be mine,
Love to God and all the world, love for plea and gift and sign.

We pray together¹⁶

Father we thank you for Christmas,
and for the coming of Jesus Christ into this world;
thank you that you have taught us to see and know you through looking to him
that he has shown us you are a God of love
and that your love is real, strong and very demanding.

We thank you that Jesus has shown us
that we need never be afraid of the past, the future or the present.
He has given us the assurance that because he is Immanuel, he is always with us.
No matter who we are, no matter what we face,
he is Immanuel, always Immanuel; God is with us - always. Amen.



Reading: Luke 2:22-40

For many years Simeon had waited. Now an old man, Simeon had been waiting for the Messiah. The Spirit had revealed to him that he would see the Messiah before death. We read Simeon was righteous and devout and was looking forward – watching for the comfort of Israel, longing for the light that was promised to shine. When God would hold Israel in his arms. Into that righteousness, into that waiting, comes the revelation that the Messiah’s arrival was on the horizon.

¹⁴ Preparation and original material by Rev Dan Balsdon.

¹⁵ Love came down, Christina Georgina Rossetti, StF210

¹⁶ From 500 more prayers for all occasions by David Clowes, p67

One day, a couple enter the temple, not an unusual thing to happen. Normal. Mundane. Expected. But yet...Simeon is stirred. Stirred by the Spirit, he sees the child, and takes the baby in his arms and somehow, somehow by the Spirit's stirring, he knows this is who he had been waiting for. God's presence in a baby, this is the Messiah. God's promised comforter.

Simeon sees God's salvation, in a bundled baby in his arms. Simeon sees the light of salvation in a baby's cry. As Simeon finds the end of his waiting for the one who will hold the world in his arms, Simeon holds God in his arms.

No sooner has Christ been born, that the purpose of the Christ-child begins to be made known. Through Christ, salvation will come to all the world. Christmas points to Easter, without Christmas there would be no Easter.

Reflect: What is God's Spirit stirring within you today?

RESPONDING

Through long years of watchful waiting *by Thomas G Wilkinson, StF232*

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|---|--|
| 1) Through long years of watchful waiting
Simeon's deep devotion shone:
gratefully the child he cradles,
humbly holds God's Holy One;
rests content in life's quiet evening,
now his Temple task is done. | 3) In the following years she watched him
as he pondered God's intent;
in that teeming crowd she lost him,
as his searching way he went;
in her grief, the son she mothered
for the whole world's need was spent. |
| 2) So God's age-long word of promise
in that place is realised;
his salvation now embodied
as a helpless infant cried;
hearing Simeon's pointed blessing
Mary's heart is crucified. | 4) As the end of Christ's obedience
on that towering cross appears:
Mary watches with the women
as the soldiers swing their spears;
Simeon's word she recollected,
and her love dissolved in tears. |
| 5) In Christ's death outside the city
God's own heart is pierced with pain:
in this world's unending conflict,
seeds of hope on earth remain;
in the light of patient servants
Christ's self-giving lives again. | |

We pray...¹⁷

Let us praise Christ, the eternal son of God,
who's coming in human flesh offers the gift of new life to all.

Longed for from of old,
you promised us a richness and abundance of life beyond our wildest imagining.
Open our eyes, Lord, to the wonder of the Christ Child.

Strength of the weak and powerless you offer the gift of your healing love
to all who acknowledge their inner poverty and helplessness.
Open our eyes, Lord, to the wonder of the Christ Child.

Healer and life-giver, you pour your love on all who will receive you.
Open our eyes, Lord, to the wonder of the Christ Child.

Lord of justice and peace,
you challenge us to live our lives in cooperation with your loving purposes.
Open our eyes, Lord, to the wonder of the Christ Child.



Acknowledgements

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¹⁷ Encircling the year, Barbara Mosse, BRF 2012, p28, with slight adaption.