



The Methodist Church

Ripon and Lower Dales Methodist Circuit: Worship at Home – 27 December 2020

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Wherever you are sharing in this act of worship, you are welcome.

A Call to Worship:

We waited.

And imagined a saviour.

We imagined power.

One like the world but stronger and on our side.

We imagined a king on a white horse wielding a sword.

We got a baby born in a stable among the livestock.

We imagined the work done for us through the destruction of our enemies.

We receive a baby who will teach us our calling

to seek reconciliation and to love expansively.

Praise be to God for the unexpected babe of Bethlehem.

Praise to the wisdom of love.

Hymn: Love came down at Christmas

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

what shall be our sacred sign?

Love shall be our token,

love be yours and love be mine;

love to God and neighbour,

love for prayer and gift and sign.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

We praise you, O loving God, who gave your very self in human form, your majesty born into our poverty, your love lying in an out-house.

We thank you that, amidst Bethlehem's noisy rush, we find in you a focus for our activity, a hope for you humanity, a love for all eternity.

But we confess that Christ's birth has gone unnoticed. Now, as then, we have not made room in our day to day lives.

Now, as then, we have mislaid your message of reconciling love. Now, as then, we have ignored the stillness of your presence. Gift-giving God, forgive us. Free us from our self-centredness. Help us to accept your love so freely given, that we may live as you have called us to live. Amen.

Reading: Luke 2: 8 – 16

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom
his favor rests."

¹⁵ 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."

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

Reflection

The first Christmas Eve was a night of meetings - a momentous meeting of two worlds. On that night a meeting of heaven

and earth, between God and humanity, took place such as never before or since. From the most important man in the world, Caesar Augustus, came a decree which touched the lives of two unimportant people in a remote backwater, Joseph and Mary. Rome, capital of the political world, was linked with humble Bethlehem. In the countryside close by there were shepherds who lived in the fields.

To a religion which regarded laws of hygiene as sacrosanct, these field-dwellers were deemed to be beyond the pale. But the vastness of heaven entered their scrubby little field and the glory of God shone in their sight.

When the shepherds had caught their breath again after the initial terror of it all, they were directed to Bethlehem. There in the memory of David, the shepherd who became king, they found the King who became Shepherd. He who would describe his role as a shepherd in search of lost sheep, was introduced onto the world stage by shepherds. Such is the flavour of Luke's story.

When God stepped into the story of humanity, the people who were caught up in the event were the poor and the religious despised, the little people of the world - those who were empty enough to receive, silent enough to listen and open enough to wonder. But there was no room for them at the inn which was too full, too noisy and too closed to the wonder of the heavens.

Only those who know the littleness of their own fields can be open to the wonder of greater realities. Mary, the littlest of all, treasured these mysterious and marvellous things and pondered them in her heart. She knew that the full wonder could not be absorbed all at once.

The first Christmas Eve was a night of meetings, when the vastness of heaven met the confined fields of earth, when the richness of heaven invaded the poverty of cave and manger, when the dazzling choirs of heaven filled the silence of night. It was the night that ushered in the day of glorifying and praising God - and each Christmas we have been glorifying and praising God ever since. Christmas is a time of meeting - the meeting of family and friends, for instance, the meeting of child and adult, the meeting of

friend and stranger, even the meeting of enemies, as happened on the battlefield in the Christmas of 1914. I hope and pray that, this Christmas, there will take place in our lives a momentous meeting of two worlds. May we, like the shepherds, find the scrubby little field of our lives invaded by the vastness of heaven.

May it be for us, as it was for the shepherds, a life-transforming experience - an experience that propels us along the little road to Bethlehem, there to worship and adore at the manger-throne.

Hymn: While shepherds watched

While shepherds watched their flocks by night,
all seated on the ground,
an angel of the Lord came down,
and glory shone around.

2 "Fear not," said he for mighty dread
had seized their troubled mind
"glad tidings of great joy I bring
to you and all mankind.

3 "To you, in David's town, this day
is born of David's line
a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord;
and this shall be the sign:

4 "The heavenly babe you there shall find
to human view displayed,
all simply wrapped in swaddling clothes
and in a manger laid."

5 Thus spoke the angel. Suddenly
appeared a shining throng
of angels praising God, who thus
addressed their joyful song:

6 "All glory be to God on high,
and to the earth be peace;
Goodwill henceforth from heaven to men
begin and never cease."

Prayers of Intercession

With confidence and trust let us pray to the
Father
For the one holy catholic and apostolic
Church,
Lord of compassion
In your mercy hear us.

For the mission of our communities ,
that in faithful witness we may proclaim the
Gospel.

Lord of compassion
In your mercy hear us.

For peace in the world
that a spirit of respect and reconciliation may
grow among nations and peoples.

Lord of compassion
In your mercy hear us.

For all those in need in our communities
– the sick, suffering, unhappy, vulnerable and
lonely – that they may be comforted and
protected.

Lord of compassion
In your mercy hear us.

For grace to amend our lives and to further
the reign of God let us pray.

Lord of compassion
In your mercy hear us.

In communion with all those who have walked
in the way of holiness.

Lord of compassion
In your mercy hear us.

We offer our prayers in Jesus' name, Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn: See amid the winter's snow

See, amid the winter's snow,
born for us on earth below,
see the tender Lamb appears,
promised from eternal years.

Refrain:

Hail! Thou ever-blessed morn!
Hail, redemption's happy dawn!
Sing through all Jerusalem,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem."

2 Lo, within a manger lies
He who built the starry skies;
He, who throned in height sublime,
sits amid the cherubim! [Refrain]

3 Say, ye holy shepherds, say,
what your joyful news today;
wherefore have ye left your sheep
on the lonely mountain steep? [Refrain]

4 "As we watched at dead of night,
lo, we saw a wondrous light;
angels singing 'Peace on earth'
told us of the Saviour's birth." [Refrain]

5 Sacred Infant, all divine,
what a tender love was Thine;
thus to come from highest bliss
down to such a world as this! [Refrain]

6 Teach, O teach us, Holy Child,
by Thy face so meek and mild, teach us to
resemble thee, in thy deep humility. (Refrain)

Benediction

We go in peace to live and work to God's
praise and glory. Thanks be to God! Amen.