**Nativity Service – Sunday 20th December 2020**

Lighting of the Advent Candle

**Today we light the fourth Candle of Advent, the Candle of Love. In their old age God gave to Zechariah and Elizabeth a son called John. John spoke to the people bravely in the desert denying his own comforts and prepared to die for what he believed. John taught that we should share what we have with others, treat each other kindly and show Gods love. He did this because he cared for people and wanted them to repent and find God's forgiveness.**

**Love is like a candle shining in a dark place. As we look at the light of this candle we celebrate the love we have in Christ.**

Welcome to our nativity service. As you can imagine, this year it is going to be a little different. We can’t have all the junior church children at the front of the church dress in tea towels and dressing gowns as Covid won’t allow us. So we have a different format to this service, with contributions from the youth at Bamford Chapel and Norden URC, Alkrington and Providence URC and even churches in deepest, darkest Wales. But despite this we have to remember what the purpose of a Nativity Service is, to tell an old story to the world – probably the most important story ever told. The purpose of the nativity is to be church – to take the message of hope to all peoples. The message of hope that is Jesus –born in a manger to save mankind.

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| *Chorus ..Come and join the celebration it’s a very special day! Come and share our jubilation - there’s a new King born today!* | 1..See the shepherds hurry down to Bethlehem; gaze in wonder at the Son of God who lay before them. |
| 2..Wise men journey, led to worship by a star,  kneel in homage, bringing precious gifts from lands afar, so | 3: 'God is with us,' 'round the world the message bring; He is with us, ‘Welcome!’ all the bells on earth are pealing. |
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**First hymn is Come and Join the Celebration CMP83**  
We now have an alternative view of the nativity particularly in these days of Covid infections. Can you actually have a church nativity given all the restrictions that the government and the church has imposed on worship. You are about to hear one of our young people practising their Nativity script read for the big day, but unfortunately the Church’s health and safety officer is going to “help” them with some advice on how to make their Nativity Covid compliant

Narrator - Here it is – the Nativity Script – just need to rehearse it.

Narrator -Long ago, about 2000 years, when King Herod ruled Judea, God sent the angel Gabriel to a young woman called Mary.

Health & Safety Officer – Can we add in that the angel didn’t enter the house and stayed at least 2 metres away from the door

Narrator - Errrr – sorry – who are you.

Health & Safety Officer – Ohh I am the church Health and Safety officer and we would like you to make sure that the nativity this year supports the official message from the church regards Covid.

Narrator -Oh OK – so (taking notes) – angel did not enter the house and stayed 2 metres back

Narrator -Anyway if I can continue

The angel told Mary that she would become pregnant and that the baby would be very special.

At this time, the Emperor Augustus wanted to have a list of all the people in the empire, to make sure they paid their taxes. He ordered everyone to return to the town where their families originally came from, and enter their names in a register there.

Health & Safety Officer – errr no. We can’t have that. Can you change that to Augustus had to cancel the census because of the Covid Pandemic and all travel was cancelled.

Narrator -OK – census cancelled.

Right back to the script – When it came time for the baby to be born, Mary and Joseph travelled to Bethlehem, because of the census.

Health & Safety Officer – ah ah ah remember census is cancelled and Mary and Joseph aren’t allowed to travel.

Narrator - But you can’t have the nativity without Bethlehem

Health & Safety Officer – Sorry – no exceptions – people can’t travel. Mary can have pictures of Bethlehem instead.

Narrator -OK – well that means all the bits with the Innkeeper have to go.

So Mary gave birth to Jesus, the Son of God, in Nazareth surrounded by pictures of Bethlehem and with Joseph by her side.

Health & Safety Officer – Sorry no partners in the birthing suite.

Narrator -OK – well at least we can have the Shepherds.

In the hills and fields outside Bethlehem, shepherds looked after their sheep through the long night. As the new day began, suddenly an angel appeared before them and the glory of God shone around them. - The shepherds were very, very scared, but the angel said, 'Don't be afraid. I have good news for you and everyone. Today in Nazareth, but with pictures of Bethlehem, a Saviour has been born for you. You will find the baby lying in a manger.'.

