

26th December 2021 – Morning Service

Boxing Day

Rev Michael Payne

Call to Worship

We've come to worship God on this amazing Festival, the Feast of St Stephen, following the Feast of Christmas. We have celebrated the birth of Jesus and now we gather once more to worship the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. No fiction as fantastic and wild, a mother made by her own child. The hopeless babe who cried was God incarnate and man deified.

Song – To the Mystery

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| 1) When the Father longed to show
A love He wanted us to know
He sent His only Son and so
Became a holy embryo | 2) A fiction as fantastic and wild
A mother made by her own child
The hopeless babe who cried
"Was God Incarnate and man deified?" |
| Ch) <i>That is the Mystery
More than you can see
Give up on your pondering
And fall down on your knees</i> | 3) Because the fall did devastate
Creator must now recreate
And so to take our sin
Was made like us so we could be like Him |

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Prayer of Approach

Lord God, we approach you who first approached us, we come into your presence for you came into ours. You overwhelm us by your glory, we cannot comprehend the mystery of your birth. We have come to be warmed by your grace, transformed by your mercy, liberated by your love. We dare to approach because of Jesus whose birth we celebrate especially in this season. **Amen**

Reading: Psalm 148

Praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights above.

Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his heavenly hosts.

Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars.

Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies.

Let them praise the name of the Lord, for at his command they were created, and he established them for ever and ever – he issued a decree that will never pass away.

Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding, you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds, kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth, young men and women, old men and children.

Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his splendour is above the earth and the heavens. And he has raised up for his people a horn, the praise of all his faithful servants, of Israel, the people close to his heart. Praise the Lord.

StF 208 – Let earth and heaven combine

- 1) 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.
- 2) He laid his glory by,
He wrapped him in our clay;
Unmarked by human eye,
The latent Godhead lay;
Infant of days he here became,
And bore the mild Immanuel's name.
- 3) Unsearchable the love
That has the Saviour brought;
The grace is far above
Or men or angels' thought:
Suffice for us that God, we know,
Our God, is manifest below.
- 4) He deigns in flesh to appear,
Widest extremes to join;
To bring our vileness near,
And make us all divine:
And we the life of God shall know,
For God is manifest below.
- 5) Made perfect first in love,
And sanctified by grace,
We shall from earth remove,
And see his glorious face:
His love shall then be fully showed,
And we shall all be lost in God.

Charles Wesley CCL No. 515642

Prayer of Adoration

Helpless baby – we worship you	Holy Mystery – we worship you
Wonderful Counsellor – we worship you	Prince of Peace – we worship you
Lord of Lord's – we worship you	King of King's - we worship you.
Mighty God – we worship you.	Gracious Spirit – we worship you.

Living in us - GOD
Listening to us - GOD
Believing in us - GOD
Speaking through us – GOD

Whatever we do - **we are always in your care**
Wherever we go - **we are always in your care**
Every moment of everyday - **we are always in your care**
In our waking and our sleeping - **we are always in your care**
In our joy and in our sorrow - **we are always in your care**
In our busyness and our rest - **we are always in your care**

Prayer of Confession

Forgive us that though we have prepared to welcome the Christ child once more we so readily live as though he has not been born. Forgive us that though we are ready to hear the Christmas story over and over we still do not give our lives fully to you as you gave yourself fully to us. Father we thank you for Jesus for by recalling his birth and life, we come before you in confidence as we confess; we desire to hear those gracious words he was and is to pronounce to the repentant – get up your sins are forgiven. **Amen.**

Reading: Luke 2:41-52

Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they travelled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, 'Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.'

'Why were you searching for me?' he asked. 'Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?' But they did not understand what he was saying to them. Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

StF 214 – Once in Royal David's City

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| 1) Once in royal David's city
Stood a lowly cattle-shed,
Where a mother laid her baby
In a manger for his bed:
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ her little child. | 3) And our eyes at last shall see him,
Through his own redeeming love,
For that child so dear and gentle
Is our Lord in heaven above;
And he leads his children on
To the place where he is gone. |
| 2) He came down to earth from heaven
Who is God and Lord of all,
And his shelter was a stable,
And his cradle was a stall;
With the needy, poor and lowly
Lived on earth our Saviour holy. | 4) Not in that poor lowly stable,
With the oxen standing by,
We shall see him; but in heaven,
Set at God's right hand on high;
There his children gather round
Bright like stars, with glory crowned. |

Cecil Frances Alexander CCL No. 515642

Reflection

It was a busy time, that first Christmas. A long journey had been endured and a sleepless night followed. A baby was born following that long journey and then, when all was calm, visitors arrive to join in the celebration.

What was yesterday, Christmas Day, like for you? For some it was a busy day, for others it was a day like any other, for some it was a painful day. Whatever it was like we are now on the day after. What we call Boxing Day – as I child I thought it was a day for pugilism, (not that I would have used that word) a day when boxing matches took place. Ok I was wrong.

Boxing day is so called as it was the day servants had a day off and received a gift from their masters. The rich would box up gifts to give to the poor. In some churches a box was placed in the church on Christmas Day and the worshippers would put in gifts, which were then taken by the priest to the poor on the 26th of December. The 26th of December is also St Stephen's Day. What did Stephen do that meant he was given a feast day when the day before was such a great feast all were full up and not feeling like feasting?

