

Transcript of the Carol Service 2020

Service Leader: Delyth Mayhew

Speaker: Mark Reid

Welcome and

Introduction to the service -

at this point I want to thank all those who have contributed to this morning's service, which will proceed without announcements or comment.

Let us pray –

Heavenly Father -

As we gather for worship today, whether in church or online,
there is excitement in the air, a song on our lips and joy in our hearts.

Help us to remember why we celebrate Christmas.

May the Word which was made flesh be heard in our worship.

May Christ be born again in this congregation and in the life of every person here.

May the love of Christmas fill this church and the peace of Christmas fill our hearts.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord

AMEN

Lighting the 4th candle

On this fourth Sunday of Advent,
as we think about the coming of Jesus Christ,
we light the candle of love.

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us! (1 John 3:1)

This is how God showed His love:

He sent His one and only Son into the world
that we might live through Him. (1 John 4:9)

CAROL 438 *Once in Royal David's city*

MARY HOCKEY *Isaiah 9 verses 2,6,7,*

Christ's birth and kingdom are foretold

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 forever.
The zeal of the LORD Almighty
will accomplish this.

SONG **1383** ***Jesus God's righteousness revealed***

GORDON COOPER **Micah 5 verses 2, 4, 5**

Foretelling the glory of little Bethlehem

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."
He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD,
in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.
And they will live securely,
for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.
And he will be our peace.

CAROL 420 ***O little town of Bethlehem***

PAM LINEHAM **Luke 1 verses 26-35,38**

The angel Gabriel appears to Mary

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 forever; 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

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled."
Then the angel left her.

CAROL ***The angel Gabriel from heaven came***

SHAUN STORER **Matthew 1 verses 18-23**

St Matthew tells of the birth of Jesus

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about:

His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered 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 home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet:

"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

GWYNNETH **ESMARCH** **Luke 2 verses 1- 7**

St Luke tells of the birth of Jesus

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.

CAROL ***Mary did you know (recording by Kathy Matthea)***

POEM **READ BY Corinne Stockdale**

THE SHEPHERD'S DOG **by **Leslie Norris****

Out on the windy hill
Under that sudden star
A blaze of radiant light
Frightened my master.

He got up, left our sheep,
Tramped over the moor.
And I, following,

Came to this open door,

Sidled in, settled down,
Head on my paws,
Glad to be here, away
From the wind's sharpness.

Such warmth is in this shed,
Such comfort from this Child,
That I forget my hard life,
Ignore the harsh world,

And see on my master's face
The same joy I possess,
The knowledge of peace,
True happiness.

JUNE COLE

Luke 2 verses 8 -16

The shepherds go to the manger

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, 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."

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

CAROL 23

Angels from the realms

POEM

read by Carl Berlemont

WHAT THE DONKEY SAW by U A Fanthorpe

No room in the inn, of course,
And not that much in the stable
What with the shepherds, Magi, Mary,
Joseph, the heavenly host –
Not to mention the baby
Using our manger as a cot.

You couldn't have squeezed another cherub in
For love or money.

Still, in spite of the overcrowding,
I did my best to make them feel wanted.
I could see the baby and I
Would be going places together

BRIAN **Matthew 2 verses 1 -11**

The wise men are led by the star to Jesus

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.

CAROL 31 ***As with gladness***

POEM read by Debbie Marfleet

BC:AD by UA Fanthorpe

This was the moment when Before
Turned into After, and the future's
Uninvented timekeepers presented arms.

This was the moment when nothing
Happened. Only dull peace
Sprawled boringly over the earth.

This was the moment when even energetic Romans
Could find nothing better to do
Than counting heads in remote provinces.

And this was the moment
When a few farm workers and three
Members of an obscure Persian sect
Walked haphazard by starlight straight
Into the kingdom of heaven.

Sermon - Mark

NATIVITY SCENE

Take a look at this lovely nativity scene. It's one you can buy at life size scale and put into your garden, or churches can put outside the front of their buildings. It's one of the most common silhouette pictures of the nativity you'll see. But look carefully at it, does it really show Mary and Joseph next to the manger? Or does it show two large dinosaurs fighting over a watermelon? Once you see it, you'll never be able to unsee it. If it isn't clear, here are the dinosaurs coloured in.

