

**Brierley Hill Nativity Service**  
**10.30 a.m. 24<sup>th</sup> December, 2023**

**Call to Worship: Isaiah Ch. 9 vs.2 & 6 – 7**

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and for ever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this. Amen.

*Hymn number 196, 'Come and join the celebration'*

*Come and join the celebration,*

*It's a very special day;*

*Come and share our jubilation,*

*There's a new King born today!*

**1. See the shepherds hurry down to Bethlehem,**

**Stare in wonder at the Son of God who lay before them: (*Chorus*)**

**2. Wise men journey, led to worship by a star,**

**Kneel in homage, bringing precious gifts from lands afar, so, (*Chorus*)**

**3. 'God is with us,' round the world the message bring,**

**He is with us, 'Welcome,' all the bells on earth are pealing: (*Chorus*)**

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**Reading: Matthew Ch. 1 vs. 18 – 24**

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and 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 be with child and will 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. Amen.

*Hymn number 214, 'Once in royal David's city'*

**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.**

**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 poor, and mean, and lowly,  
Lived on earth our Saviour holy.

3. And, through all His wondrous childhood,  
He would honour and obey,  
Love and watch the lowly maiden  
In whose gentle arms He lay;  
Christian children all must be  
Mild, obedient good as He.

4. And our eyes at last shall see Him,  
Through His own redeeming love;  
For that Child so dear and gentle  
Is our Lord in heav'n above:  
And He leads His children on  
To the place where He is gone.

© Cecil Frances Alexander {1818 – 1895}

**Reading: Luke Ch. 2 vs. 1 – 7**

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Amen.

*Hymn number 191, 'Away in a manger'*

1. Away in a manger, no crib for his bed,  
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.  
The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay,  
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

2. The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,  
But little Lord Jesus no crying he makes.  
I love thee, Lord Jesus! Look down from the sky,  
And stay by my side until morning is nigh.

3. Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask thee to stay  
Close by me forever, and love me I pray.  
Bless all the dear children in thy tender care,  
And fit us for heaven to live with thee there.

*Anonymous*

**Reading: Luke Ch. 2 vs. 8 – 20**

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

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

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people on whom his favour rests."

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

When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. Amen.

### **Gad, the Grumpy Shepherd part 1 (Baa when SHEEP is spoken)**

Shabbat Shalom chevarim, I am Gad, a shepherd in the mountainous lands around the wilderness of Judea. Dad named after one of the lost tribes of Israel, thinking it would be funny since I would spend much of my time looking for lost lambs! I don't know why, but my fellow shepherds call me 'Grumpy Gad', especially when one of my **SHEEP** wanders off into the wilderness and I have to go and find it before it gets eaten by a wild animal. Yesterday, we were in the mountains near Bethlehem, where King David was born about a thousand years ago. Every evening, we take our **SHEEP** down to the plains where they spend the night in huge pens which we can guard and keep them safe. I was counting my **SHEEP** when I realized one was missing.

**'Huh, I bet it's the little one again!'** I grumbled. **'It's always straying. It would serve it right if it was eaten by a wolf, but I know my master will be angry if I don't find that dratted SHEEP.'**

I left the other **SHEEP** with Jacob, so he could take them down the mountain and I went in search of the stray. He had gone for miles. I tripped on boulders and hurt my toes.

**'Ow, that really hurt!'** I grumbled. **'Where has that dratted SHEEP gone?'** Just as the sun was low in the sky, I saw the **SHEEP**, standing on a rock above some thorn bushes. **'Come here, SHEEP!'** I bellowed. The **SHEEP** just looked at me and said, **'Woof!'** That can't be right, can it. What noise do **SHEEP** make? I can't hear you, so let's try again. **SHEEP!** That's right, **baa**.

I said **'bah'** as well, because I had to get through the thorn bushes to reach the stray. **'Ow, that really hurt!'** I grumbled.

I picked up the **SHEEP**, put him on my shoulders and took him back to the other **SHEEP** just after darkness fell. I was tired, bruised and scratched, so I settled down by the fire at the entrance to the pen. Jacob said I looked grumpy and I replied that if he'd had to look for that dratted **SHEEP**, he'd have been grumpy, too. (That is quite enough from you **SHEEP**. Go to sleep!')

I had just started to doze when a bright light shone and I heard a loud noise.

**'Oh, for pity's sake,'** I moaned, **'Stop that awful row!'**

**'It's not a row. We are angels praising the Lord,'** said a voice.

I opened my eyes and had the shock of my life. It was an angel who said, **'Don't be afraid. I am Gabriel and bring wonderful, joyful news for you and everybody.'**

**'What do you mean, 'Don't be afraid'?'** I said. **'Of course we're afraid. You've come here in the middle of the night, woken us up to tell us about some good news and**

you say 'Don't be afraid'. Couldn't it have waited till morning? If you wake up the SHEEP I won't be very happy.' Jacob said quietly, 'Look Grumpy, we could do with some good news. Everything we hear seems so gloomy. Just listen to Gabriel.' The angel looked at me and continued, 'Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'

I was still grumpy and asked why he was telling us. We were ordinary, poor people, not important priests, or King Herod. What the angel said next amazed me.

