



The  
United  
Reformed  
Church

The United Reformed Church in Lion Walk  
Christ Church United Reformed Church  
The United Reformed Church at Chappel

Christmas Day 2020

Call to Worship:

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.  
Those who lived in a land of deep darkness -  
on them light has shone.

**We long for a light to guide us.**

You have multiplied the nation,  
you have increased its joy.

**We long for God's joy in our lives.**

For the yoke of their burden,  
and the bar across their shoulders,  
the rod of their oppressor,  
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

**We long to be relieved of all that we carry.**

For a child has been born for us,  
a son given to us;  
he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

**He is named Emmanuel:  
God with us.**

**In this tiny baby, this vulnerable child,  
we find our light, our joy, our comfort.  
Joy to the World! The Lord is come!**

Hymn 135

Joy to the world! the Lord is come!  
Let earth receive her King;  
let every heart prepare him room,  
and heaven and nature sing.

Joy to the world! the Saviour reigns!  
Let all their songs employ;  
while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains  
repeat the sounding joy.

No more let thorns infest the ground,  
or sins and sorrows grow;  
wherever pain and death are found  
he makes his blessings flow.

He rules the world with truth and grace,  
and makes the nations prove  
the glories of His righteousness,  
and wonders of his love.

Prayer/Meditation:

Loving God - we give thanks for this Day of worship and celebration - for all it has meant to so many over the years, all it continues to mean to us, and all it will mean in generations to come. We give thanks for the familiar words of story and song, for the images they present and the truth they reveal, for all that speaks of the coming of Christ and the beginning of a new Kingdom.

We give thanks for family and friends, for the spirit of giving and receiving, for the mood of goodwill and celebration, and all we enjoy about Christmas.

Loving God, help us in all of this to keep sight of the heart of Christmas, what it all really means to celebrate the birth of the infant Christ, to worship him as joyfully and reverently as shepherds and wise men long ago, to welcome him and follow him faithfully as those who left everything to be his disciples.

Forgive us if we have lost sight of what this season truly means. Forgive us if we have become over-familiar with its simple message. Forgive us if we have failed to make enough room for Christ in our Christmas celebrations.

Speak to us now, through all we do and share, all we shall sing and hear, so that our lives may be touched by the wonder of his presence.

So, seeking his presence and his spirit, we pray together in the words of our Lord Jesus Christ...

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. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory for ever. Amen**

Reading: Luke 2:1-7

HYMN

O little town of Bethlehem,  
how still we see thee lie!  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep  
the silent stars go by;  
yet in thy dark streets shineth  
the everlasting Light;  
the hopes and fears of all the years  
are met in thee tonight.

O morning stars, together  
proclaim the holy birth,  
and praises sing to God the King  
goodwill and peace on earth.

For Christ is born of Mary;  
and gathered all above,  
while mortals sleep, the angels keep  
their watch of wondering love.

How silently, how silently,  
the wondrous gift is given!  
So God imparts to human hearts  
the blessings of his heaven:  
no ear may hear his coming;  
but in this world of sin,  
where meek souls will receive him, still  
the dear Christ enters in.

O holy Child of Bethlehem,  
descend to us, we pray;  
cast out our sin, and enter in,  
be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels  
the great glad tidings tell.  
O come to us, abide with us,  
our Lord, Immanuel.

Reading: Luke 2:8-20

Reflection:

The Bible is full of little clues that help us to draw a picture of the way things were in society at the time. Luke gives us some details about the census which was the reason that Joseph had to go to Bethlehem, and from the records that the Romans kept, we discover that it was held in 8CE. In that year, Jesus was born. Joseph and Mary had to travel for the census from Nazareth where they lived, to Bethlehem, Joseph's home town. The distance they had to go was about 80 miles. That doesn't sound like much to us nowadays - it's roughly the distance from Ipswich to London, and takes about an hour and a half to cover by train. For Mary and Joseph, travelling on foot or, if we follow the tradition, riding on a donkey, the journey would have taken four or five days or maybe even a week. It must have been a very uncomfortable journey, and things were no better once they arrived in Bethlehem, for they discovered that there was nowhere for them to stay. There was no room for them at the inn.

The word 'inn' conjures up an image for people today, of something akin to a Holiday Inn where you get a comfortable bed for the night and a good breakfast in the morning. Maybe if we put our minds to it and think back in time we'd come up with something like a modern day country pub. Something that's literally a public house, with public rooms downstairs and bedrooms upstairs. But that would be wrong too, for conditions in Bethlehem all those years ago were even more primitive. The Bethlehem inn would be nothing more than a covered courtyard with smaller areas like stalls opening from it. The people who stayed there would have to provide their own food; the innkeeper gave them only somewhere to sleep, fodder for their animals, and the use of cooking facilities. But even this primitive accommodation wasn't available.

