

**Sheffield United Reformed Churches  
Team Ministry worship for individuals or families**

**Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> December 2020 at 10:30 am  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Advent**

**Welcome**

This week is our Carol Service. Although separate we will be raising our voices together singing carols and listening to the readings from the Bible about the story of Creation (light and darkness) coming into the world from Genesis to the Gospel of John. As we worship we trust that the birth of Christ will bring us all hope and joy this Christmas time.

**Call to worship**

Dreams and angels, prophecies, mystery and magi, choirs and shepherds, we make our way to the star-blessed stable, to the light shining miraculously in human misery and darkness. We are almost there

**Lighting the Candle**

Living God, as we light this Advent candle, and the each of the other candles flicker to show that your coming is kindled in our hearts, may the flame of our desire for justice, joy, hope and peace burn deep within us, releasing in us the transforming power of your Holy Spirit; and may your kingdom come. **Amen.**

**Carol - R&S 147**

The first nowell the angel did say was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;  
in fields where they lay keeping their sheep on a cold winter's night that was so deep.  
Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell, born is the King of Israel.

They lookèd up and saw a star shining in the east beyond them far;  
and to the earth it gave great light, and so it continued both day and night.  
Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell, born is the King of Israel.

**Prayer of Approach, Thanksgivings and Confession**

Lord, thank you for all the ways you break into our lives with your message of love and hope for the future. Thank you for your angels, who come to us in so many different ways.

We wonder, we wait. We look, we hope. We laugh, we cry. We speak, we remain silent.

We listen, we are listened to. We come, we approach. We encounter. We are changed. So as we meet together, but on our own on this

Lord, we confess that sometimes when we read the Bible, we think 'that was then', or 'that was for them'; it's not really anything to do with us. We don't always want to hear your call to us.

We don't want you to break into our lives. We don't believe you can do it. We don't believe you could choose us.

Open our hearts, ears, minds Lord. We pray that we might be more like Mary, but hearing your voice and being there, ready to do what you ask of us... Amen

**Readings**



**Genesis 22: 15- 18** – the promise to Abraham that his decedents will be blessed

**Isaiah 9:2, 6-7** – the prophets speak of an established kingdom built on justice and righteousness

**Luke 1: 26 -35, 38** – the angel visits Mary

**John 1:1-14** – the light shines into the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it

## Reflection

Even though we cannot gather in person – *Emmanuel: God with us*. Even if some Christmas traditions have had to go – *Emmanuel: God with us*. Even if we might not get to hug family and friends – *Emmanuel: God with us*. Even if we cannot sing carols beside each other – *Emmanuel: God with us*. Even if Christmas cheer is harder this year – *Emmanuel: God with us*

God is with us and is constantly on the move. Though God is our resting place, our spiritual home, God nevertheless reminded the people of Israel as they wandered through the wilderness that through the tough times and the good times, God was there with them. The same applies to us today. People are asking, “Where is God in all of this pandemic?” Will we see an end to all of this or has our world changed all together? And sometimes when we pray, God seems so far away.

From our readings today, we hear the words of the prophets, announcing the birth of a child and that child will head up a government based on justice and fairness. The shepherds did not expect to be the ones to see the child and to share the story. It is interesting to note that shepherds were chosen, when David who was a decedent of the baby started life as a shepherd and ended up as one of Israel’s greatest kings. Being a shepherd certainly runs in the family.

David known as the writer of the Psalms spent most of his life in fear of losing his life. During his time as a shepherd, a man of the pastures, a protector of the sheep, and always on the move. As if on personal pilgrimage, David had encountered God while walking, sleeping, and travelling from place to place. And so for us today as we journey through this Christmas week, it may be a personal pilgrimage, as its fish this Christmas instead a bird, no presents as we haven’t been able to shop for them and over the past 9 months you have been decluttering the attic or the cupboard under the stairs.

