

**Rion and Lower Dales Methodist Circuit  
Written service for 1<sup>st</sup> January 2023**

A Happy New Year and welcome whenever and wherever you are joining in this act of worship.

**Our call to worship** on this the first Sunday of the New Year is 2 verses from a Charles Wesley hymn which begin to capture the wonder of the incarnation.

**StF 208**

Let earth and heaven combine,  
Angels and all agree.  
To praise in songs divine  
The incarnate deity,  
Our God contracted to a span,  
Incomprehensibly made man.

Unsearchable the love  
That has our Saviour brought;  
The grace is far above  
Both earth's and angels' thought:  
Suffice for us that God, we know,  
Our God is manifest below.  
Charles Wesley

**StF 176 Like a candle flame**

LIKE A CANDLE FLAME,  
flickering small in our darkness.  
Uncreated light  
shines through infant eyes.

God is with us, alleluia.  
God is with us, alleluia.  
Come to save us, alleluia.  
Come to save us.  
Alleluia!

Stars and angels sing,  
yet the earth sleeps in shadows;  
can this tiny spark  
set a world on fire?

God is with us, alleluia.  
God is with us, alleluia.  
Come to save us, alleluia.  
Come to save us.  
Alleluia!

Yet his light shall shine  
from our lives, Spirit blazing,  
as we touch the flame  
of his holy fire.

God is with us, alleluia.  
God is with us, alleluia.  
Come to save us, alleluia.  
Come to save us.  
Alleluia!

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

**Let us pray**

(Words from © Nick Fawcett 'Prayers for all seasons'  
no. 91 pub. Kevin Mayhew)

Mighty God,  
we come together at the beginning of another  
year  
with joy and gratitude in our hearts.  
We come to lift up our voices,  
to sing your praises,  
and to declare your faithfulness.

**Lord of past, present and future,  
Receive now our worship.....**

We gather with your people across the world,  
to bring you our thanksgiving  
to offer our service  
and seek your guidance,

**Lord of past, present and future,  
Receive now our worship.....**

For the love we have received,  
the care you have always shown,  
and the help you have invariably given:

**Lord of past, present and future,  
Receive now our worship.....**

For the mercy you have displayed,  
the forgiveness you have offered,  
and the renewal you have brought:

**Lord of past, present and future,  
Receive now our worship.....**

For all you are,  
all you have been  
and all you shall be:

**Lord of past, present and future,  
Receive now our worship.....**

Meet with us now through this time of  
worship,

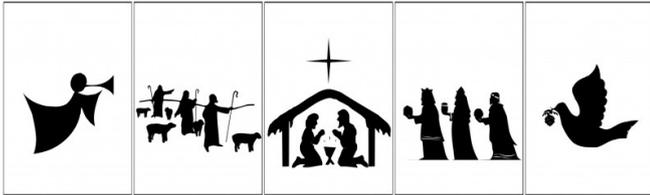
so that through being here  
we may grow closer to you and one another  
and be equipped to work for your kingdom.  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

**Lord's Prayer**

Our Father in heaven,  
Hallowed be your Name,  
Your kingdom come,  
Your will be done,  
On earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.  
 Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who  
 sin against us.  
 Save us from the time of trial  
 And deliver us from evil.  
 For the Kingdom, the power and the glory are  
 yours  
 Now and forever. Amen



*Look at this Christmas Crib scene. We see many in our homes, in shops, on Christmas cards and, of course in our primary schools where the inclusion of an unspecified number of shepherds, of animals and angels gives scope for all the class to have a part in the production. They all show the same event and take some poetic licence with timings and background. Shepherds and Wise Men arrive at the same time. The background is clean, no smells from animals or straw in need of a change, no terrified and exhausted parents, worn out by the recent past and showing fear of what the future might hold. What is it that draws us to these scenes? What they usually show is the promise and hope captured in this event. Mary and Joseph look down in wonder at this sleeping baby, poor shepherds gaze in adoration and even rich Wise Men, kneel in worship and pay homage to this special child. We love these images because they speak to our hearts of something wonderful that we can't quite understand but we know is good because it is of God. But perhaps it wasn't quite like that. The parents would have been exhausted. Perhaps they had an idea of what Herod might have in store. They knew that this special child had to be kept safe at all costs and they asked themselves how. Our crib scenes and the pictures on Christmas cards tell one side of the story, and we will come back to that, but our first Bible reading for today tells another. This is the part that our children rarely act out in nativity plays and which often gets ignored in the nativity story. It's a story which is harsh and of unimaginable cruelty, but which, tragically,*

*has echoes in so many events taking place today.*

**Matthew 2:13-23 New International Version**

<sup>13</sup> When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

<sup>14</sup> So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, <sup>15</sup> where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

<sup>16</sup> When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. <sup>17</sup> Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

<sup>18</sup> "A voice is heard in Ramah,  
 weeping and great mourning,  
 Rachel weeping for her children  
 and refusing to be comforted,  
 because they are no more."

