

**22<sup>nd</sup> December 2024 – Morning Service**  
**Christmas Symbols – Carol Service**  
Rev Alan Combes

**Advent Candle Liturgy**

Preparations almost complete, the time is nearly here. Promises and praises echo all around,  
Silencing the noises of injustice. O hush the noise, **Let's hear the angels sing.**

The promise of God for the servant lowly, God who comes to the help of all,  
Whose ancient promise still stands today. O hush the noise, **Let's hear the angels sing.**

And we watch and we seek, And we learn, we pray and we praise,  
And we wait and we wait. O hush the noise, **Let's hear the angels sing.**

**Opening Words**

Christians, awake, in Christ our hope is sure, He is the promised one we've waited for.  
When doubts arise, help us to hear and see, His deeds and words at work in you and me.  
He is the Lord, our King and God's own Son, who was and is today and is to come!

**StF 214 – Once in Royal David's City**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1) Once in royal David's city<br>Stood a lowly cattle-shed,<br>Where a mother laid her baby<br>In a manger for his bed:<br>Mary was that mother mild,<br>Jesus Christ her little child.                   | 3) And our eyes at last shall see him,<br>Through his own redeeming love,<br>For that child so dear and gentle<br>Is our Lord in heaven above;<br>And he leads his children on<br>To the place where he is gone.     |
| 2) He came down to earth from heaven<br>Who is God and Lord of all,<br>And his shelter was a stable,<br>And his cradle was a stall;<br>With the needy, poor and lowly<br>Lived on earth our Saviour holy. | 4) Not in that poor lowly stable,<br>With the oxen standing by,<br>We shall see him; but in heaven,<br>Set at God's right hand on high;<br>There his children gather round<br>Bright like stars, with glory crowned. |

*Cecil Frances Alexander*

**Call to Worship**

With joy we call Emmanuel down to meet with us this morning! **Christ be with us!**  
Through the birth of Christ, we know God's love for us. **Thanks be to God!**

**Introduction**

Brothers and sisters in Christ – it is our duty and our joy to prepare ourselves to hear again the message of the angels and in our hearts and minds to go again to Bethlehem to hear and see the great events that happened there; Christ, God's son, in all his glory born in poverty. So we will read the Holy Scriptures that tell of God's loving purposes – from the first days of our disobedience to the glorious Redemption brought to us by this Holy Child, and we fill the air with glory and praise...

**Opening Prayers**

Creator God, we pray for the needs of this whole world; for peace and goodwill over all the earth; for unity and brotherhood in the world you created and within the Church that Jesus came to build.

We remember in his name the poor and the helpless, the cold, the hungry and the oppressed; the sick in body and in mind and those that mourn. We remember the lonely and the unloved; the aged and the little children; and all who do not know the Lord Jesus.

In this moment of your grace, we hold before you our brokenness and sin that brings sadness and grief to your loving heart. We are sorry for our materialism, our greed, our selfishness as we recall so many for whom this winter contains doubt, uncertainty and little joy. We give thanks that through Christ's life, death and resurrection our sins can be forgiven. May we know that promise to be true for us in the coming of the Christ child. As we receive your forgiveness we remember before you – our God - all those who rejoice with us, across the worldwide Church and we give thanks for those who have gone before us...

Gracious God, as Christmas comes again help us, in faith - as we set out on the road to Bethlehem - to see afresh this glorious moment that has happened so long ago. Lead us on our journey through lessons and carols and kindle in our hearts a spirit of expectancy. May we not rest until we bow in wonder and adoration before Mary's Child, the everlasting son of the Father, and sing "Glory to God in the highest In him our hope rests – the word made flesh..." **Amen**

### **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. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

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. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

### **StF 205 – It came upon the midnight clear**

- 1) It came upon the midnight clear,  
That glorious song of old,  
From angels bending near the earth  
To touch their harps of gold:  
'Peace on the earth, goodwill to men,  
From heaven's all-gracious King!  
The world in solemn stillness lay  
To hear the angels sing.
- 2) Still through the cloven skies they come,  
With peaceful wings unfurled;  
And still their heavenly music floats  
O'er all the weary world;  
Above its sad and lowly plains  
They bend on hovering wing;  
And ever o'er its Babel sounds  
The blessed angels sing.
- 3) Yet with the woes of sin and strife  
The world has suffered long;  
Beneath the angel strain have rolled  
Two thousand years of wrong;  
And man, at war with man, hears not  
The love-song which they bring.  
O hush the noise, ye men of strife,  
And hear the angels sing!
- 4) For lo, the days are hastening on,  
To prophets shown of old,  
When with the ever-circling years  
Shall come the time foretold,  
When the new heaven and earth shall own  
The Prince of Peace their King,  
And all the world repeat the song  
Which now the angels sing.