DINOSAURS.

So why not just choose another nativity picture. Each year the Royal Mail produces lovely Christmas stamps and happily, many years, they have a religious theme rather than just snowmen and robins. So here's Mary and Joseph again with the manger. Lovely, and nice colours too. But look more closely: Joseph appears to be adopting his best Alvin Stardust pose as Mary accompanies him on keyboards as he sings "My Coo-ca-choo!" You won't unsee that one again either!

Why do I say all this? Because once we have a wrong perception of something, it's sometimes difficult to explore the truth and such is the problem with the story of the nativity.

So as we have read the familiar words of the nativity story from God's word, what image slipped into our minds? Maybe this one. TRADITIONAL NATIVITY PICTURE. It's twee, but is it right? We know it isn't. The wise men never visited the manger. They weren't wise either; they were magi – gentile astrologers from the East, probably Zoroastrians. They weren't kings and we don't know how many there were. You may think me pedantic by questioning centuries-held tradition. Yet, the only accounts that exist of Jesus' birth in Matthew and Luke's gospels don't place the magi at the manger. But does constant repetition of a false view of something make it true? Does it matter if it isn't true as long as it gives us a feeling of the romance and wonder of Christmas?

PICTURE. One Christmas, children were asked by their teacher to draw a picture of the nativity. One little boy, let's call him Johnnie, because all little boys in stories like this are called Johnnie, drew a picture something like this, with two stick people, a stick baby and a rather fat man, presumably the innkeeper. The teacher said in a politically correct manner "Who's the nutritionally challenged innkeeper in your picture?" "You mean the fat bloke?" Johnnie replied "He's Round John Virgin."

I know that's an old one but it underlines another problem with the traditional romantic image of the nativity. Was there an inn? Of course there was, I hear you say. Most Bible scholarship these days indicates that the traditional translation of "inn" is not correct and the better translation is "guest room." Does that matter? In one sense it does because it changes how we perceive what was going on in Bethlehem the night Jesus was born. And it wasn't nice.

If there was a guest room, then Joseph would have been staying with family: people he knew. What sort of family doesn't give the pregnant woman the guest room to give birth in, but relegates her to an area where animals were kept? Would you do that?

It suggests that Joseph and Mary were out of favour. Why? The answer is a simple one. Mary had conceived out of wedlock? That was a no-no; unacceptable in that society and a woman involved and her offspring would always be tarred with a bad brush even if they did marry a respectable guy like Joseph.

The birth of a child, particularly a firstborn son would have been an occasion of great celebration, but here was baby Jesus, relegated with his mother to a cattle trough. Happily, that's not how heaven saw it and there was great rejoicing there and the heavenly host quickly drummed up a crowd of shepherds to rejoice with them.

We don't know this is exactly what happened because of the brevity of the nativity accounts, but it is consistent with the rest of both narrative stories in Matthew and Luke. Yes there is the wonder of the angels, but the rest isn't romantic. The Son of God was welcomed by the world by a tide of indifference, judgmentalism, gossip, unbelief, concern by the civil and religious authority and ultimately by genocide. I would always to encourage you to balance your reading of the Christmas story. It is full of the wonder of the incarnation, but also the horror of the way the world welcomed Him.

And that comes out so clearly in both Luke 2 and Matthew 2. We are about to have read to us a scripture from the first chapter of John's Gospel which says this: *He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. John 1:11 (NIV)*

Jesus was greeted by indifference, unbelief and opposition by "respectable" Jewish religious and civil leaders and upright Jews generally. The only people who believed and worshipped him were a rag-tag of shepherds (the lowest strata of Jewish society). Later there were a bunch of magi who came to worship who weren't even believers in Judaism. The only religious Jews who recognised Jesus were an elderly priest, Simeon and an elderly prophetess Anna. The active priesthood didn't. Right from His birth Jesus was rejected by people regarded most important – only those with the humility to seek Him found Him. In truth, nothing much has changed in 2000 years.

