

Christmas Day 2020



[Introduction](#)

For some, Christmas Day 2020 will be like no other they have previously experienced. Covid-19 is definitely leaving its fingerprint on it and may be it's helping us remember that Christmas is about Christ! Without Christ there is no Christmas – just 'mas'. What does that mean – a pile of scrunpled, torn wrapping paper and tangled ribbon, too much indigestion from overeating and drinking, tension in families as too much is expected, too much spent, trees, stockings, gingerbread? Let's see what the gospels tell us, and ask again "And is it true?"

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Readings for this Sunday

These are the readings for this Sunday which you may like to read in your bibles at home.

Matthew 1:18-20

Luke 2:8-20

Matthew 1: 18-20 - The Birth of Jesus the Messiah

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

Luke 2: 8-20 - The Shepherds and the Angels

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Reflection by Anne Edwards

Christmas is about – Christ!

For many Christians, Christmas begins with the Midnight Eucharist – not this year. For many, Christmas is the gathering of the family from near and far – not this year. Covid-19 is definitely leaving its fingerprint on Christmas this year, but may be, just may be, it’s helping us remember that Christmas is about Christ!

Without Christ there is no Christmas – just ‘mas’. What does that mean – a pile of scrunpled, torn wrapping paper and tangled ribbon, too much indigestion from overeating and drinking, tension in families as too much is expected, too much spent, trees, stockings, gingerbread?

And yet Jesus’ coming changed the world for ever, and in particular the lives of you and me. So let us pause and look at the Christmas story through fresh eyes – perhaps easier to do this year as there are many restrictions, plans having to be changed, abandoned even, less distractions.

Neither Mark’s nor John’s gospels begin with the Christmas story.

Mark starts by telling us his gospel is about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, followed by words from the prophet Isaiah, before launching into the arrival of John the Baptist on the scene. The gospel of John begins “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 ...” In other words, John is going even further back in time – right back to creation.

Both Matthew and Luke place it firmly in history.

Matthew begins with the genealogy of Jesus as the son of David, before moving on to Mary’s miraculous pregnancy and Joseph’s visit by an angel of the Lord, whose task it was to dissuade Joseph from divorcing Mary quietly. Matthew tells us Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea during the time of King Herod. A time in the history of Israel.

Luke on the other hand begins his story with the meeting Zechariah had when an angel of the Lord told him his prayer for a son had been heard and his wife Elizabeth would bear him this much-prayed-for son. This story then moves to Nazareth and the angel Gabriel’s visit to Mary. Here we’re also told this was at the time of Herod, King of Judea, and that Caesar Augustus ordered a census of the entire Roman world, which necessitated Joseph to take pregnant Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem “the town of David”.

Luke also tells us of a boring and rather cold night-shift of shepherds with the sheep, and the explosion of light and song, and an angelic message “I bring you good news ... Today in the city of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.” (Luke 2)

And that baby whose birth was announced to the shepherds became our Shepherd, the Shepherd who knows his sheep, and whose sheep know his voice.

This year in the wake of the pandemic many of us will be spending Christmas Day at home alone. No doubt for some it will feel a very different day from previous Christmas Days, and may be from one they were hoping for, so I’d like to suggest you read the Christmas story in both Matthew (ch. 1:18-20) and Luke (ch. 2:8-20) and ask yourself: who do you identify with,

feel with and for in the story? Where are you imaginatively in the story? Walk yourself through the story.

It is good to remember again the messiness and humanity of the birth of Jesus, of how his earthly story began, and perhaps take a moment to “ponder” with Mary on the earth-changing miracle that took place, of “the Word made flesh”, when God, like us, took his first crying breath!

We can also celebrate the best news of all – that God came into our broken, hurt, confused world, and is now with us. He made His “dwelling among us”. Today we celebrate that God is with us – and even though the power of death tried to claim him 33 years later, he broke that power for ever.

For some of us this year Christmas is being pared down – so we have a chance to take another hard, long look, and, as John Betjeman did in his poem “Christmas”, ask the question: “And is it true?”

The final verses of his poem read:

And is it true? And is it true,
This most tremendous tale of all,
Seen in stained-glass window’s hue,
A baby in an ox’s stall?
The Maker of the stars and sea
Became a Child on earth for me?

And is it true? For if it is
No loving fingers tying strings
Around those tissued fripperies,
The sweet and silly Christmas things,
Bath salts and inexpensive scent
And hideous tie so kindly meant,

No love that in a family dwells,
No carolling in frosty air,
Nor all the steeple-shaking bells

Can with this single Truth compare –
That God was Man in Palestine
And lives today in Bread and Wine.