*Edmund Hamilton Sears*

## Symbol 1 – An Apple

To help remind us that in the beginning we were at one with God, but we broke our promise to God, we sinned, and our sin separates us from God.

### Reading: Genesis 3 v 8-15

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, 'Where are you?' He answered, 'I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.' And he said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?' The man said, 'The woman you put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.' Then the Lord God said to the woman, 'What is this you have done?' The woman said, 'The snake deceived me, and I ate.'

So the Lord God said to the snake, 'Because you have done this, 'Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.'

### StF 178 – Long ago prophets knew

1) Long ago, prophets knew  
Christ would come, born a Jew,  
Come to make all things new;  
Bear his People's burden,  
Freely love and pardon:

*Ch) Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring!  
Sing, choirs, sing, sing, sing!  
When he comes, When he comes,  
Who will make him welcome?*

2) God in time, God in man,  
This is God's timeless plan:  
He will come, as a man,  
Born himself of woman,  
God divinely human:

3) Mary, hail! Though afraid,  
She believed, she obeyed.  
In her womb, God is laid;  
Till the time expected,  
Nurtured and protected:

4) Journey ends! Where afar  
Bethlem shines, like a star,  
Stable door stands ajar.  
Unborn Son of Mary, Saviour, do not tarry!

*Ch) Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring!  
Sing, choirs, sing, sing, sing!  
Jesus comes! Jesus comes!  
We will make him welcome!*

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## Symbol 2 – A Scroll

To show that Christ's birth was foretold many years before it happened. That the prophecy said that Christ would forever be our role model and our guide, bringing light and peace into a world of darkness.

### Reading: Isaiah 9 v 2, 6-7

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness 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 greatness 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.

## StF 165 – Advent candles tell their story

- 1) Advent candles tell their story  
As we watch and pray,  
Longing for the Day of Glory,  
'Come, Lord, soon,' we say.  
Pain and sorrow, tears and sadness  
Changed for gladness on that day.
- 2) Prophet voices loudly crying,  
Making pathways clear,  
Glimpsing glory, self-denying,  
Calling all to hear.  
Through their message - challenged, shaken -  
Hearts awoken: God is near!
- 3) John the Baptist, by his preaching  
And by water poured,  
Brought to those who heard his teaching  
News of hope restored:  
'Keep your vision strong and steady,  
And be ready for the Lord.'
- 4) Mary's gift, beyond all telling,  
Was to give Christ room.  
She gave God a human dwelling  
In a mother's womb.  
Who could guess the final story?  
- cross and glory; empty tomb!

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## Symbol 3 – An Angel

To show that Christ's coming into the world was so truly special that it required an Angel to announce it. He is God made man. God amongst us.

### Reading: Luke 1 v 26-38

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.' Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants for ever; his kingdom will never end.' 'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail.' 'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May your word to me be fulfilled.' Then the angel left her.

## The Annunciation Monologue

I cannot, to this day, tell you why it happened. I cannot, to this day, tell you how it happened. Maybe I fell asleep. Perhaps it was all a dream. But this I know... this I thought in my mind... It had been a busy day. There had been much to do, sweeping, cleaning, mending, baking, dusting, bed-making. I was alone and very tired. Perhaps I just nodded off - just for a moment, you understand. But I know there was a bright light, and, for a moment, great fear, and then the voice... How could I invent these things? I am a young girl, I know so little... There was a voice in the light, saying, "God has blessed you, Mary." Yes, it said my name, just like that! And I did not feel blessed, only very, very frightened. But I listened... 'You will conceive a son, and call him Jesus. And he will be the Son of God.' He calls this a blessing! To be a disgrace to my family, to be a disgrace to Joseph, to never be fit to marry. What kind of blessing can possibly come from this? What blessing could there be in a child conceived in this way? And the Son of God! This is madness! Yet the voice went on... "You will have a child, born of the Holy Spirit, a sacred, holy child. Do not be afraid? Then, suddenly, the light was gone, and with it went my fear. I moved, and found that my heart was saying 'Let it be as God wills. I am his to command. What will come, will come. Just as the Lord wills it.'