VERSE

Of course that rejection actually foretold centuries before in Isaiah's prophecy: *He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Isaiah 53:3 (NIV)*

The Son of God had all the worst of humanity and had all the forces of hell arrayed against Him. They were going to get Him, try to destroy His reputation, and then kill Him. How awful. Let me give you an even more significant verse: Isaiah 53 in verse 10a *But it was the LORD's good plan to crush him and cause him grief. People may have wanted Jesus dead for their own selfish reasons right from His birth, but it was always God's intention to crush Him, to cause His death on the cross. Why?*

ANGELS The true light of the Christmas story isn't the wonder of the angels but the nature of the message they brought of a Saviour being born, Jesus, Yeshua means God saves! It was always God's intention that His Son should die, in order that He may rescue the human race, people who He dearly loved so much that He was prepared to take their punishment and suffering on Himself.

Let me give you the rest of Isaiah 53:10 *Yet when his life is made an offering for sin, he will have many descendants. He will enjoy a long life, and the LORD's good plan will prosper in his hands.*

The Jesus that died on a cross, is the same Jesus that rose again. One of the pictures of Advent when have sung about in the last four weeks has been about God the Son coming to Earth. Coming as a shaft of light, shining in the darkness, coming to bring forgiveness, hope, life. And that was brought by the death of Jesus on the cross. He took the punishment that should have been ours as He suffered and died. But He rose again. He's alive.

Let me finish the bit of John's gospel I quoted earlier: ¹¹ *He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.* ¹² *Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—* ¹³ *children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will,*

but born of God. John 1:11-13. That was God's intention as He crushed Jesus, as He punished Him for our sins, as Jesus' life was laid down.

Jesus came to die for each man, woman, boy and girl. He came to rescue us, save us from the terrors of death, the evils of life and the failure and sin of our lives. Yes, He even died to open a way for those who had rejected Him to turn around and follow Him because He loves all. It doesn't matter who we are: what race, what gender, what creed, what social class, whether we are rich or poor, whether we are really bad or thought of as respectable. His love for all means that He offers us each life and hope, forgiveness, a relationship with God for eternity, if we would trust and follow Him.

That's why I encourage you to never to get too caught up in the romance and wonder of Christmas, because there is so much that's dark about the nativity story which has been massaged out with less than the truth over the centuries. And it was to face that darkness that the Son, the eternal Word, the Light of the World came. We celebrate that shaft of light Christmas that should make us rejoice but recognise too the darkness that Jesus paid a huge price to dispel so that He might offer forgiveness, life and hope to all who are prepared to trust and follow Him. And that gift is still on offer to all who like the shepherds and the magi will come in humility to Him.

So, I conclude with a question. Have you accepted Jesus into your life? This Christmas has been rather different hasn't it? But make it *really* different in 2020 by accepting Jesus' gift of life and follow Him. He reaches His hand out to you this morning. Will you take it?

Let's pray shall we?

Lord Jesus, thank you that you were willing to come to this earth as a baby to rescue me. Thank you that you died on the cross, thank you that you rose from the dead in order to give me new life, life to the full, life that's eternal. Thank you that you died to save me from my sins, please forgive me and accept me into your family; I want to follow you, I want to serve you. Fill me with your Spirit and walk with me each day I pray.

I ask this in Your name. Amen

As we come to the end of the service, let's hear those words of John in His gospel in full as it were, as Delyth reads the first part of chapter 1 to us.

DELYTH John 1 verses 1 -14

St John unfolds the great mystery of the incarnation

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.
In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 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.

CAROL 155 ***Hark the Herald Angels sing***

(Ending the service)

DELYTH

A Sending

The wait is almost over, Christmas is nearly here!

Emmanuel is about to be born.

So go out, into this Christmas season, aware that God is with you.

The wait is almost over, Christmas is nearly here!

The King who has come, and who will come again,
sends you out to demonstrate his Kingdom on earth.

The long expected King, born to the sound of angels singing,
sends you out to worship him with your lives.

The King who was born poor and humble,
sends you to serve those who are weak and needy in the world.

The wait is almost over, Christmas is nearly here!

.....
And so we come to the end of our service today. May this week be a good one for you, and as we remember the birth of Jesus, may we share in the song of the angels, the gladness of the shepherds and the wisdom of the wise men.

And Happy Christmas!

As we leave, we sing this benediction to each other and to all those we love.