This detail Luke gives us, that there was no room for them in the inn - is a symbol of what was to become of Jesus. He spent his life searching for a way into the hearts and minds of men and women, but found at the end that only on the cross was there room for him. It sets the mood for Jesus' whole life that the first announcement of his birth should come to shepherds and not to the respectable religious people of the day. Shepherds were not popular people among the devoutly religious Jews. They worked with animals, and their job took up so much of their time that they were often unable to participate in all the religious ceremonies and rituals of the faith. They were looked down on as being dirty and disreputable, but it was to them that God's message first came.

And that too is a symbol. It stresses for us that Jesus the king was born into the world not for the rich or powerful but for the poor and humble and ordinary, and even for those who are despised and outcast.

All these clues and images we find in Luke's story about shepherds - and in Matthew's story about wise men, which we will look at soon in the season of Epiphany - are pointers to the life Jesus will lead and the death he will die. That's the reason we celebrate the sacrament of communion on Christmas Day. It may seem odd to some that we remember the last meal of his life on the day we celebrate his birth, but that birth, however miraculous, signifies very little if we do not keep in mind that it was the beginning of a life and death that changed the world - and continues transform it - and us - today.

#### Hymn 167

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.

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.

And he is our childhood's pattern,  
day by day like us he grew,  
he was little, weak and helpless,  
tears and smiles like us he knew;  
and he feeleth for our sadness,  
and he shareth in our gladness.

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;  
for he leads his people on  
to the place where he is gone.

## Sacrament

Bethlehem is a long way away,  
and Jesus was born a long time ago.  
But Jesus was born for the world,  
his Spirit is with us still.  
Jesus invites us  
to meet him at this table.

As shepherds came to Bethlehem  
to celebrate the birth of a Saviour,  
we come to worship.

All who come in fear or need,  
all who come in wonder or in hope,  
all who come in love and in joy,  
are welcome at the table of the Lord.

### Let us Pray:

God of all goodness, we thank you for the birth of Jesus; for his coming as the least among the least, in poverty among the poor. In vulnerability and need you have placed your love at our disposal, becoming for us a living hope in the midst of our powerlessness; challenging the proud and overcoming the powers that oppress and enslave us.

With thanksgiving we remember Mary's loving response to your purpose, Joseph's caring obedience to your will, and we remember all who have responded to grace by offering their lives to make incarnate the promise of your justice and now share the fullness of your joy. For us and for all, for the ones who struggle and suffer and long for freedom and peace, Jesus on the night of his arrest took bread and wine and shared them saying: 'This is my body - this is my blood'. His body was broken for all who are broken, his blood was shed for all who bleed.

So we celebrate Jesus' birth and give thanks for his life, his death on the cross, his resurrection and ascension.

With angel choirs, with ordinary shepherds, with the wise ones, with all God's people, we lift our hearts in joyful praise.

Touched by the Spirit, in bread and wine, make us one body with Christ in suffering and glory. Together in him, we will praise you, and serve you in the world until the gift of Christmas is fulfilled for us and for all creation. Amen

### Action

On the night when he was betrayed, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and said: 'This is my body, which is for you.' In the same way after supper he took the cup, saying: 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood.'

The break which we break is the communion of the blood of Christ.  
The cup of blessing which we bless is the communion of the blood of Christ.

## After Communion

Lord Jesus Christ, in the immensity of your innocence, be born in us today. We have come with joy and sorrow, with delight and anxiety, for the world, for people we love, and for ourselves. We are here because this is Christmas and there is expectation in the air, as we recall again the child who was born for us who is the peace of the world.

Loving God, in the name of Jesus we pray for all humankind: strong and weak, poor and rich, tyrants and tyrannised: that they may kneel at the manger seeking help and healing -  
And we praise you that we have been here, with bread and wine, to celebrate the coming, the shining, the living, the breaking, the dying and the Resurrection of the Prince of Peace.  
Be praised and glorified, eternal God: here this morning, today, this Christmas Day, and every day of the year.

Amen

### HYMN 159

Hark! the herald angels sing  
Glory to the newborn 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:

Refrain:

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 the Virgin's womb:  
veiled in flesh the Godhead see;  
hail the incarnate Deity,  
pleased as man with us to dwell,  
Jesus, our Immanuel:

[Refrain]

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 we no more may die,  
born to raise the things of earth,  
born to give us second birth:

[Refrain]

Benediction

Let the love that shaped earth and heaven  
dwell within us this Christmas.

Let the love that created humanity  
dwell within us this Christmas.

Let the love that overcomes suffering and hatred  
dwell within us this Christmas.

Let the love that causes us to rejoice with loved ones  
dwell within us this Christmas.

Let the love that forgives and renews  
dwell within us this Christmas.

Let the love that brings reconciliation after separation  
dwell within us this Christmas.

Let the love that brings the blessing of peace  
dwell within us this Christmas.

May we share that peace  
with all people near and far.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit go with each one of us and with all those we love, today and for ever more. Amen