

# 19<sup>th</sup> December 2021 – Morning Service

## Advent 4 – Joseph stood firm

Jill Martin

### Advent Candle

We light this candle to remind us of Joseph - who in the face of rejection and shame stood firm beside Mary and obeyed God's command. Lord Jesus you came in order that we might become Children of God – give us the courage to live out our faith

As we light our advent candle - **Light of the world, shine on us.**

As we prepare for Christmas time - **Light of the world, shine on us.**

In this world of pain and darkness - **Light of the world, shine through us.**

To all the people who don't know you - **Light of the world, shine through us.**

Jesus you are coming again - **Light of the world, light the way.**

In our service here today - **Light of the world, light the way.**

### Song – Servant King we wait on you

Servant King we wait on you,	Love that will not let us go,
Watching for that special day,	Born in humble human form,
When your glory will descend to us we pray.	May our hearts respond with faith, in you O Lord.

*Alan Combes CCL No. 515642*

### StF 175 – Light of the world

1) Light of the world, You stepped down into darkness, Opened my eyes, let me see. Beauty that made this heart adore You Hope of a life spent with You.	2) King of all days, oh so highly exalted, Glorious in heaven above, Humbly You came to the earth You created, All for love's sake became poor.
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*Ch) So here I am to worship,  
Here I am to bow down,  
Here I am to say that You're my God:  
You're altogether lovely,  
Altogether worthy,  
Altogether wonderful to me.*

*Br) And I'll never know how much it cost  
To see my sin upon that cross.  
And I'll never know how much it cost  
To see my sin upon that cross.*

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### Prayer of Adoration

Lord of all wonder and all life we rejoice that with you nothing is impossible. Through you we see a vision of life in all its perfection: prepare us for your coming in Jesus Christ, that we may see the world as transformed by your presence and given meaning by your love. Let us feel the radiance of your brightness, and not be afraid; that we may adore you more and more, and the world may be filled with the knowledge of your truth as the waters cover the sea; through him who became a little child at Bethlehem, our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen**

## Prayer of Confession

If we have worshipped you as a relic from the past, a theological concept, a religious novelty, but not as a living God: **Lord forgive us**

If we have confused your will with our understanding of it, if we have preferred divergence to Unity: **Lord, forgive us.**

If we have heard stories of struggle, with no intention of sharing the burden or pain: **Lord forgive us.**

If we have identified the misuse of power, but failed to prophesy against it, and refused to empower the weak: **Lord forgive us.**

If we have sung songs in praise of your creation, while defiling the goodness of the earth: **Lord forgive us**  
**O God show mercy to those who have no one else to turn to.**

The Lord says: I will bring my people back to me, I will love them with all my heart. No longer am I angry with them. I will be to the people like rain in a dry land. This is the promise of God. **Amen. Thanks be to God**

## Collect for the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Advent

All-powerful God, let the splendour of your glory rise in our hearts like the dawn, that the darkness of the night may be scattered and the coming of your only Son may reveal us as children of the light. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

Today, the fourth in Advent we look towards Joseph and his response to his role in the coming of our Saviour. As a retired teacher I remember with great love and joy rehearsing the children who would present the Christmas story to teary parents. Mary always dressed in blue, a quiet little girl who would sit patiently holding a plastic doll. The inn keepers who would shout out their line 'No room'. The shepherds dressed in dressing gowns, heads wrapped in tea towels, the kings in cardboard crowns, slowly and seriously delivering their gifts. The little angels dressed in white dresses and tinsel. And Joseph, a fairly non-descript character, with few lines, just addressing the various inn keepers, taking Mary into the stable and standing still patiently waiting for all the other characters to pay their visits.