'Christ the Lord has come for everybody, not just a few. He has come to save everyone – even grumpy shepherds.' Bah, all the SHEEP laughed at the joke!

After the angels had gone and the flocks had settled down, Jacob said, 'Let's go into Bethlehem to see if we can find this Messiah. We'd better take these noisy SHEEP with us, or they'll wake up the others.'

*(AS WE WALK TO BETHLEHEM, WE SHALL ALL SING NUMBER 216, 'See him lying on a bed of straw'.*

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: *Chorus*

*O now carry me to Bethlehem,  
To see the Lord appear to men,  
Just as poor as was the stable then  
The Prince of Glory when he came.*

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: *Chorus*

3. Angels, sing again the song you sang,  
Bring God's glory to the heart of man;  
Sing that Bethlem's little baby can  
Be salvation to the soul: *Chorus*

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

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### **The Grumpy Shepherd part 2**

So we walked into Bethlehem. It wasn't too bad because there was a large star in the sky that lit up the path, so I didn't stub my sore toe again. Although the town was dark, we saw the light of a small oil lamp ahead and when we reached it, we saw a man and woman lying on a mattress. Beside them was a manger and in that manger, lying on a bed of straw, was a baby, just as the angel had told us. It looked so small and helpless, I could not help but smile at the child and put my hand softly on his head and said, 'May the Lord bless you!'

The man said

'Our child is going to be called Jesus, which means 'God saves', so Jacob and I told the parents about the angels and what they had said. The mother smiled and said

what the angels had said was true and her little son would grow up to be the Saviour of the world. We were so amazed we knelt down and praised the Lord while the **lambs** stood by silently. Mary and Joseph looked exhausted, so we said goodbye and walked back to the fields, praising God that we had been the first people to see Christ – not Herod, or the Chief Priest, Annas – just Jacob and me: oh, and those dratted **SHEEP!**  
**Bah!** Shabbat Shalom!

*Hymn number 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. *Chorus:*

*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.*

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. *Chorus:*

© Joy Webb (born 1932)

**Poem: The Reason for the Season**

What is the reason for the season?

Have you ever thought?

Is it for the food and drink

Each of us has bought?

Is it for the party-time,

The crackers and the fun,

The mistletoe and holly

And the gifts for everyone?

We love them all, we do agree,

And they can play their part,

As long as we reserve a place

For Jesus in our heart.

He is the reason for the season

And we never must forget

He came to us in heavenly love:

We are ever in his debt.

Now Christmas is not far away:

Let's recall the wondrous tale.

How Jesus came to live with us

With a love that cannot fail.

It began long ago and far away

In a town in Galilee,

When Jesus came to save the world

**Let us pray.**

Almighty God, we have come today to hear the nativity of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. It is amazing that you, the creator of life throughout the universe, should care for human beings like us and yet you do. You love us so much that even when we had strayed from the path you want us to walk, instead of abandoning us, you chose to come to us, not as a mighty king in a palace, surrounded by luxuries and protected by soldiers, but as a helpless baby in a cold, dark stable with neither status nor privileges.

Jesus comes as Immanuel, God with us, God beside us and God living within us. He lived among ordinary people like us and knows our every emotion. He came to bring light to a world darkened by sin and selfishness and died to pay for our wrongdoing. He was raised so even death has no power over us, for in him there is everlasting life.

Like the shepherds in our readings, we offer praise and thanksgiving for all you have done for us throughout our lives. Thank you for everything that has made us happy, for people who have cared for us, inspired and guided us, but most of all for Jesus without whom we are helpless and hopeless.

Merciful Lord, your grace and goodness humble us, for we know we fail to live as you call us to. In grief we confess we don't love others as we love ourselves and we are sometimes full of doubts, or half-hearted in our service to you. Gracious God, help us to change our ways and in Jesus' name forgive us both for the sins we have committed and for the opportunities to do good that we have not taken.

Gracious God, we believe you hear and answer our prayers. Confident that you have forgiven us, help us take Good News to the world in words and deeds of love in the beautiful name of Jesus, our Saviour and friend. Amen.

***We come to our prayers of intercession when we bring our concerns to our Lord. When I say 'In our need', please respond with 'Come, Lord Jesus, come'. 'In our need' ..... 'Come, Lord Jesus, come'.***

Lord Jesus, come to this beautiful but broken world and in response to your overwhelming love, we pray that you will grant us the faith and compassion we need to act as your earthly hands. However, we ask you to intervene in situations that are far beyond our power, for nothing is impossible to you.