<sup>19</sup> After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt <sup>20</sup> and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead."

<sup>21</sup> So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. <sup>22</sup> But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, <sup>23</sup> and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

*Over Advent and Christmas some of you will have been following the Methodist Church series, 'There is Room'. Arriving in Bethlehem Mary and Joseph were told that there was no room for them until eventually a space was found in a stable. The Methodist Church over Advent and Christmas has invited to say, 'There is room' as week by week we have reflected and prayed for different needs. Today we are asked to make*

room for refugees. *Refugees, like Mary and Joseph, fleeing war or economic hardship. Our country is greatly challenged at present by the numbers flooding in, in need of shelter, comfort, security and work. Each individual must be 'processed' and that takes time. It is hard for us to imagine what they might have gone through before they left their own homes and arrived here. We are ashamed and frustrated by the inadequacy of our response to the demands made on our systems. We, in our safe little haven in rural North Yorkshire, may have some sympathy for and understand the hostility some nearer to events feel towards refugees as they land on their local beaches and flood into their streets. However today we are reminded of the very real terror that Mary and Joseph shared with those refugees as they were threatened by a king, mad with jealousy and with life and death powers. Egypt welcomed and protected the Holy Family. Can we make room for refugees today?*

*And so to our second reading which stretches us to see not a refugee baby in danger but a special child who was part of God's much wider plan for the salvation of us all. There is nothing wrong with the idealised crib scenes. They might not show the harsh realities, but they do reveal the truth. This is a child to be received with gratitude to be protected and adored and worshipped. Our next reading puts Jesus in his place in history pointing to his divinity. It's a truth about who Jesus was and is. These words so often bring us up short in the midst of our Christmas festivities and touch the worship space in our hearts.*

### **John 1:1-9,10-18 New International Version**

**1** In the beginning was the Word, and the **Word** was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was with God in the beginning. **3** Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. **4** In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

**6** There was a man sent from God whose name was John. **7** He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through

him all might believe. **8** He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

**9** The true light that gives **light** to everyone was coming into the world.

**10** He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. **11** He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. **12** Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— **13** children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

**14** 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.

**15** (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'") **16** Out of his fullness we have all received **grace** in place of grace already given. **17** For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. **18** No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

### **StF 222 Who would think that what was needed?**

WHO WOULD THINK that what was needed to transform and save the earth might not be a plan or army, proud in purpose, proved in worth? Who would think, despite derision, that a child might lead the way? God surprises earth with heaven, coming here on Christmas Day.

Shepherds watch and wise men wonder, monarchs scorn and angels sing; such a place as none would reckon hosts a holy helpless thing. Stable beasts and by-passed strangers watch a baby laid in hay: God surprises earth with heaven, coming here on Christmas Day.

Centuries of skill and science span the past from which we move, yet experience questions whether, with such progress, we improve.

While the human lot we ponder,  
lest our hopes and humour fray,  
God surprises earth with heaven,  
coming here on Christmas Day.

John L. Bell (b. 1949) and Graham Maule (b. 1958)

*John begins, not in a stable, but at the beginning with creation and shows how God creates new and wonderful opportunities for mankind. He begins with awe and majesty, Jesus Christ the Word of God, present at creation, but then shows that close interrelationship between God and his people.*

*John, as it were, takes some of the highlights of Jesus' life and explains them so that all, including us, can understand the incomprehensible .... 'God contracted to a span'.*

*From all the words we've heard today I simply want to pick out 3 key words from that passage, to think about what they mean and then show what it is that the writer of this gospel is telling us about Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us.*

**Word** – *This word is God, has wisdom of God and transcends time. Word and wisdom here mean much the same thing. This is what makes things happen. Wisdom is constructive, brings order out of chaos, enables life to be lived in all its fullness. Wisdom is good and is seen in the Word that God spoke at the beginning of time.*

*Jesus is shown as the Word or the Wisdom of God. This idea had significance for both Jew and Greek. When God speaks things happen. God spoke and the world began. To the Greeks God's wisdom was the power of reason under-girding all creation, making sense of it all.*

*By calling Jesus 'the Word' John is showing the divinity of Jesus, is showing that Jesus and God are one in action, in purpose, in love for us and the world. When God created the world and saw that it was good, Jesus was there. When people sinned and spoilt the world .... Jesus was there..... When God planned to come and give the world a fresh start that plan found its fulfilment through Jesus.*

