

The Benefice of Flitton, Pulloxhill and Silsoe
Growing as beacons of Christ's light in our communities



A Virtual Service for Christmas Eve 2021 with Rev Anne Barker

Opening Carol:

O Holy Night - *sung by St Martin's Voices*

John Sullivan Dwight (1813-1893) based on Placide Cappeau (1808-1877)

Welcome

Call to worship

This tonight is the meeting place of heaven and earth.
For this is the stable in which God
keeps his appointment to meet his people.
Not many high are here, not many holy;
not many innocent children, not many worldly wise;
not all familiar faces, not all frequent visitors.
But, if only strangers met, that would be enough.
For Bethlehem was not the hub of the universe,
nor was the stable a platform for famous folk.
In an out-of-the-way place which folk never thought to visit –
here God kept and keeps his promises;
there God sends his son.
I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people:
to you is born this night in the city of David a Saviour,
who is the Messiah, the Lord.

Carol:

Silent Night – sung by Maggie Jeeves

John Freeman Young (1887) based on Joseph Mohr (1818)

Confession

As we kneel with the shepherds before the newborn
Christ-child we open our hearts in penitence and faith:

**All: We confess that Christ's birth has gone unnoticed.
Now, as then, we have not made room
in our day to day lives.
Now, as then, we have mislaid
your message of reconciling love.
Now, as then, we have ignored
the stillness of your presence.
Gift-giving God, forgive us.
Free us from our self-centeredness.
Help us to accept your love so freely given
that we may live as you have called us to live. Amen.**

Jesus knows our every weakness, and loves us still.
Awaken us to the promise of Christ's amazing grace.
Friends, believe the good news of the gospel.

All: In Jesus Christ we are forgiven!

Collect

**All: Eternal God,
in the stillness of this night
you sent your almighty Word
to pierce the world's darkness with the light of salvation:
give to the earth the peace that we long for
and fill our hearts with the joy of heaven
through our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen**

Carol:

Come adore the humble King – arranged & sung by Katie Ritson

Matt Boswell & Matt Papa (CCLI 7134769)

The Birth of Jesus

2 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to their own town to register.

⁴ 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. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ 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.

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests."

¹⁵ 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."

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

(New International Version)

Sermon

Carol:

O little town of Bethlehem – sung by St Martin's Voices

1 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.

2 O morning stars, together
proclaim the holy birth,
And praises sing to God the King,
and peace to men on earth;
For Christ is born of Mary;
and gathered all above,
while mortals sleep, the angels keep
their watch of wondering love.

3 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.

4 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 Emmanuel.

Phillips Brooks (1835-1893) (CCLI 7004604)

Prayers – Margaret Butt

From 'The Second Intercessions Handbook', by John Pritchard

*The response to the words 'In this season of light' is **be light for the world** '*

In this season of gifts, we celebrate your coming as the only gift we really need. As we enjoy the surprises and the imagination of those who give us presents, may the child in the straw be the gift that really overwhelms us. And may our giving to others flow from hearts motivated by gratitude for your glorious gift.

*In this season of light, **be light for the world***

In this season of family gatherings, we celebrate your coming to be part of a human family. As we experience the delights and the frustrations of family life this Christmas, especially the fact that we may not be able to meet with all our family because of Covid, may the child in the straw be the still life who holds us together. And may our care for each other reflect your profound care for us all.

*In this season of light, **be light for the world***

In this season of memories, we celebrate our corporate memory of your arrival in darkness, a sharp cry in the night air, animals shuffling nearby, rough shepherds from the hills, a star, strange Visitors from the east. And our own individual memories take us back to distant times of greater innocence and less cluttered lives, of other relationships and different places. May the child in the straw be the continuity we need, the thread of gold that holds past and present in a single story.

*In this season of light, **be light for the world.***

In this season of peace, we celebrate the peacemakers who listen to the angels' song and seek to bring peace to your people on earth. And yet we stand on the vulnerable edge of violence in many parts of the world; May the child in the straw be a reminder of another way and a greater light, one that unites every race under heaven.

*In this season of light, **be light for the world.***

In this season of hope, we celebrate your coming like the dawn after a long night. As we struggle with our personal darkness, the issues and conflicts, the temptations and confusions, so may the child in the straw draw us into a larger and safer space, where complexity dissolves into simplicity, and your light shines for ever.

*In this season of light, **be light for the world.***

Lord of light, you have come to draw us out of darkness into your glorious light.
We come to you afresh this Christmas, longing for a new start and another chance.
Take our Christmas celebrations and fill them with golden, glowing hope to sustain us
through this coming year.

We ask this in the new-born name of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

A prayer concerning Coronavirus

God of compassion,
be close to those who are ill, afraid or in isolation.
in their loneliness, be their consolation;
in their anxiety, be their hope;
in their darkness, be their light;
through him who suffered alone on the cross,
but reigns with you in glory,
Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

All: **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.**

Carol:

O come all ye faithful - sung by St Martin's Voices

1 O come, all ye faithful,
joyful and triumphant
O come ye, o come ye to Bethlehem
come and behold him
born the King of Angels.

Refrain:
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
Christ the Lord.

2 God of God,
Light of Light;
lo, he abhors not the virgin's womb;
very God,
begotten not created;

3 Sing, choirs of angels,
sing in exultation,
sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!
Glory to God
in the highest:

4 Yea, Lord, we greet thee,
born this happy morning:
Jesus, to thee be all glory given;
word of the Father,
now in flesh appearing;

Translated from the Latin (18th century) by Frederick Oakely (1802-1880) (CCLI 5386491)

BLESSING

The joy of the angels, the wonder of the shepherds,
and the peace of the Christ-child, fill your hearts this Christmas time
and the blessing of God Almighty the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be with each one of you and those in your hearts
today and always.

Amen.

Closing Carol

Joy to the World – *sung by St Martin's Voices*

1 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.

2 Joy to the earth! The Saviour reigns!
Your sweetest songs employ
while fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

3 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.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

***MERRY CHRISTMAS and a
HEALTHY, HAPPY & PEACEFUL NEW YEAR***