## StF 190 – Angels from the realms of glory

- 1) Angels, from the realms of glory,  
Wing your flight o'er all the earth;  
You who sang creation's story,  
Now proclaim Messiah's birth:
- 2) Shepherds in the field abiding,  
Watching o'er your flocks by night,  
God with us is now residing,  
Yonder shines the infant Light:
- 3) Sages, leave your contemplations;  
Brighter visions beam afar;  
Seek the great Desire of nations;  
You have seen his natal star:
- 4) Saints before the altar bending,  
Watching long in hope and fear,  
Suddenly the Lord, descending,  
In his temple shall appear:
- 5) Though an infant now we view him,  
He shall fill his Father's throne,  
Gather all the nations to him;  
Every knee shall then bow down:

*James Montgomery*

## Symbol 4 – A Lamb and Crown

To explain that Jesus is both the Son of God, a wonderful King, worthy of our praise AND that in coming amongst us he was perfect like a newborn lamb, and that he lived a perfect life.

### Reading: Luke 2 v 1-14

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 their 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 guest room available for them.

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 that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, 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 heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.'

## Song – Immanuel, O Immanuel

Immanuel, O Immanuel,  
Bowed in awe, I worship at Your feet,  
And sing Immanuel, God is with us,  
Sharing my humanness, my shame,  
Feeling my weaknesses, my pain,  
Taking the punishment, the blame, Immanuel.

And now my words cannot explain  
All that my heart cannot contain,  
How great are the glories of Your name,  
Immanuel.

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## Reflection

### ***I wonder what would you like for Christmas?***

I grew up in a family where, rather than surprise each other, we tended to check out what we'd like to get. So on Christmas Day there were few surprises but much satisfaction. CS Lewis, writing in simpler times and before the internet, already saw the danger of the commercial bustle which makes Christmas so busy that Christ is in danger of getting squeezed out. These days the incessant tug of technology forces us to attend to a wide range of Christmas greetings randomly popping up on WhatsApp, Facebook, the app formerly known as Twitter, email and good old-fashioned cards! My problem is that I keep losing track of who has greeted me, where and how, and if I have actually replied!

### ***I wonder what would you like for Christmas?***

I'd like a little more time and a little less pressure, please. Some families are choosing not to do gifts this Christmas, recognising the pressure of the cost of living. Others are choosing to donate to charity in the name of their loved ones. And in the background – as an eco-church community - I shudder at the environmental impact of printing, sending and binning so many Christmas Cards. Yet I've always preferred something real to something electronic! A difficult one to resolve...

### ***I wonder what would you like for Christmas?***

If you're living in a war zone - like the ordinary people of Gaza/Israel and eastern Ukraine/Russia - I'm sure they would desperately want the fighting to stop. All the talk of peace on earth and goodwill to humankind rings hollow when you're not experiencing it.

### ***I wonder what would you like for Christmas?***

I'd like a new baby please. (Sorry Michele – that's not meant to be a surprise!) No not just any baby. The one in the manger. I'd like a chance to stop and wonder at what it means for the God of the Universe, the mighty Word through whom all things were made, to become vulnerable and dwell among us. I'd like to have time, like the shepherds and wise men, to simply gaze at God's most precious gift to us and wonder at the gift of love this represents. Sometimes we might feel angry with God for the state of the world. We might cry out to God, "Why don't you do something?" And our gracious mother God in heaven replies: "I have done something. I sent you this baby. Stop and listen to his message and invite others to do the same!"

We can't fix the problems of wars in far distant places. But we can fix the family feuds which are closer to home. We don't need to take offence, even where someone is trying to give it. We don't need to insist that the other person has to say sorry first. We can extend the olive branch to anyone we've been in conflict with. That would be a beautiful gift for the baby – wouldn't it?