Is that OK?

Health & Safety Officer – yes that’s fine

Narrator -Then a host of angels appeared, lighting up the sky.

Health & Safety Officer – Sorry – no more than 30 individuals allowed

Narrator - OK – 30 angels appeared singing: 'Glory to God in highest, and peace to everyone on earth.'

Health & Safety Officer – nope no singing allowed. They will have to play Youtube videos of people singing

Narrator -When the angels had gone the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go to Bethlehem to see what has happened.'

Narrator - (slowly) – But the shepherds realised they couldn’t travel. So they set up a zoom session so they could see the baby Jesus who was lying in a manger as they had been told. - When they saw him, they told everyone what the angel had said and everyone who heard the story were astonished.

Health & Safety Officer – Well done – you’re getting the idea

Narrator - When Jesus was born, a brand new bright star appeared in sky. Some Wise Men in faraway countries saw the star and guessed what it meant. They were very clever men that studied the stars and had read in very old writings that a new star would appear when a great king was born. They set out to find the new king and bring him gifts.

Health & Safety Officer – Errrrr

Narrator -The Wise Men also set up a zoom sessions to the place where Jesus was.

Health & Safety Officer – Good, also gets rid of all that messy stuff with Herod

Narrator -The Wise Men zoomed to where Mary and Joseph lived and found Jesus with them, they bowed down and worshipped him. The Wise Men gave gifts, errr I mean sent gifts via Amazon. The gifts were gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Health & Safety Officer – Very good, but shouldn’t we change the gifts to face masks,PRESS toilet rolls PRESS and hand wash.

Narrator – No – absolutely not. You’ve ruined the whole thing. You can’t have a Christmas nativity without going to Bethlehem, without the Shepherds and the Wise men

Health & Safety Officer – ahh yes but at least we are compliant with government guidelines

Narrator -If we get rid of all those elements, then all we’re left with is the Baby Jesus - born of Mary to be the saviour of the world

Health & Safety Officer – Sounds perfect to me.

And that is the point. A lot of the trappings of Christmas, particularly the religious ones, will be missing this Christmas. The church carol singing, children being in church to do the nativity – all the church services. All of these activities which show the true Christmas story – all of these things which try and balance societies view of Christmas – the shopping, eating and drinking too much. Even without these things, even without the Church fulfilling its role – we are still left with the baby Jesus – born to be the saviour of all the world, born to save humanity, born to die for us. As our Health and Safety Officer said – sounds perfect to me.

**Our second hymn is The First Noel CMP644** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rU7BCH9i-oY>

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| 1.. The first nowell the angel did say, was to Bethlehem's shepherds in fields as they lay; in fields where they lay keeping their sheep on a cold winter's night that was so deep: | 2.. Then wise men from a country far looked up and saw a guiding star; they travelled on by night and day to reach the place where Jesus lay: |
| 3.. At Bethlehem they entered in, on bended knee they worshipped him; they offered there in His presence their and myrrh and frankincense: | 4.. Then let us all with one accord sing praised to our heavenly Lord; for Christ has to our salvation wrought and with His blood mankind has bought. |
| Chorus: *Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell, born is the king of Israel.* | Anon © in this version the Jubilate Group ccli 169737 Streaming License 595811 |

We now have a dramatized Bible reading based on Luke 2 v 1 -20

**Narrator** Joseph said

**Joseph** Mary, Caesar Augustus has issued a decree that a census should be taken of the whole Roman world. Everyone has to go to his own town to register. So we will go from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because I belong to the house and line of David.

**Narrator** Joseph went there with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

**Mary** While we were there, the time came for the baby to be born and I gave birth to my first born, a son. I wrapped him in cloths and placed him a manger, because there was no room for us in the inn.

**Narrator** And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

**Shepherd** An angel of the Lord appeared to us and the glory of the Lord shone around us and we were terrified. But the angel said to us

“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you, he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you. You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising god and saying “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests.

