

As you read this be aware that others are joining together to worship with you.

StF 175

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

*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*

King of all days
So highly exalted
Glorious in heaven above
Humbly you came to the earth you created
All for love's sake became poor

Here I am to worship....

I'll never know how much it cost
To see my sin upon that cross

Here I am to worship....

Prayers of Thanksgiving

In current circumstances it is often quite difficult to find things to be thankful about. Many of us are 'shut in' and it feels that chaos is around us. Then, we hear of hope, hope in a vaccine. You are invited to spend some time thinking about those who are working to support all of us and to find treatment and means of protection. Then, you are invited to give thanks for those people, those you know and those you do not know.

Amen

Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be your Name:
your kingdom come; your 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 yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever.
Amen

John 1

The Message

⁹⁻¹³ The Life-Light was the real thing: Every person entering Life he brings into Light. He was in the world, the world was there through him, and yet the world didn't even notice. He came to his own people, but they didn't want him. But whoever did want him, who believed he was who he claimed and would do what he said, He made to be their true selves, their child-of-God selves.

These are the God-begotten,
not blood-begotten,
not flesh-begotten,
not sex-begotten.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish.

¹⁵ John pointed him out and called, "This is the One! The One I told you was coming after me but in fact was ahead of me. He has always been ahead of me, has always had the first word."

¹⁶⁻¹⁸ We all live off his generous bounty, gift after gift after gift.

We got the basics from Moses, and then this exuberant giving and receiving,
This endless knowing and understanding — all this came through Jesus, the Messiah.
No one has ever seen God, not so much as a glimpse.

This one-of-a-kind God-Expression, who exists at the very heart of the Father, has made him plain as day.

StF 15

The splendour of the king
Clothed in majesty
Let all the earth rejoice, all the earth rejoice
He wraps Himself in light
And darkness tries to hide
And trembles at His voice, and trembles at His voice

*How great is our God! Sing with me
How great is our God! And all will see
How great, how great is our God!*

And age to age He stands
And time is in His hands
Beginning and the End, Beginning and the End
The Godhead, three in one
Father, Spirit, Son
The Lion and the Lamb, the Lion and the Lamb

Name above all names
Worthy of all praise
My heart will sing
How great is our God!
Name above all names
Worthy of all praise
My heart will sing
How great is our God!
How great is our God!

Message

I often feel that we sanitise both the Christmas and the Easter stories. Those lovely pictures of a clean stable and scrubbed shepherds.

The truth is that the stable was in fact a room of the house where the animals were kept in the winter. It was probably dirty, although they may have provided clean hay for the manger. And the shepherds spending day and night on the hills surrounded by smelly sheep. I doubt if they even washed their hands before they visited the family, let alone had a shower. No chance of 20 second hand wash, face covering and 2m distancing.

But, of course, there was the baby, little Jesus, meek and mild, perfect. A friend of mine said that his daughter, now grown up, had never caused them any trouble, one mild tantrum when 2 but otherwise - perfect. When I heard that I thought 'There's a daughter who knows how to keep her parents in the dark'.

Anyway, Jesus. Surely, what is so special about the Christmas story is that it is about human beings and a flesh and blood baby. A baby who was God - God becoming human, coming on to the earth as a dependant, tiny baby, born into a family situation.

God could have come to earth in 'clouds of glory' or fully grown with no background, no feelings, unable to be harmed, a bit like in a sci-fi movie when a robot appears.

He could have come into a position of power, with immediate influence, able to command a multitude to serve him.

But no - God came as a baby into an ordinary family.

I have often wondered what Jesus was like as a baby and a child. He must have done the usual things, cried when hungry or in pain, smiled when tickled, needed to be toilet trained, fallen over when learning to walk, started to talk with a few words at first then gradually developing full communication. I am sure he had rough and tumbles with his siblings and friends, needed to have cuts and bruises kissed better by his Mother, had to be reassured when there was thunder.

I presume that Joseph taught the young Jesus how to use his tools safely, hammer, chisel and saw. Maybe Jesus made small gifts for his Mother.

He went through the usual changes at puberty and, possibly had to deal with the teasing from other children.

And he had a Mother who placed expectations on him - remember the story of the wedding when they ran out of wine. Mary goes to Jesus and says "They have run out of wine - do something". Did he give a sigh, roll his eyes and think 'Mother'?

He was human, yet divine, God become man.

Why, why go through all that - God had the ability to do it another way - surely an easier way?