The people of Israel were taken into exile. They felt like they lost everything, their routine, their rituals and even their customs. How can we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land? Where was God then? A number of prophets came and offered a message of hope. Where is our message of hope? Where do you look for your message of hope?

Perhaps we see that message of hope in Mary. In the birth narrative and across two millennia of Christian tradition is her openness, and obedience to God and devotion to Jesus. Faithfully, she cared for him, they became refugees and travelled to Egypt. Mary no doubt helped shaped his thinking and followed him to the foot of the Cross. So precious was she to him that, at death, Jesus asked the beloved Disciple to care for her.

So, here we are today. I am sure most of us would agree that this is not the Christmas that any of us would want or would wish for, there are so many people who have died, as many in hospital, all those who have tested positive and we are still in Europe. But throughout it all it is Christmas and Jesus is still looking for a home and someone to share the good news in word or deed so that the world will know that we have a king who has come to challenge our assumptions and to create a kingdom based on justice and righteousness.

He comes as a lamb, born in a stable, a shepherd, rode on a donkey before he was born and also rode on a donkey on his way to his death. He became the one who would give his life for us any day. So today, for the people of the Congo and young people in Nigeria and here with us the king has come, so let us rejoice and greet him as our hope is here to save! Emmanuel

## Music for Reflection - R&S 138

Come, thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free  
From our fears and sins release us let us find our rest in thee  
Israel's strength and consolation hope of all the earth thou art  
Dear desire of every nation joy of every longing heart

Born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a king  
Born to reign in us forever. Now thy gracious kingdom bring  
By thine own eternal spirit, rule in all our hearts alone;  
by thine all sufficient merit, raise us to thy glorious throne.

## **Prayers of Intercessions**

Almighty God, we acknowledge that Jesus, is heir of your throne, reigning for ever. Of his kingdom there will be no end. Help us, therefore, not to be afraid, may the power of the Most High be at work in our world; for nothing is impossible for you, our God

*As the countdown to Christmas gathers pace, we pause a moment to offer to God our prayers for the week ahead.*

We pray for our church and other local churches that remain closed over this

We pray for Christian communities across the world.

This is the week when faith and culture combine to produce a wealth of wonderful ways to celebrate Christ's birth. Yet for some, the high profile of Christmas can pose an increased threat of attack. Loving Lord, grant courage and strength to our brothers and sisters in parts of the world where it is difficult and dangerous to follow you.

We pray for the communities in which we live and work. This week we remember children and young people as they come to the end of term and they are taking their stats tests.

We pray for those laid low by suffering.

This is the week when pain and depression, death and funerals, seem out of season. Our celebrations risk seeming irrelevant to those who suffer. Loving Lord, grant us to see your birth as an embrace of human suffering and an offering of hope to those in despair.

We pray for ourselves.

This is a week in which our celebrations may draw us closer to God or may distract us away from God. Loving Lord, grant us to hear amid the clamour and excitement your still, small voice – and to take heed. Lord in your mercy; hear our prayer.

We offer these prayers to God, trusting that God hears and believing that God responds in love. Give us the courage and the desire to seek to serve you as best we can –and in that service may we reflect the life you lived. We offer our prayers for those who struggle with this season.

**Our Father ...**

### **Carol - R&S 147**

Silent night, holy night! Sleeps the world hid from sight.  
Mary and Joseph in stable bare watch over the child beloved and fair,  
Sleeping in heavenly peace, Sleeping in heavenly peace

Silent night, holy night! Shepherds first saw the light.  
Heard resounding clear and long - Far and near the angel song ,  
Christ the redeemer is here Christ the redeemer is here

Silent night, holy night! Son of God o how bright.  
Love is smiling from your face. Strikes for us now the hour of grace,  
Saviour since you are born - Saviour since you are born

### **Blessings**

Within the restrictions of lockdown we can't go too far Lord, so here we are, your servants. Send us out into a new week, ready to be your light to those around us. Let us recognise that you are here with us, as we continue to seek your will in our lives. So, may the blessing of this Christmas be Emmanuel, now and always. Amen