What is known of Joseph the man who helped to change the world? Rev Margaret Bullit-Jonas writes: *It's Mary-not Joseph- whom we usually think about at Christmas, Mary who gets the spotlight as the mother of God. Of course no tableaux would be complete without Joseph, but usually we don't pay that much attention to him. He wasn't Jesus' "real" father and in the story of Jesus birth and infancy, Joseph never says a word, he doesn't even speak, whereas Mary in Luke's Gospel gets to sing the "Magnificat". So perhaps we usually think of Joseph as a minor character in the drama of salvation, and soon enough he falls off the stage upon which Jesus' life plays out, a guy with a bit part who disappears quickly into the wings.*

## Song – Joseph's Song

1) How could it be, this baby in my arms  
Sleeping now, so peacefully  
The Son of God, the angel said  
How could it be?

2) Lord I know He's not my own  
Not of my flesh, not of my bone  
Still Father let this baby be  
The son of my love

Ch) *Father show me where I fit into this  
plan of yours  
How can a man be father to the Son of God  
Lord for all my life I've been a simple carpenter  
How can I raise a king? How can I raise a king?*

3) He looks so small, His face and hands so fair  
And when He cries the sun just  
seems to disappear  
But when He laughs it shines again  
How could it be?

## Reading: Matthew 1:18 - 25

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: his mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.'

All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel' (which means 'God with us'). When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

## Reflection – Joseph stood firm

Matthew, a Jew, lived and understood the law and culture of his day; Joseph a man betrothed discovered Mary to whom he was betrothed was carrying a child. Could there be a greater shame? Joseph had every right to anger and outrage, he could decry Mary and her family, the entire community would turn their back on them, they would be ridiculed and ostracised thrown out of society. Joseph did not react in a knee jerk way; he heard and he waited. Matthew tells us that Joseph was a righteous man. Righteous is not a word in common usage unless 'self' is put in front. To be self righteous is to adopt a superiority, contemptuous of lesser mortals. It means to look down on others and take the high moral ground - I am right, therefore you must be wrong. Joseph was righteous, no airs and graces, he heard God's call to him, a call which meant he had to reject the laws of his community and be there for Mary.

Joseph stood firm. He must have wrestled with his conscience, devastated by the news that his betrothed was to have a child. Should he quietly divorce Mary, thus doing the right thing for him yet causing the least harm to her? Joseph was a righteous man. In the Christian context to be righteous is to live in a right relationship with God, to be straight with God, to actively seek to do God's will. A righteous person is someone who in every situation keeps asking : what is the most loving thing I can do right now for this person, or this community or for the Earth on which all life depends?

Wesley's rules for a good life reflect on righteousness:

*Do all the good you can, By all the means you can, In all the ways you can, In all the places you can, At all the times you can, To all the people you can, As long as ever you can.*

The other attribute of Joseph, highlighted by Margaret, was that he was open to God's ongoing revelation. *"He was open to surprise, available to fresh encounter. When an angel of the Lord spoke to him in a dream, Joseph paid attention. Joseph knew as we know too, that the holy Mystery we call God can speak to us in our dreams, in our intuitive hunches and flashes of insight. I imagine that Joseph lived with a prayerful awareness that that reality is not a closed system that contains a linear, logical and predictable series of events. No - reality is wide open. An angel can speak to us in a dream; a voice can sound from a burning bush; we can quiet our minds in prayer and suddenly see something we have never seen before."*

Joseph stood firm by Mary when every instinct and tradition he had been brought up with would have led him to do otherwise. Joseph was a righteous man, committed to living in a right relationship with God and to doing all the good that he could. Not only was he a prayerful man, listening to inner wisdom, ready to let God speak to him in a dream, he was also a man of determination. He hears God speak, he listens and decides to change course. "Yes" he says to God and Mary "I will be a father to the child. I will claim him as kin. I will guard him and stand by him and Mary and keep them safe from harm."

The most powerful thought in this reflection is Joseph was an ordinary man, trying his best to listen to God and his willingness in choosing to serve God tuned out to be enough. He had a role in the larger drama of salvation. His faithful stand was essential, no matter how small a part it may seem. Without him it would have all been very different.