John Betjeman

Tomorrow – what about tomorrow? Will Christmas be over, will it have come to an end? No, of course not! The significance, the message of the season, is not over. God sent his Son. And Christmas continues in us every day, as we seek to live out the consequences of that – of ‘Jesus in our lives’. We can go on ‘pondering’, looking for and listening out for God in our day by day lives. We don’t all get angelic visitors! Sometimes God makes it very clear what He wants from us; at other times it’s just a nudge, a hint. We have to learn to hear His voice – so keep on ‘pondering’ like Mary and invite Jesus into our hearts every day and into 2021!

Prayers

Collect for Christmas Day

Almighty God,
you have given us your only-begotten Son
to take our nature upon him
and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin:
grant that we, who have been born again
and made your children by adoption and grace
may be daily renewed by your Holy Spirit;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit
one God, now and for ever. Amen

Today, in all the demands, we pray for those who are facing a Christmas without someone they love.

God of goodness, hear us and be with us.

Today, in all the delights, we pray for those who are facing a Christmas alone.

God of goodness, hear us and be with us.

Today, in all the celebration, we pray for those who are facing conflicts.

God of goodness, hear us and be with us.

Today, in all the time at dinner tables, we pray for those who are hungry.

God of goodness, hear us and be with us.

God, you remind us that the truest gift is the gift of love. Today, giving and unwrapping gifts, with joy and maybe even disappointment, let us love one another, because love comes from you. And love is the best thing worth celebrating. Amen.

Lord Jesus, bringing all that I bring to you today, my thoughts, my feelings, my hopes, the things that have worked out and the things that haven't, the joys and the sadnesses: I offer them all to you, knowing that you will accept everything I bring, because I bring it and offer it to you. Amen.

As our saviour taught us, so we pray
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

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King.
Let every heart prepare him room, and heaven and nature sing,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven, 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,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

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

Parish Prayers for the week ahead

In the Anglican cycle of prayer:

Sunday	Christians in other denominations and the work of the ecumenical movement
Monday	Fond du Lac (The Episcopal Church); Fort Worth (The Episcopal Church)
Tuesday	Fredericton (Canada); Freetown (Sierra Leone)
Wednesday	Gahini (Rwanda); Gambia (West Africa)
Thursday	Gasabo (Rwanda); Gboko (Nigeria)
Friday	The Diocese of Aba – The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion)
Saturday	The Diocese of Aba Ngwa North – The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion)

In our Diocesan Cycle of Prayer:

Sunday	Parish of Kimpton (Deanery of Wheathampstead)
Monday	Parish of Markyate Street, St John the Baptist (Deanery of Welwyn)
Tuesday	Parish of Redbourn (Deanery of Wheathampstead)
Wednesday	Parish of Sandridge (Deanery of Wheathampstead)
Thursday	Parish of Wheathampstead (Deanery of Wheathampstead)
Friday	Bishop of St Albans
Saturday	Parish of Bedford

For the homes and families in:

Sunday	Wensley Close, West Common
Monday	West Common Close, West Common Grove
Tuesday	West Common Way, Westminster Court
Wednesday	Wheatfield Avenue, Wheatfield Road
Thursday	Wheathampstead Road, Willow Court
Friday	Acacia Walk, Aldwick Road
Saturday	Alzey Gardens

The Sick:

Berkeley, Amy Smart, Claire, Jo, Sue, Christine Strohm, Hermione, Karen, Sue Holt, Enid Giles, Jo Young, Chris, Sophie Crowley and all whose names are entered on our St Luke's Cell Prayer List.

For the recently deceased:

Rosalind Drysdale, Emily Herbert-Scott, Charles Troward, Grace Goate

On their year's mind:

Lilian Jones, Patricia Quin, Thomas Wright, Amelie Simkin

[A reminder... of this phone service:](#)

Daily Hope – dial 0800 804 8044 for prayer, reflection, music and worship services from the Church of England. A weekly service is available from 9 am every Sunday.

Church at home:

We are delighted to produce each week these printed papers. If you would prefer not to receive these papers each week, please let Julie in the parish office know. If you are aware of others in the parish who would also value the opportunity to worship at home in this way, do please contact a member of the Ministry team or Julie. The next edition of Church at Home will be for Epiphany, 3rd January 2021.

Parish Office:

The office is now closed for the Christmas period and will re-open on 5 January.