

24th December 2023 – Morning Service

Chrismon – Advent 4

Kingswinford Planning Team

Advent Liturgy

We listen as Advent reaches its fulfilment, we listen to the frenzied activity that is all around us, we listen to the travail and the trauma, we listen to joys and celebration.

God of all, **listen to my cries and let me hear your voice.**

We listen in the midst of noise and silence. We listen in aloneness and togetherness. We listen to the everyday, the ordinary, and there within it all, we listen to the voice of God.

God of all, **listen to my cries and let me hear your voice.**

We listen to messages new and old, from friends far and near. We listen to familiar words, hymns and songs, Bible stories telling all.

God of all, **listen to my cries and let me hear your voice.**

On this Christmas Eve, let us open our selves afresh to listen ever more to the messages of God that lighten our paths, confirm our faith, embrace our being and call us to be messengers ourselves.

God of all, **listen to my cries and let me hear your voice.**

[The 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th candles are lit]

Advent God, as we light the fourth candle in preparation to celebrate Christmas, that most extraordinary of gifts, let us open our ears to listen, our eyes to see, our hearts to love and our very beings to be enfolded in your Spirit. Let us listen and be open to our inner selves, to the world around us, to the sights, the sounds, the senses and the needs that surround us. Let us listen to your still small voice and be open to your indwelling Spirit. Let us be messengers of your good news that we have heard and let us be open, too, to listen to your good news that others share with us. **Amen.**

Call to Worship

Jesus welcomes us all; the young and the old; the lost and the found; the nervous and the confident; the lukewarm and the enthusiastic; the lonely and the overcrowded; the tired and energetic; the new and the long-standing. **Jesus welcomes us all.**

Opening Prayers

O Immanuel, God with us in this Advent season, we celebrate that you are not hidden in some faraway cloud, but you chose to be with us in the blur and mystery of our lives. In the midst of lists and rush, you are with us as a song that echoes in our minds, as the light of a candle, as a card from a friend. They are signs of your presence. We turn to you this season and pray that you would birth joy and healing, blessing and hope in us. Let something wonderful begin in us — something out of the ordinary and holy.

May your hand be upon us. Let your love fill us. Let your joy overwhelm us. Let our longing for you be met on a coming holy night. Immanuel with us once again. **Amen**

Merciful God, you made us in your image, with minds to know you, hearts to love you, and wills to serve you. But our knowledge is imperfect, our love inconstant, and our obedience incomplete. We often refuse to go where you lead us. We often fail to grow into your likeness. Have mercy upon us. Forgive us and free us from our sin. We ask in the gracious name of Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Explanation of Chrismon

Legend has it that Martin Luther was the first to decorate his home with a Christmas tree over four centuries ago. He was walking home on Christmas Eve when he saw the stars shining upon the snow-covered branches of fir trees.

He was so taken by the sight that he took a tree home and placed candles on the branches to demonstrate to his family what a glorious sight he had seen. From this first Christmas tree in the Luther household, the German people began using a Christmas tree in their homes.

The very first Chrismon Tree was created in 1957 at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Danville, Virginia. The word Chrismon is made up of two words "Christ's Monograms". Chrismons are symbols of Jesus and the Christian faith. Many of the symbols you will see are simply copies of symbols that Christians have used from the time of Jesus, others are more recent. They remind us of the true value and meaning of Christmas and they remind us of the whole Jesus story - not just his birth. The Chrismon tree is only decorated in White and Gold colours. White stands for purity and perfection and gold for the majesty and glory of God. As we move through this service we are going to look and consider the Chrismon symbols and learn about what they mean.

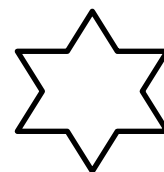
God the Father

The first group of Chrismons remind us of God the Father – the Creator, the Everlasting, the Beginning and the End. We have three symbols to help us.



The Greek letters "Alpha" and "Omega" are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, so the alpha and Omega symbol reminds us that God was there before the beginning of the universe and will be there after the end. He is eternal – He never ends.

The 6 pointed star is called the Star of David – it is a traditional symbol for the Jewish faith; it is also called the Creator's Star because it is made up of 2 triangles. Each side of the star represents part of God's character: love, mercy, wisdom, majesty, power and justice.



The Celtic Cross is a cross with a circle behind it. The circle part reminds us that God has no end nor beginning. Put together with the cross (which will be explained later), it tells us that God's love is endlessly offered to us.

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.