### StF 662 – Have you heard God’s voice?

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| 1) Have you heard God's voice;<br>Has your heart been stirred?<br>Are you still prepared to follow?<br>Have you made a choice to remain and serve,<br>Though the way be rough and narrow? | 3) In your city streets will you be God's heart?<br>Will you listen to the voiceless?<br>Will you stop and eat, and when<br>friendships start,<br>Will you share your faith with the faithless? |
| Ch) <i>Will you walk the path that will cost you much<br/>And embrace the pain and sorrow?<br/>Will you trust in One who entrusts to you<br/>The disciples of tomorrow?</i>               | 4) Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith<br>And believe it could be different?<br>Will you share your views using words of grace?<br>Will you leave a thoughtful imprint?              |
| 2) Will you use your voice; will you not sit down<br>When the multitudes are silent?<br>Will you make a choice to stand your ground<br>When the crowds are turning violent?               | E) <i>We will walk the path that will cost us much<br/>And embrace the pain and sorrow.<br/>We will trust in One who entrusts to us<br/>The disciples of tomorrow.</i>                          |

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### Prayer of Thanksgiving

Heavenly Father, who chose the foolish things of this world to confound the wise, and the weak things of this world to confound the mighty; we bless and praise your holy Name for all your goodness to us, and especially for the hope that is ours in the birth of Jesus Christ.

We remember that the angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph in a dream to break with convention and tradition and to stand firm in supporting Mary his betrothed. We ask you likewise to use us in your providence and mercy having a right relationship with you as God. We thank you for the annual message of the Child born in a stable, and for the hope which comes to us through his life. We thank you for the sure and certain knowledge that in him you became man, living a human life and dying on the cross, raising him victorious and through him have given us your Holy Spirit as guide and comforter.

Take us and use us we pray, give us confidence that we are part of your purpose for the world, and rouse us to a sense of our glorious calling as children of light. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

### Prayers of Intercession

God of hope, we pray for our future; for the future of our world, our community, our church; for the future of ourselves and those we love. L: God of hope **R: Help us walk in your light**

God of justice, teach us your ways. Open our eyes to exploitation and oppression. Help us to live justly in this complex world. Open the minds of the leaders of nations: show them that justice is the way to peace  
L: God of hope **R: Help us walk in your light**

God of peace, teach us your ways. Open our eyes to selfishness and greed. Show us to live with tolerance and understanding. Open the minds of the leaders of the nations show them that peace is the way that leads to hope. L: God of hope **R: Help us walk in your light**

God of hope, teach us your ways. Open our eyes to see you at work in our world. Show us what you are calling us to do. Open our minds and make us ready for your coming. Open our hearts to the saving love of your Son. L: God of hope **R: Help us walk in your light**

God, in Christ you came to show your ways of justice, peace and love. You came to bring us hope for ourselves and for the world, for now and for ever. We make our prayers in our Saviour's name and in the confidence of the hope that he brings. **Amen**

### **The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father, who art 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 those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the  
glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

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 for ever. **Amen.**

### **StF 706 – Longing for light**

1) 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.

*Ch) Christ, be our light!  
Shine in our hearts.  
Shine through the darkness.  
Christ, be our light!  
Shine in your Church gathered today.*

2) Longing for peace, our world is troubled.  
Longing for hope, many despair.  
Your word alone has power to save us.  
Make us your living voice.

3) Longing for food, many are hungry.  
Longing for water, many still thirst.  
Make us your bread, broken for others,  
Shared until all are fed.

4) Longing for shelter, many are homeless.  
Longing for warmth, many are cold.  
Make us your building, sheltering others,  
Walls made of living stone.

5) Many the gifts, many the people,  
Many the hearts that yearn to belong.  
Let us be servants to one another,  
Making your kingdom come.

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### **Blessing**

Christ the Sun of Righteousness, shine upon us and prepare our hearts and souls to meet you when you come in glory; and the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be ours now and forever **Amen.**