**Light** – *While dark at bedtime can be comforting and lead to restful sleep to wake up in total darkness can be disorientating and frightening and remains so until we find a*

*familiar light. In that night-time darkness we fear or are vulnerable, but our fears seem less and less frightening in the daylight. Evil things happen under cover of darkness. Natural disasters, like the flood creeping under the door or the shock of an earthquake, are worse when they take place at night. The darkness robs us of our ability to act, to protect ourselves. In the daylight things never seem quite as bad. The light gives us strength and empowers us to act.*

*And so we think of Jesus as being light, the light which empowers but also exposes evil done under cover of darkness.*

*Evil deeds are exposed by the light of Christ. We are people of the light.*

**Flesh** – *Jesus became man... It is difficult to understand how Jesus can be both God and man at the same time and over the centuries trying to express and understand this idea has led to great confusion and conflict.*

*Jesus had that closeness to God which comes from being part of God's plan for salvation, there throughout time but also living on earth fully human. .... It's no accident that the hymn writer uses the words 'Our God contracted to a span incomprehensibly made man'. The word incomprehensible describes it well. We cannot fully understand but we can believe the evidence of Jesus' life which we interpret through the eyes of faith.*

*As Christians we take comfort in the meaning of God incarnate in Jesus and know that God can feel the pain of each individual. Jesus knows human pain for he experienced it himself. He wept at the grave of his friend Lazarus and wept over the fate of Jerusalem..... and Jesus fully knew the pain of death and the weight of human sin.*

*When we are overwhelmed by the size of disasters.... God isn't...but God, in Jesus, weeps with us.*

*When I was little, we had a children's hymn which contained the words, 'He sees the meanest sparrow fall, unnoticed in the street'. That is what it means for God to be made flesh. It means to understand humanity's pain and joy. We cannot imagine feeling such pain on such an enormous scale.*

*When we put together those 3 words .... The Word, the light and in flesh then we have Jesus. Put the 3 concepts together and we have 'the Jesus event'. The incarnation of*

*God in Jesus was not something we earned. It was God's act of **grace**... And so because of that, new beginnings are always possible. New beginnings are more than short lived New Year resolutions so what a wonderful message to take forward into the New Year.*

**Let us pray**

Father, we come to you at the beginning of a New Year.

We leave behind the mistakes and failures of the last year and yet we still carry with us the consequences of what has happened in the past.

Father, we confess how often we have failed to be truly your people. We have failed to measure our actions against those of Jesus.

We have not followed his example.

Forgive us our sins of omission and our sins of commission.

*Pause for reflection and personal prayers*

We thank you that, in Jesus, our sins are forgiven

**Father as the New Year begins**

**Help us to build your kingdom of love.**

We pray for our world. In quietness now we each bring our thoughts to you.

*Pause for reflection and personal prayers*

**Father as the New Year begins**

**Help us to build your kingdom of love.**

We pray for all who hold high office in our and other lands. We pray that they might have wisdom and compassion in these challenging times.

Today we pray especially for those refugees who are seeking a place of safety in our land.

Show us how to make room for them and show our leaders how to manage this difficult situation.

**Father as the New Year begins**

**Help us to build your kingdom of love.**

We pray for those we know who are ill, lonely or bereaved.

For those for whom Christmas brings bad memories so that the rejoicing around them makes their pain worse.

*Pause for reflection and personal prayers*

**Father as the New Year begins**

**Help us to build your kingdom of love.**

Father, we ask knowing that you know and care for everyone, knowing that you share their pain and ours. Confident that you will bring new life out of pain and so we ask these

prayers, as we know we can, in Jesus' name. Amen

**StF 470 Lord for the years**

Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided,  
urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way,  
sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided,  
Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today.

Lord, for that word, the Word of life which fires us,  
speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze,  
teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires us,  
Lord of the word, receive your people's praise.

Lord, for our land, in this our generation, spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and care;  
for young and old, for commonwealth and nation,  
Lord of our land, be pleased to hear our prayer.

Lord, for our world; when we disown and doubt him,  
loveless in strength, and comfortless in pain;  
hungry and helpless, lost indeed without him,  
Lord of the world, we pray that Christ may reign.

Lord, for ourselves; in living power remake us,  
self on the cross and Christ upon the throne;  
past put behind us, for the future take us,  
Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.

Timothy Dudley-Smith (b. 1926)

**Blessing**

May he, who by his incarnation gathered into one things earthly and heavenly, fill our lives with his light and joy and peace, and the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, remain with us always. Amen.