What did happen the day after the birth in Bethlehem? Cold turkey sandwiches and pickles for lunch? No of course not. What did Mary and Joseph want to do? Rest or show off their child? We cannot know the truth for we were not there and nothing is recorded. Our nativity story, performed each year in schools, churches and chapels across the land are not historically accurate and are perhaps misleading.

Nowhere does the Bible say anything about an innkeeper and the word translated “Inn” could be translated “Guest room”. If Joseph came to Bethlehem to register, for he was of the line of David, there might have been family members in the community. Did he want to show off this child to the community?

Some of you have experienced the joy of a first child – and others besides; some have not and have lived with the pain or acceptance of childlessness, others have experienced the pain of losing a child. I have had the privilege, that ministry can bring, of sharing with a number of families in the early hours after the birth of a child; even a first child. A number of these occasions are etched on my memory.

There was a Sunday afternoon when I went into the hospital to visit a new mum, Karen. She had gone through a long and tough labour and delivery; all the family had been sent away so Karen could have some rest but I was allowed to visit and welcomed in. We talked and ate after eight mints together.

There was another occasion when I visited before any member of the family; apart from mum and dad, and the nursing staff I was the first to see little baby. It was not planned that way but it happened. I’d better not say too much more as this service is recorded and who knows who may discover it. Still to this day the grandparents do not know that I saw their grandchild before they did. The child is now an adult.

I remember the first baptism service I led in Circuit ministry. 27 years later Anita and I were at Kirsty’s wedding and invited to share in the day by leading a short service of blessing after a civil ceremony. It was Kirsty’s aunt I ate the After 8’s with.

Contact with children, particularly babies, can bring some special memories. For some of you yesterday might have been the first Christmas with a new baby in the family and memories of the day may well stay with you for many years to come. Of course not all memories of babies and children are of joy for they can also bring pain to a family when not all works out as planned and hoped for.

As children grow they can cause great worry and concern – even Jesus did as we heard in the reading from Luke of an event in the life of Jesus 12 years later. The family discovered their boy was missing – an experience sadly too many know of each year and not always ending with a family reunion. Yet, this child, whose birth we celebrate each year, was born for all people. For you and I, be it a second, fifth, fourteenth or first child in your family; Jesus was born a child to you for you. He was born that a family could be reunited – you with God. Find Jesus and you find the Father, you find God.

As Jesus was born for you so you were born for God. You were born to bring great joy – yes we each cause God pain, hurt and frustration at times in our lives but we were born to give joy and receive love from the ultimate parent – God Almighty. As a parent looks with loving eyes into the eyes of their child so God looks lovingly into your eyes, even now, and delights in what he sees. Yes you will frustrate him tomorrow and the day after, and the day after, but you will give him joy and always God will love you.

You are a child of God; a child who can live with confidence that there is one on your side; - one who is none other than the great Creator, the Father Almighty, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ in whose presence Jesus sought to be, in the Temple and at all times.

StF 206 – It was on a starry night

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| 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. |
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*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.*

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Prayers of Thanksgiving & Intercession

Unlooked for, Christ comes. To shepherds, watching their sheep through the long, dark night, he comes with the glory of the angels' song and in the humility of the manger. Loving God, we pray for our community. In the midst of our everyday lives, surprise us with glimpses of the glorious, humble love at the heart of existence. L: Lord, come to your people **R: In your mercy set us free**

Searched for, Christ comes. To the wise and powerful, star-led to Bethlehem, seeking a king, he comes, child of Mary, crowned with meekness, worthy of every gift. Loving God, we pray for the leaders of the world. Guide them with your light to the true wisdom of justice and peace, of freedom and respect for every human life. L: Lord, come to your people **R: In your mercy set us free**

Longed for, Christ comes. To Anna and Simeon, whose days are lived in faithful expectation, he comes, a new life to the old, a living prophecy of hope. Loving God, we pray for your Church in all the world. Unite us by your Spirit, and make us faithful witnesses to the hope we have in you.

L: Lord, come to your people **R: In your mercy set us free**

Prayed for, Christ comes. To men and women, girls and boys, crying out in darkness, pain and loneliness, he comes, baptized, at one with us, our Saviour, healer and friend. Loving God, we pray for those whose lives are hard and painful or whose existence is sorrowful, bitter or empty. In their need, may they know your healing touch, reaching out to comfort, strengthen and restore.

L: Lord, come to your people **R: In your mercy set us free**

Unlooked for and searched for, longed for and prayed for, loving God, you come to us now as you have come to your people in every age. We thank you for all who have reflected the light of Christ. Help us to follow their example and bring us with them to eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **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 202 – Hark the herald angels sing

- 1) Hark! The herald-angels sing
Glory to the new-born King,
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled.
Joyful, all ye nations, rise,
Join the triumph of the skies;
With the angelic host proclaim:
'Christ is born in Bethlehem.'
- 2) Christ, by highest heaven adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord,
Late in time behold him come,
Offspring of a virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see!
Hail, the incarnate Deity!
Pleased as man with men to dwell,
Jesus, our Immanuel:
- Ch) *Hark! The herald-angels sing
Glory to the new-born King.*
- 3) Hail, the heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Hail, the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,
Risen with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by,
Born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth:

Charles Wesley CCL No. 515642

Blessing

The Christ-child has come so we can begin again. The Son of God has become like us that we might be like him. Jesus is the name of He who sends us to be His presence in the world today. And the blessing of God, the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, be with us all this day and for ever more. **Amen.**