

Carols by Candlelight – Order of Service

Welcome and Opening prayer

Once in Royal David's City (soloist v1)

1st Reading – Isaiah 9:2, 6-7

Choir Carol

2nd Reading – Reflection Part 1

O Little Town of Bethlehem

3rd Reading – Luke 1:26-38

Choir carol

4th Reading - Reflection Part 2

See Amid the Winters Snow

5th Reading – Luke 2: 1-16

Choir carol

6th Reading - Ring out, wild bells, Tennyson

God Rest Ye, Merry Gentlemen

7th Reading - Prayers

Choir carol

8th Reading – John 1:1-14

Hark! The Herald

Final Prayer and Blessing

Opening Prayer

Let me begin with a prayer,

How silently, how silently, the wondrous Gift is giv'n;
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His Heav'n.
No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in.

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!

Amen.

Reading 1: Isaiah 9: 2, 6-7

The first reading is taken from Isaiah chapter 9, verses 2, then 6 to 7.

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

Reading 2: Reflection Part 1

[Do not announce, simply read]

'Unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulders.' Unless you sigh with relief at those words, you haven't really been listening. What we need just now, more obviously than ever, is someone to shoulder the burden, someone who can get under and pick up our multiple problems and carry them for us.

It should be obvious by now that nobody locally or globally has the slightest idea how to address, let alone solve, the problems of global power, global finance, global humanity as a whole.

We snatch too eagerly at sudden fresh signs in world politics. And that can only be because we have forgotten the Christmas message, or have neutered it, have rendered it toothless, as though the shoulder of the child born this night was simply a shoulder for individuals to lean on rather than the shoulder to take the weight of the world's government.

This night was the night for which planet earth was waiting and to which it must look back if it wants to know the way forward.

Jesus isn't simply another politician on whom everyone can pin their hopes and who will then let them down. His way of establishing God's justice and peace on the earth was different to Caesar's, different to the usual power games and money games, different in source, different in method, different in effect. We are today hungry for exactly that difference, and tonight we ponder it.

Reading 3: Luke 1:26-38

The third reading is taken from the gospel of Luke, chapter 1, verses 26-38.

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David,³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me according to your word." Then the angel left her.

Reading 4: Reflection Part 2

[Do not announce – simply read]

The prophets and angels cry out that it's time for a different kind of world, a different kind of empire. What we need is a new economic system, a new way of doing global politics, a new style of leadership. Christmas is all about the coming of the world's true king, the one who stops wars, who forgives debts, who establishes true justice and judgment in the earth.

The story the gospels tell is about this child growing up and starting to put God's kingdom into operation, close up, wherever he goes. This is what it looks like, he says, when God is running things. The world gets turned the right way up. Watch, in the gospels, as the Wonderful Counsellor goes to work, dealing with individuals but also confronting the systems which had enslaved them, and upsetting the slavemasters. Watch as the Mighty God strides through Galilee feeding the hungry, healing the sick, rescuing people and restoring creation itself. Look on in awe as the Everlasting Father is seen mirrored in the incarnate Son, giving himself totally to his beloved world. And, if you dare in the light of our culture where war, the way of death, is the way of life for so many, watch as Jesus, from his earliest beginnings with a price on his head through to his riding the donkey into Jerusalem, shows what it looks like when the Prince of Peace is on the move. He comes to get God's kingdom off the ground – or perhaps we should say, precisely *on to* the ground, the real life of real people. And that involves taking upon himself the full force of the world's cruel systems, the political and economic enslavement from which we still suffer, so that the power of evil can be broken and something new may take its place.

Reading 5: Luke 2:1-16

The fifth reading is taken from the gospel of Luke, chapter 2, verses 1 to 16.

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, 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 heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests."

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

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

Reading 6: Ring out, wild bells, Tennyson

[Do not announce, simply read]

Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,
The flying cloud, the frosty light;
The year is dying in the night;
Ring out, wild bells, and let him die.

Ring out the old, ring in the new,
Ring, happy bells, across the snow:
The year is going, let him go;
Ring out the false, ring in the true.

Ring out the grief that saps the mind,
For those that here we see no more,
Ring out the feud of rich and poor,
Ring in redress to all mankind.

Ring out a slowly dying cause,
And ancient forms of party strife;
Ring in the nobler modes of life,
With sweeter manners, purer laws.

Ring out the want, the care the sin,
The faithless coldness of the times;
Ring out, ring out my mournful rhymes,
But ring the fuller minstrel in.

Ring out false pride in place and blood,
The civic slander and the spite;
Ring in the love of truth and right,
Ring in the common love of good.

Ring out old shapes of foul disease,
Ring out the narrowing lust of gold;
Ring out the thousand wars of old,
Ring in the thousand years of peace.

Ring in the valiant man and free,
The larger heart, the kindlier hand;
Ring out the darkness of the land,
Ring in the Christ that is to be.

Reading 7: Prayers

Let us pray,

Holy God

Help us to think of different ways of ordering our world – to recognise that the best way is the Jesus-way, the baby-in-the-manger way.

Help us to put the vulnerable and the poor first and work things out from there.

Help us to establish new economic principles, social principles and political principles and forgive us for assuming that we already know all the answers. Forgive us when our good intentions are misdirected to serve our own ends, real or imagined.

Help us to speak up - at work, on the street, in our families and schools and offices, in local and national government, education, business, administration and, yes, even in the church.

Heal and renew us. Put the story of the Christ-child in our hearts, and by the Spirit of Jesus, give us energy and direction. Help us to be kingdom-bringers, in whatever sphere we can.

Help us to think globally and act locally as we campaign for the big issues such as debt remission and climate change, and working on the local issues like housing, asylum and unemployment.

As we stop, and pause, and look in wonder once more at the baby lying in the manger, we give ourselves again to your service.

Amen.

Reading 8: John 1:1-14

The last reading is from the gospel of John chapter 1, verses 1 to 14.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Final Prayer

A final prayer,

Heavenly Father

We came here tonight, aware that the kingdom Jesus came to bring needs to be worked out in the real and tough challenges that lie ahead of us but aware, too, that if it is Jesus' kingdom we are working out we cannot get enough of Jesus himself, cannot worship him enough, cannot ponder him enough, cannot invoke him enough, cannot love and adore him enough, cannot taste him enough. That's why we were here tonight.

Open our eyes afresh to his way of doing things, putting into our minds and hearts a new vision of how things could be and let us celebrate the fact that the government is upon his shoulder, and let us go out into the this Christmas and new year to face the much-heralded darkness with the news of a great light.

Amen.