*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.*

Tim Hughes © 2000 Thankyou Music

CCL No. 515642

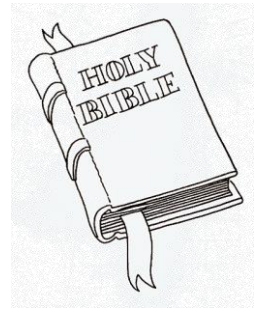
God Speaking and Jesus's Birth

Our next group of Chrismons remind us that God speaks to us and also focus on the birth of Jesus.

God can speak to us in many ways – directly by hearing his voice, through prayer, through other people, through prophets and angels and through the Bible. The Bible is our record of the times when God has helped his people, or has spoken to us, or made promises to us – for example, the prophet Isaiah in the Old Testament promised that Jesus would come.....

Isaiah 9:6 - *A child is born to us! A son is given to us! And he will be our ruler. He will be called, "Wonderful Counsellor," "Mighty God," "Eternal Father," "Prince of Peace."*

The Bible Chrismon reminds us that we need to keep on reading our Bibles, and learning to understand what God says to us today through it.

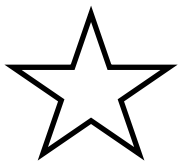


2 Timothy 3:16 - *Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another—showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way. Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us.*



The Bible has many examples of when God spoke to people through Angels – our next Chrismon. The Christmas Story is full of angels – first Gabriel speaks to Mary and then a whole company of angels bring the good news to the shepherds, who are told....

Luke 2:10-11 - *"Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Saviour has just been born in David's town, a Saviour who is Messiah and Master. This is what you're to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger."*



That brings us to Jesus's birth in Bethlehem. We are told in the Bible that a bright star led wise men from the East who saw it as a sign of the birth of a new King. One of the gifts they brought was gold – a gift for a King. So we have two more Chrismons in this set. The first is a King's crown and the second is a 5-point star – the star that led the wise men to Jesus.



StF 206 – It was on a starry night

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1) It was on a starry night
When the hills were bright,
Earth lay sleeping, sleeping calm and still.
Then in a cattle shed, in a manger bed,
A boy was born king of all the world. | 2) Soon the shepherds came that way
Where the baby lay
And were kneeling, kneeling by his side,
And their hearts believed once more
For the peace of all,
For a boy was born king of all the world. |
|--|--|

Ch) *And all the angels sang for him,
The bells of heaven rang for him,
For a boy was born king of all the world.
And all the angels sang for him,
The bells of heaven rang for him,
For a boy was born king of all the world.*

Joy Webb © Salvationist Publishing CCL No. 515642

Jesus's Life

Our next symbols reflect the life of Jesus – the things he said and did. Obviously that is a huge subject – so we have cut it down to just three!

Just before Jesus started his public ministry, he went out to John the Baptist at the River Jordan to be baptized.

Matthew 3:16-17 - *The moment Jesus came up out of the baptismal waters, the skies opened up and he saw God's Spirit—it looked like a dove—descending and landing on him. And along with the Spirit, a voice: "This is my Son, chosen and marked by my love, delight of my life."*

The Dove is often used as a symbol of the Holy Spirit, of peace and of baptism and so that is the first of this set of Chrismons.



Our second one is another symbol of baptism - a shell. Many early baptisms were done near lakes, rivers, seashores. A shell would be used to pour water over the head of the person being baptized.



Jesus used many different names for himself during his ministry to try to explain why He had come and how much God loves us. One of these is:

John 10:14-15- *I am the Good Shepherd. I know my own sheep and my own sheep know me. In the same way, the Father knows me and I know the Father. I put the sheep before myself, sacrificing myself if necessary.*

So our final Chrismon in this set is a shepherd's crook to remind us of Jesus as the good shepherd.



StF 193 – Born in the Night (Part 1)

1) Born in the night, Mary's child,
A long way from your home:
Coming in need, Mary's child,
Born in a borrowed room.

2) Clear shining Light, Mary's child,
Your face lights up our way;
Light of the world, Mary's child,
Dawn on our darkened day.

Geoffrey Ainger © 1964 Stainer & Bell Ltd

CCL No. 515642

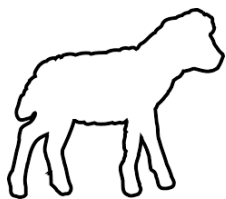
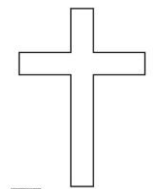
Jesus's death and resurrection

This set of Chrismons speak of Jesus's death and resurrection.