***'In our need' ..... 'Come, Lord Jesus, come'.***

Lord, we pray for an end to conflicts that rage across the planet, causing deaths, destruction and injuries, besides swelling the number of refugees. We pray particularly for peace to be restored in Ukraine and Gaza in Palestine, for our hearts break as we see the terrible suffering of ordinary people, just like us. Teach leaders of the nations to seek justice and to deal mercifully, for only when justice and mercy exist will peace prevail. Hear our prayer for the victims of warfare, terrorism, persecution and prejudice, that they may receive the support and care they need to rebuild their broken lives.

***'In our need' ..... 'Come, Lord Jesus, come'.***

Lord of grace, help us to play what part we can to build a better world by striving to end poverty here and abroad, by sharing the earth's resources instead of fighting over them and by learning to co-operate with one another, accepting our differences, even rejoicing in diversity, rather than being divided by it.

***'In our need' ..... 'Come, Lord Jesus, come'.***

Lord, hear our prayer for those in our own country who are unemployed, homeless, or who need to use food banks to survive. Bless all who provide food for and all who run food banks, and other organizations which serve the poor. Create in our politicians and

business leaders a vision for a fairer society in which the poor and disfranchised are given hope and grant that we, too, may contribute to such a great work.

**'In our need' ..... 'Come, Lord Jesus, come'.**

Lord of shalom, come to your people as healer and bearer of pain. We pray for people from this church, for families and friends, for people from work, or from our community who are ill, recovering from injuries or operations, or who face surgery in the near future. We remember also everybody who is lonely, confused, burdened or bereaved, for Christmastide often sharpens their pain. As we name them before you in a time of silence, we are confident you will know their needs and will reach out to them: ... Lord, help us to offer them practical support and friendship, In your grace, enfold us all in your love, wipe away the tears of failure, fear and distress, and set us free to serve you for ever.

**'In our need' ..... 'Come, Lord Jesus, come'.**

Sovereign God, help us at Brierley Hill Methodist Church, and our Circuit to find new ways to serve our community in Jesus' name. We pray, too, for the worldwide Church: unite us in love and outreach, so our words and actions bring the light of your love to our neighbours and bring peace in place of strife. Loving Lord, we don't know what others will ask of us, so we pray for the Spirit to guide and encourage us when times are difficult, for vision and hope to enable us to take a risk for the sake of the gospel and courage to remain true to the teaching of Christ.

**'In our need' ..... 'Come, Lord Jesus, come'.**

Abba, Father God, we ask you to bless us, our families and friends. Keep us safe from harm and help us not only to lead Christ-centred lives but to be as faithful as Joseph and Mary when we answer your call. Amen.

### ***Hymn number 217, 'Silent night, holy night'***

#### **1. Silent night! holy night!**

**All is calm, all is bright**

**'Round yon virgin mother and Child!**

**Holy Infant, so tender and mild,**

**Sleep in heavenly peace,**

**Sleep in heavenly peace.**

#### **2. Silent night! holy night!**

**Shepherds quake at the sight!**

**Glories stream from heaven afar,**

**Heav'nly hosts sing Alleluia;**

**Christ, the Saviour, is born,**

**Christ, the Saviour, is born.**

#### **3. Silent night! holy night!**

**Son of God, love's pure light**

**Radiant beams from Thy holy face,**

**With the dawn of redeeming grace,**

**Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth,**

**Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth.**

**© Joseph Mohr (1792 – 1848)**

### **Reading: John Ch. 1 vs. 1 – 14**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.

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

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. Amen.

***Hymn number 212, 'O come, all ye faithful'***

**1. O Come, all ye faithful,  
Joyful and triumphant,  
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;  
Come and behold him,  
Born the King of angels; *Chorus*  
*O come, let us adore him,  
Christ the Lord.***

**2. God of God,  
Light of Light,  
Lo! he abhors not the Virgin's womb:  
Very God,  
Begotten, not created; *Chorus***

**3. See how the shepherds,  
Summoned to his cradle,  
Leaving their flocks, draw nigh to gaze;  
We too will thither  
Bend our joyful footsteps; *Chorus***

**4. Sing, choirs of angels,  
Sing in exultation,  
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above;  
Glory to God  
In the highest; *Chorus***

**5. Yea, Lord, we greet thee  
Born that happy morning,  
Jesus, to thee be glory given;  
Word of the Father,  
Now in flesh appearing: *Chorus***

**A Christmas Blessing**

**May God the Father bless us and keep us safe; may the Holy Spirit breathe peace upon our beautiful, but broken world; may we be granted the joy of the angels, the faithfulness of Mary, the steadfastness of Joseph, the delight of the shepherds, the diligence of the wise men and the wonderful gift of God's love in the Christ-child. May love peace live within us not only at Christmas, but for evermore. Amen.**