One of the most abused phrases is "I understand how you are feeling, I have been through the same". Abused because it isn't true. Each of us feels pain and suffering in our own way. However, if you or I have been through a similar experience to the person we are talking to, whether that is illness, bereavement, redundancy, or other human challenges, then we have a greater insight into the suffering of the other and, hopefully, greater empathy.

I would suggest that one of the reasons God became human is so that we could know that he had felt some of the same things which we feel. He had felt physical and emotional pain, bereavement, frustration, doubt. He, Jesus, knew what it was to be tempted, to be tired, to need to be by himself, to feel pressured by others to do what they thought he should do. He knew the need to step back from the busyness of life to just be with God the Father. He knew all of that, experienced it and knows and understands what we go through and feel.

But there is more to this coming and it comes back to light, illumination.

John 1

⁴⁻⁵ What came into existence was Life, and the Life was Light to live by. The Life-Light blazed out of the darkness; the darkness couldn't put it out.

⁹ The Life-Light was the real thing: Every person entering Life he brings into Light.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son,

¹⁸ No one has ever seen God, not so much as a glimpse. This one-of-a-kind God-Expression, who exists at the very heart of the Father, has made him plain as day.

Through seeing and knowing Jesus we have a clearer picture, understanding, of God.

Jesus explains this to his confused disciples:

John 14

⁵ Thomas said, "Master, we have no idea where you're going. How do you expect us to know the road?"

⁶⁻⁷ Jesus said, "I am the Road, also the Truth, also the Life. No one gets to the Father apart from me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him. You've even seen him!"

⁸ Philip said, "Master, show us the Father; then we'll be content."

⁹⁻¹⁰ "You've been with me all this time, Philip, and you still don't understand? To see me is to see the Father. So how can you ask, 'Where is the Father?' Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?"

As we look to Jesus we see God because they are one and the same - it is that conundrum of trying to understand the Trinity - God - three in one.

As we look to Jesus we see how God relates to us, how he loves us, is patient with us, possibly frustrated by us as we still don't understand. Don't understand what he wants us to do, or how he wants us to be. Frustrated when we still do what he doesn't want us to do.

And yet, despite all that, in Jesus we see so clearly that God doesn't give up on us.

At the end of his life, when he was in the greatest danger, the disciples ran away and Peter denied him. Yet the risen Jesus returns to them, eats with them, gives them another chance to serve him.

It is the same with God, he does not give up on us but gives us new chance after new chance. Chances to re-set the clock, to start again, time after time after time - because he loves us and never leaves us.

We know that he has not left us alone because Jesus told us.

¹⁵ *I will talk to the Father, and he'll provide you another Friend so that you will always have someone with you. This Friend is the Spirit of Truth.*

God was revealed to us in a very special way by Jesus, we only have to look to Jesus and we see God the Father and the Holy Spirit constantly reveals both to us day by day.

But, I often leave you with a 'but'. We have to be prepared to make the effort to seek him, to be with him and then to serve him in whatever way we can. Jesus, when preparing his disciples for his death said:

¹⁵ *"If you love me, show it by doing what I've told you".*

He says the same to each and every one of us as we look to the flesh and blood Jesus and follow him.

Prayers of Intercession

Father,

As we come before you this morning we offer to you our concerns.

We pray for all those who have been affected by Covid 19, both here and across the world. We pray for the care workers, scientists and front-line workers.

We remember those who have lost jobs.

As we have seen greater communication and co-operation between countries over the solution to the pandemic, we ask that this co-operation may continue with other issues.

We pray for our own country as we are having to deal with the transition of Brexit and ask that we all have patience and understanding.

We remember members of our own community who are having a difficult time at this moment
(*you might like to add names here*).

We pray for ourselves, that we may have patience, resilience, and compassion (*you may add your own particular concerns*).

We ask that you continue to guide us and encourage us to be true to your call to serve you, in whatever way we can.

Amen

StF 11

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!

Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.

Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,

God in three Persons, blessed Trinity.

Holy, holy, holy! All saints adore thee,
casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,
which wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.

Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide thee,
though the sinful human eye thy glory may not see,
only thou art holy; there is none beside thee,
perfect in power, in love, and purity.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!

All thy works shall praise thy Name, in earth, and sky, and sea;

Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,

God in three Persons, blessed Trinity.

Blessing

We go into the world to walk in God's light, to rejoice in God's love and to reflect God's glory
Amen