**Narrator** When the angels left them and gone into heaven the shepherds said to one another

**Shepherd** Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.

**Narrator** So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby who was lying in a manger.

**Shepherd** When we had seen him we spread the word concerning what had been told about this child.

**Narrator** All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds had said to them.

**Mary** I treasured all these things and pondered them in my heart.

**Shepherd** We returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things we had heard and seen which was just as we had been told.

**Our third hymn is Hark The Herald Angels Sing CMP211**

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| 1.. Hark! the herald-angels sing,  "Glory to the new-born King;  Peace on earth and mercy mild,  God and sinners reconciled."  Joyful, all you 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." | 2.. 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!  Pleased as man with man to dwell,  Jesus, our Emmanuel.  Hark! the herald-angels sing,  "Glory to the new-born King." |
| 3.. 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. | Charles Wesley Felix Mendelssohn  ccli 169737 Streaming Licence 595811 |

Let us pray

**Prayers for Nativity service**

In our prayers we invite you to keep your eyes open as we share some images with you. Let’s pray….  
God of light and love You created the universe, the stars, the planets and our own planet earth. We see you in the magnificence of the night sky on a clear night. Lord we praise you for your awesome power.

God of light and love

You sent your son to live as one of us and teach us how we should live. He came as a baby, born in a stable. He came for everyone, whatever age, colour or creed; whether rich or poor.

Lord we praise you for your awesome love.

God of light and love

Throughout our lives you **are** there. You give us your holy spirit to guide, support and comfort us. Lord we praise you for your awesome faithfulness.

God of light and love

You are there in the big things, but also in the little, everyday things. Even in these difficult timeswe can see you in the splendour of the countryside and the beauty of our gardens. We hear you in birdsong and in the music we enjoy.

God of light and love

We feel you in the love shared in families and with friends. We experience you in the smile of a neighbour and the kindness of strangers. the constant care of NHS and care workers that we know we can rely upon if we are in need.

God of light and love

You have empowered us humans to develop technology so that we can communicate with each other while keeping apart; You have given us the skill to quickly develop vaccines giving us all hope.

For all these we say, “Thank you.”  
God of light and love

We are sorry for our wrong doing and any bad choices we have made.  
Please forgive us and help us to follow in your footsteps.  
God of light and love accept our prayers.

Let us share together in the Lord’s Prayer.

Our Father who are 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 others who trespass against us.  
Lead us not into temptation  
And deliver us from evil  
For thine is the kingdom. The power and the glory  
For ever and ever.  
Amen

**Our fourth hymn is O Little Town of Bethlehem CMP 503** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sI7_TGZaOIE>

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| 1.. O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see you lie! Above your deep and dreamless sleep, the silent stars go by. Yet in your dark streets shining in everlasting Light; the hopes and fears of all the years, are met in you tonight. | 2.. For Christ is born of Mary and, gathered all above; while mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love. O morning stars, together proclaim the holy birth; and praises sing to God the King and peace to men on earth. |
| 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, Emmanuel. |
| Lewis H. Redner Phillips Brooks Public Domans ccli 169737 Streaming Licence 595811 | |

At this time, when so many things seem to be happening in the world, we really need our Prayers of intercession. Let us pray

Lord, today we pray for the world as we reflect on this year. We think of all those who have faced challenges throughout this difficult year across the world. Be with those who have lost family or friends during this time. We pray for healing for all of those affected by the virus. And for those who are still awaiting treatment for other illnesses. Please be with those who’s mental health has been affected by the pandemic and we pray for the homeless through these winter months. Remind us of the conflict and persecution that goes on in other countries. Don’t let us be blinded by the challenges we face. Lord help us to remember those who are suffering.

Let us pray for each other, even though we may not be able to meet in person, please bring us all together in thought. Help us to feel each other’s presence and love through the challenging times we face. Allow us to take time out of our busy lives to be in your presence and hope, as you are the light that has guided us throughout this year.

Thank you, Lord, for the promising news of the COVID-19 vaccine. It gives us hope that our lives will move forward in the near future. We thank the scientists and those who have been involved in research to help discover the vaccine. Thank you to all the key workers and those who work tirelessly every day from NHS staff to delivery drivers.