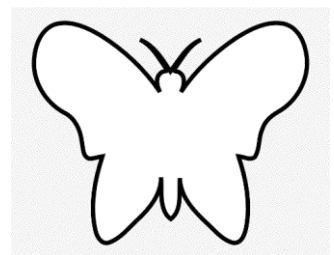
We already have mentioned a King's crown, linked to the birth of Jesus and Christmas. However we need to remember that Christmas is not the only part of the Jesus story – he grew up, lived amongst us and was then put to death – all part of God's plan to show us how much He loves us and wants to have a close relationship with us. In fact, the only crown that Jesus actually received was a crown of thorns, placed on his head when the soldiers wanted to mock him when he was

on his way to be crucified. And so we have two Chrismons to remind us of Jesus's death – a crown of thorns and the latin cross – the standard cross symbol that is widely used in most churches.



In the Old Testament, the Jewish people used to sacrifice lambs to try to make up for the things they had done wrong – their sins – the things that separated them from God. Because Jesus sacrificed His life for us – paying the price for our sins for all time, he is sometimes called 'The Lamb of God'. So we have a Chrismon of a lamb to remind us of Jesus's sacrifice for us.

However, that was not the end. Jesus was wrapped in cloths and placed in a tomb but three days later He rose from the dead – he was resurrected. This is what we celebrate at Easter time. Our final Chrismon of this group is a butterfly – symbol of resurrection. A butterfly can only grow after the pupae has wrapped itself in a cocoon. This natural process is like a death and new life.



StF 193 – Born in the Night (Part 2)

3) Truth of our life, Mary's child,
You tell us God is good;
Prove it is true, Mary's child,
Go to your cross of wood.

4) Hope of the world, Mary's child,
You're coming soon to reign;
King of the earth, Mary's child,
Walk in our streets again.

Geoffrey Ainger © 1964 Stainer & Bell Ltd CCL No. 515642

Jesus - Hope

After Jesus rose from the dead he spent some time with his followers and then he went back to God the Father in heaven. After he had gone, the followers were greatly blessed by God with His Holy Spirit. Earlier we talked about the Holy Spirit being represented by a dove at Jesus's baptism. This time the Holy Spirit came in a different way:

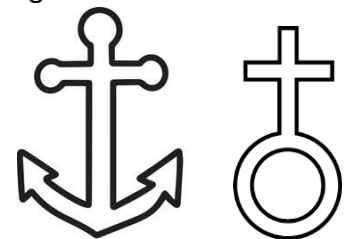
Acts 2:3-4 - *Then they saw what looked like tongues of fire which spread out and touched each person there. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit.*

The Chrismon Flame reminds us the Holy Spirit is available to everyone who follows Jesus – an inner presence and power which gives us hope and the strength to do all that Jesus calls us to do.



We also have other symbols that remind us of the hope we have in Jesus. We have the candle – which reminds us that Jesus described himself as the Light of the world.

Then we have two more crosses: the anchor cross which reminds us that Jesus is our 'anchor in the storms of life' and the cross over the world which shows us that Jesus's death and resurrection is important for everyone – God's love is for the whole world.



StF 351 – In Christ Alone

1) In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My Comforter, my All in All,
Here in the love of Christ I stand.

4) No guilt in life, no fear in death,
This is the power of Christ in me;
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand;
Till He returns or calls me home,
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand!

Keith Getty & Stuart Townend © 2001 Thankyou Music

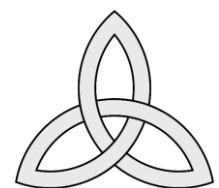
CCL No. 515642

The Trinity & Signs

So we already have symbols that remind us of God the Father, God the Son – Jesus – and God the Holy Spirit. One God – but with three parts or facets. We call this the Trinity. This is quite a complicated idea for most of us and we often have whole services on the topic. But – apologies - there is no time to go into any more detail here!

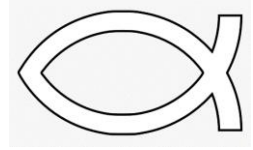


However, we have three symbols to represent it. Each of them have three parts or sides. The Fleur de Lys, the Shamrock and the triquetra – which is three interlaced arcs forming a sort of knot.

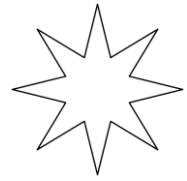




Our final batch of Chrismons are three symbols that are very old. The first of these is made up of the overlapping letters I H and S. These letters spell out Jesus' name in the Greek language.