### ***I wonder what would you like for Christmas?***

I'd like church to reach out beyond its walls making new connections to young and old, black and white, gay and straight, tall and short, single and partnered... I'd like some new people to visit church, to know a welcome so wonderful, generous and graceful that they are drawn into the life of our community of faith until they find their own faith in this wonderful mystery of God in Christ... until they become part of the church family. If you're here today and you don't often go to church, know that you are welcome. And why not make going to church your new year's resolution? The Bible promises that if you – if we all - seek God and really want to find God, then God will be there for you. And to those here who are church regulars, remember when you go to Church for Christmas, to greet the strangers and the visitors before you greet your friends. Mary and Joseph were strangers in a busy, unfamiliar city. Thankfully they were given the greeting of an innkeeper who didn't turn them away but instead made room. Let's have that same spirit of looking out for all in need.

### ***I wonder what would you like for Christmas?***

I'd like what I already have, please... Emmanuel, which means God is with us. Here, in the manger, is someone who loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you. He is the original Christmas Gift. He gave himself to us. Let us in our turn give him to the world. Come, Emmanuel. Come and bring peace in this place, bring peace to the place of your birth, bring peace to the whole world. And change our hearts, that we may make peace with one another and worship at your feet. Come, Lord Jesus, and do not delay! And may God bless us, every one. Amen

### **Symbol 5 – A Star**

To show us that Jesus was not only King of the Jews but that he came for all people. The Wise Men travelled from far off lands, they were not Jews, and yet God guided them so that they too could worship Jesus. Jesus came for all of us here today. God's star guides us all to him.

### **Reading: Matthew 2 v 1-11**

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, 'Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.' When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 'In Bethlehem in Judea,' they replied, 'for this is what the prophet has written: "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'" Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, 'Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.' After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

### **StF 272 – From heaven you came**

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|--|---|
| 1) From heaven You came, helpless babe,<br>Entered our world, Your glory veiled;<br>Not to be served but to serve,<br>And give Your life that we might live.   | 3) Come see His hands and His feet,<br>The scars that speak of sacrifice,<br>Hands that flung stars into space<br>To cruel nails surrendered. |
| <i>Ch) This is our God, the servant King,<br/>He calls us now to follow Him<br/>To bring our lives as a daily offering<br/>Of worship to the servant King.</i> | 4) So let us learn how to serve,<br>And in our lives enthrone Him,<br>Each other's needs to prefer<br>For it is Christ we're serving.         |
| 2) There in the garden of tears,<br>My heavy load He chose to bear;<br>His heart with sorrow was torn,<br>'Yet not my will but Yours', He said.                |   |

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### **Symbol 6 – A Candle**

To share the Good News that, just as light in our world is the source of all life – so Jesus is the true light and life of the all the world. Just as a candle guides us in the dark, so too we may come to know Jesus as our friend and guide. By believing in him our sins may be forgiven, and we may become Children of God.

## Reading: John 1 v 1-3, 11-14

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. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive 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 Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

## Prayers

Gracious God, be with us this day and this season. Bless us with joy as we engage with this yearly remembrance of the birth of your only son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Grant that as we receive him as our redeemer, so we may have assurance and confidence to approach him when he will come again to be our judge. Jesus, it is you who by your birth into poverty gathers into one; all people and all creation on earth and in heaven. Send the Holy Spirit to grant us inner peace, bless us and this world with much needed goodwill, lead us along the narrow path of sacrifice that is your way, inspiring us to grow more like you. **Amen**

## StF 202 – Hark the herald angels sing

- 1) 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.'
- 2) 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:
- Ch) *Hark! The herald-angels sing  
Glory to the new-born King.*
- 3) 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 man no more may die,  
Born to raise the sons of earth,  
Born to give them second birth:

*Charles Wesley*

## Blessing

As our time of worship comes to a close, I pray that you may know the presence of God with you in the days to come. May God help us all to be people who bring more light than darkness into this world. May we ask for less this Christmas and be generous towards those who have little. May God bless you and may the hope and love of Christ be with you and all of your loved ones this Christmas. We ask all these things in the name of Jesus who is our light and lives and reigns with God and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**