Thank you, God, for the roof over our heads and the food on our table. These are the important things to us especially as times are so challenging for others. Guide us to help those in need and support us to take the time to carry out an act of kindness to those struggling this Christmas.

Remind us lord to look after ourselves and those around us. Grant us the ability to forgive others and ourselves. Loving God please help us keep sadness away from our hearts and the worries away from our minds. Bless us with love and happiness and surround us with your love and comfort to guide us each day.

Be with us all this Christmas, especially those who have to face Christmas without loved ones and on their own. Times will be different but help us to fill this special time of the year with your love and strength that you teach us every day.

Our God, you are the light in our darkness, and you shine so bright. Be with us forever and always.

Amen.

We would now like to share with you some of the thoughts and images from our middle group on what they think Christmas means to them.

Whilst you’re eating your eating your Advent chocolates…Embrace the hope, peace, joy and love during this advent season.

In the midst of all the chaos, we should spend time with family and loved ones.

Whilst exchanging presents we should remember the gifts given to a baby with a very special destiny.

While trimming our trees, let’s remember Jesus’ family tree and all the people who paved the way for Jesus.

Whilst playing with our new toys we should think of the homeless and those in poverty and help where we can.

As we curl up in our nice warm homes, let’s pray for those fleeing their homes.

As we sing our favourite Christmas songs, let’s rejoice the good news brought by the Angels.

Christmas lights are great….Just don’t forget who is the true light of the world.

And remember whose birthday it is we’re celebrating.

**Our fifth hymn is O Come All Ye Faithful – CMP491**

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| 1.. O come all you faithful, Joyful and triumphant, O come now, O come now to Bethlehem; come and behold Him, born the King of angels: | 2.. True God of true God, light of light eternal, He who abhors not the virgin's womb; Son of the Father, begotten not created |
| 3.. Sing like the angels, sing in exultation, sing with the citizens of heaven above: 'Glory to God, glory in the highest': | 4.. Yes, Lord, we greet You, born that/this happy morning, Jesus, to You be glory given! Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing: |
| Chorus: O come, let us adore Him, O come, let us adore Him, O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord. | Frederick Oakley (1802 - 1880) altered by ©1986 Horrobin/Leavers ccli 169737 Streaming Licence 595811 |

And when the nativity is over, when all the celebrations are done, when all the visitors stop, when the gifts have been given, when the baby Jesus is all alone then what.

Reverse Nativity:

1 And there we have the nativity scene in all its perfection, loved for generations. But what happens after.  
  
2 Well the wise men had a long journey ahead of them, so they set off – obviously avoiding Herod’s palace on the way  
  
3 And then the shepherds had to return to the flocks, because who else would protect them, particularly on the run up to the lambing season.  
  
4 And the animals that shared the space where Jesus was born, well they went to find food as animals do.  
  
5 And then Joseph had to return to work in his carpentry business - to place food on the table and a roof over their heads.  
  
6 That left Jesus and His mother Mary. But Mary had a house to run and she would go on to have many more children.  
  
7 Which just leaves Jesus – the little baby. Born to be the saviour of all mankind. To give his life for others. The little baby – all human and all God – sent to earth so we may have eternal life and peace between all people.

Play video of Christmas Armistice (including Silent Night) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NOz9SpWc_yE>

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| 1.. Silent night, holy night! Sleeps the world; hid from sight, Mary and Joseph in stable bare watched o'er the child beloved and fair sleeping in heavenly peace; sleeping in heavenly peace. | 2.. Silent night, holy night! Shepherds first saw the light, heard resounding clear and long, far and near the angel-song. 'Christ the Redeemer is here; Christ the Redeemer is here.' |
| 3.. Silent night, holy night! Son of God, O how bright. Love is smiling from Your face! Strikes for us now the hour of grace. Saviour, since You are born Saviour, since You are born. | Franz Gruber John Freeman Young Joseph Mohr Public domain  ccli 169737 Streaming Licence 595811 |