The last two are secret symbols used by the early Christians when they were being persecuted and were not allowed to worship openly. One is a fish. The Greek word for fish was ichthys and the early Christians made an acrostic out of this which, translated, is Jesus Christ, God's Son, Saviour. So they drew this symbol to show where Christians might meet safely together. The other is an 8-point star which early Christians used to draw without taking the pen from the paper – and was used for



the same purpose. So today it also reminds us that not everyone is free to follow their faith and that Christians are still being persecuted, and forced to meet in secret.

Song – Father I praise you

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1) Father, I praise You
 You mean everything to me
 Help me to live close to You every day
 May I keep on praising You</p> | <p>3) Spirit, I love You
 You're there when I feel alone
 Help me to live close to You every day
 May I keep on loving You.</p> |
| <p>2) Jesus, I serve You
 You're my Saviour and my Friend
 Help me to live close to You every day
 May I keep on serving You</p> | |

Alison Moon © 1992 Daybreak Music CCL No. 515642

Prayers of Intercession

Eternal God, through the symbols we heard about we recognise the greatest of all gifts - your love for us and all creation which is expressed in the beauty and vulnerability of a new born child who was to be the Saviour of the World. As we journey through Advent and the Christmas season, our joy is sung by the angels, our presence is seen in ordinary shepherds, our homage made by those wise men from the east. Each shape and sign is a reminder of your complete love for us and in amazement we can only say thank you and ask that you help us to remember that...

Christmas isn't just for children but there is room for every child. Thank you for their innocent excitement which reminds us of what we have often lost. Bless them not just with presents but with Jesus. May their lives be touched by his life, their story connect with his. In the silence we pray now for the children we know and for children we see in the news facing difficult situations in Ukraine, Russia, Gaza, Israel....

Now we remember that Christmas isn't just for adults but there is room for adults of every kind. We may have grown jaded from many Christmases, we may have become disappointed by the loss of magic and fallen back into more worldly celebrations. As we journey through present wrapping, card writing, food buying, turkey stuffing, speak to us afresh through the simplicity of the story and the extraordinary truth that it contains. In the silence we pray for the adults we know, in our community, across the world - might all make room for you, for peace-making, joy-giving, hope-filling, love-sharing - might Christmas make us different...

As we think about the Chrismon tree, we recognise that there is room at Christmas for the whole created order. Thank you, Creator God for the wonder and majesty which surrounds us every single day. Each animal, flower, plant, tree (Christmas or otherwise) created by your loving hands. Forgive us when we fail to care for your precious creation, instead help us to make room to treat the world in which we live with the same tenderness and passion that we experience through your loving, Grace filled care for us.

In the silence we make room for all those experiencing the impacts of climate change today...

As well as glory there's also room for sadness at Christmas - sadness for those left behind by neglect, loneliness, bereavement, messy relationships and more. There are no easy over-the-counter solutions to the smudge and stain of our struggles but we pray for the transforming presence everywhere of the Christ child, this down-to-earth God with his gift of life and hope. We make room in our hearts for any who will be finding this time hard and, in the silence, we offer the names of those we hold in our hearts today...

Holy God as we journey on towards Christmas may we make room to understand all we have learnt today, may we make room to accept the Grace offered to us all, may we make room to share that same grace to all who we meet. For there is no better time, than now. In the name of Jesus we pray. **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 216 – See him lying

1) See him lying on a bed of straw;
Draughty stable with an open door,
Mary cradling the babe she bore;
The Prince of Glory is his name:

3) Angels, sing again the song you sang,
Sing the story of God's gracious plan;
Sing that Bethlehem's little baby can
Be the Saviour of us all:

*Ch) O now carry me to Bethlehem
To see the Lord of love again;
Just as poor as was the stable then,
The Prince of Glory when he came.*

4) Mine are riches from your poverty;
From your innocence, eternity;
Mine, forgiveness by your death for me;
Child of sorrow for my joy:

2) Star of silver, sweep across the skies,
Show where Jesus in the manger lies;
Shepherds, swiftly from your stupor rise
To see the Saviour of the world:

Michael Perry © Jubilate Hymns CCL No. 515642

Blessing

God of hope, who brought love into this world, be the love that dwells between us.

God of hope, who brought peace into this world, be the peace that dwells between us.

God of hope, who brought joy into this world, be the joy that dwells between us.

God of hope, the rock we stand upon, be the centre, the focus of our lives always, and particularly at this Advent time.

And the blessing of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore. **Amen.**