

Service for Christmas Day 2020 - Caroline Churcher

Christians awake. The Word has become flesh and dwells among us.

Read or sing:

Christians awake, salute the happy morn
whereon the Saviour of the world was born;
rise to adore the mystery of love,
which hosts of angels chanted from above;
with them the joyful tidings first begun
of God incarnate and the Virgin's Son.

Like Mary, let us ponder in our mind
God's wondrous love in saving humankind;
trace we the Babe, who has retrieved our loss,
from his poor manger to his bitter cross;
treading his steps, assisted by his grace,
till our first heavenly state again takes place.

John Byrom (1692-1763)

Then to the watchful shepherd was told
who heard the angelic herald's voice, 'Behold'
I bring good tidings of a Saviour's birth
to you and all the nations upon earth;
this day has God fulfilled his promised word,
This day is born a Saviour, Christ the Lord.'

Then may we hope, the angelic hosts among
To sing, redeemed, a glad triumphal song;
he who was born upon this joyful day
around us all his glory shall display;
saved by his love, incessant we shall sing
eternal praise to heaven's almighty King.

Prayer

Loving Lord

The preparation is over. We are here to welcome God on earth. In all your majesty, you chose to go through the pangs of birth to become flesh in our world. You stepped into our darkness to bring us the Light, to show us who we might be through Jesus Christ. We thank you and praise you for loving us so much that you came to us as Immanuel.

Forgive us Lord, if, in the maelstrom that is our life, we forget you are with us. We have not put you in the centre and our lives unravel. Forgive us, Lord as we come before you to be reconciled with you through the sacrifice of Christ upon the Cross, and the resurrection of the Light that shines upon us, lead us back to what you would have us be, your children. Amen.

Reading John 1:1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all

who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Reflection

As I write this the papers are screaming out their headlines that Christmas is cancelled. The Christmas they mean is the Christmas of over-indulgence, of tinsel and family get togethers. The Christmas we all enjoy to a certain extent.

But the Christ Mass we celebrate as Christians is never cancelled. In the beginning was the Word. The Word has always been here. The Word is with us now. Christmas is the time we celebrate that. The Word cannot be cancelled. If the Word is with God and is God, it is, as we say, now and forever. These words in John's gospel are among the most powerful in the whole New Testament. This passage tells us the very essence of God, who He is and who He became for us. The Word became flesh. The Godhead became flesh. In all his majesty, he made himself human and came among us. He didn't arrive wrapped in shiny paper, with a big glittery bow. He didn't arrive in time for turkey and Christmas pudding.

He came because we were in darkness. We were in a mess. He came to sort us out and save us from ourselves. Our relationship with God was at breaking point. No amount of prophets could make the difference to our darkness. So God became Emmanuel, God with us, to walk among us and show us where we were going wrong. The Light came into the darkness, but the darkness did its best to destroy it. The world did not recognise the Light for what it was – God among us. Jesus was humiliated, tortured and crucified, and the world looked like it was going to remain dark. But in God coming to meet us, the story isn't over. The Light shone through and has never been extinguished.

I think, sometimes, we consider ourselves a light. But we aren't. We can lead the way just as John did. God works through us if we let him. We are given the gift of being able to reflect the light within us and show others how Emmanuel is with us always.

For many this year has been very dark indeed. A darkness, it seems we haven't known since the middle of the last century. But when we ask God to lighten our darkness, it isn't just the darkness of our difficulties. It is also the darkness of being separated from God. We create our own darkness when we don't put God at the centre. If we really want the Light of the world to shine on us and through us, we need to look at how we live. The pandemic has highlighted so many issues that are wrong in our world. We think of climate change, the diminishing of habitats and species, the movement of despairing refugees. All of these problems and many more need to be addressed. We, are children of God, born of his will. Let us recognise that will through prayer, reaching out and bringing his light to a darkness that will pass. The true light which enlightens everyone is here. We need it now more than ever.

Amen.

Read or sing

Love came down at Christmas
Love all lovely, Love divine;
Love was born at Christmas,
star and angels gave the sign.

Worship we the Godhead
Love incarnate, Love divine
worship we our Jesus:
but wherewith for sacred sign?

Love shall be our token
love be yours and love be mine,
love to God and all the world,
love for plea and gift and sign.

Christine Georgina Rosetti (1830-1894)

Prayer

Loving Lord,

We pray for all those who are feeling lost this Christmas. The loss of plans made, the loss of meeting loved ones, the loss of livelihoods and stability.

Shine your Light upon them in their darkness.

We pray for all those who are grieving in loss. For those who weren't able to say their 'goodbyes'. For those unable to attend the funerals of friends and family through restriction in numbers. For those who feel abandoned and bereft.

Shine your Light upon them in their darkness.

We pray for all those who have given so much of themselves for others that they are spent. They are tired, worn out with the relentlessness of the pandemic and their efforts to overcome its effects. All our key workers in hospitals, schools, care homes, waste disposal; all who have ensured that the impact is minimised to the best of their ability.

Shine your Light upon them in their darkness.

We pray for your church. We pray for the children of God to reflect your light from within. We pray for more to come to know Jesus in this age of uncertainty and confusion.

Shine your Light upon them in their darkness.

Please pray for those who God has put upon your heart.

**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.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.**

Sing or read:

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.'

*Hark the herald-angels sing
Glory to the new-born King.*

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:

*Hark the herald-angels sing
Glory to the new-born King.*

Hail, the heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Hail, the Son of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,
risen with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by,
born that man may no more may die,
born to raise the sons of earth,
born to give them second birth:

*Hark the herald-angels sing
Glory to the new-born King.*

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Blessing

As God became flesh for our sakes, may we receive the blessing of His Light in Love and Grace.

Amen.

May I wish you all a blessed time this Christmas.

Caroline Churcher December 25th 2020