Cheshire South Circuit Worship at Home - Sunday 21st December 2025

Opening Prayer

Today is the 4th Sunday of Advent. We pray using the words from hymn no. 165.

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.

CCL 821965 Mark Earey

StF no. 169: *Come, thou long-expected Jesus*

- 1 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.
- **2** Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art, dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.
- **3** Born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a king, born to reign in us for ever, now thy gracious kingdom bring.
- **4** By thine own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone; by thine all-sufficient merit raise us to thy glorious throne.

Charles Wesley

Let us pray together

Gracious God,

On this last Sunday of Advent, we offer our adoration of the gift of a child, a gift promised and longed for. We prepare our hearts once again to sing your praises with the angelic host. We anticipate with awe the knowledge of what You, our loving Father, are about to share with us, and we give thanks for the hope of Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us.

Yet even as we prepare with hope and with adoration, praise and thanksgiving on our lips, we recognise with sadness the times when our words and actions have not prepared the way for you, have even proved a stumbling block to those seeking you.

We are truly sorry and receive with joy the promise of your Son in whose name our sins are forgiven. Praise be to God, who is with us. **Amen**.

Today's Gospel Reading: Matthew 1:18-25

¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' ²² All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ²³ 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel', which means, 'God is with us.' ²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the

Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

StF no. *Silent night*

1 Silent night, holy night: sleeps the world; hid from sight, Mary and Joseph in stable bare watch o'er the child beloved and fair sleeping in heavenly rest. 2 Silent night, holy night: shepherds first saw the light, heard resounding clear and long, far and near the angel-song: 'Chris the Redeemer is here!'

3 Silent night, holy night:
Son of God, O how bright
love is smiling from your face!
Strikes for us now the hour of grace,
Jesus, Lord at your birth.

Joseph Mohr

Time to Reflect

Do not be afraid...

I don't know about you, but telling me not to do something isn't always the best way to make it happen. Don't be clumsy, oops there goes that glass of water. Don't eat cake, but it looked so tasty and I couldn't help it. Don't think of an elephant. I reckon you are thinking of an elephant, I am.

So, I wonder, when the angel told Mary not to be afraid and then when those same words were echoed to Joseph, do I think that meant they weren't to be afraid at all? I'm not sure I do, if I am going to be really honest with you.

Do not be afraid...

What does that mean if actually, we are very much afraid? If fear is something that we are struggling to switch off from? If even the mention of it brings it rushing to the front of our mind? In my experience, and with my firm faith in the strength and love of my God, I know that if there is something I need to do, or somewhere I need to go, and if, for whatever reason, I see it as a challenge, then the fear does stay with me, albeit in the background. And when a time arrives when I feel seriously challenged, then I remind myself that God would not ask me to do anything beyond my strength to manage, and, indeed, He will send me strength to cope, even when I stumble and feel I need to give up. Is this your experience?

I might have my doubts about whether Joseph and Mary were without fear despite being told not to be, but I have no doubt that they took reassurance from those words that gave them the strength to follow God's plan. You see I think we can be afraid and still continue to move forward in faith. I think we can be afraid and find the reassurance in God that does not let fear win. I think we can be afraid and at the same time incredibly courageous.

As we make our final preparations to celebrate God with us, I am not going to tell you not to be afraid. I am going to encourage you to have courage, to be assured of God with you and to follow where God leads. For God is with us, even in the fear-filled shadows of the night and longing of our souls. Come, Lord Jesus, come. **Amen**

StF no. 173 *Into the darkness*

1 Into the darkness of this world, into the shadows of the night; into this loveless place you came, lightened our burdens, eased our pain, and made these hearts your home. Into the darkness once again -- O come, Lord Jesus, come....

Come with your love to make us whole, come with your light to lead us on, driving the darkness far from our souls:

O come, Lord Jesus, come.

2 Into the longing of our souls, into these heavy hearts of stone, shine on us now your piercing light, order our lives and souls aright, by grace and love unknown, until in you our hearts unite -- O come, Lord Jesus, come. ...

Come with your love to make us whole, come with your light to lead us on, driving the darkness far from our souls:

O come, Lord Jesus, come.

3 O Holy Child, Emmanuel, hope of the ages, God with us, visit again this broken place, till all the earth declares your praise and your great mercies own.

Now let your love be born in us, O come, Lord Jesus, come.

Come in your glory, take your place, Jesus, the Name above all names, we long to see you face to face, O come, Lord Jesus, come.

CCL821965 Maggi Dawn

A time of prayer

In the light of your presence and in hope of your word fulfilled; we pray in faith, offering into your light the needs and sorrows of the world.

Light in our darkness, come to us we pray, when daylight is far off at the darkest and coldest time of the year, come when hope is low.

Whisper to us your promise that your home is among mortals. Whisper to us your promise of a world made new.

Light in our darkness, we pray for all who work in the NHS, and for GPs, paramedics, care home staff and ambulance drivers; for their constant care under pressure for the sick, the injured and the dying. Help us to give priority to the work of caring for the sick, to the daily acts of love that bring healing.

Light in our darkness, we pray for all in leadership in our country at a time when so much is troubled. We pray for seriousness in addressing the multiple challenges we face; for preparedness to think beyond the vote-catching headlines; for readiness to preserve the fabric of society and to support the most vulnerable among us. Help us to remember what is truly valuable and to preserve it.

Light in our darkness

we pray for all who find this time of the year hard and for all who are struggling with seemingly overwhelming problems. We pray for all we know who are sick in mind or body and all who need to

know the light of your healing presence today. We pray especially for all families who have lost loved ones at this time... Surround them with your loving care.

Light in our darkness, we pray for hungry children struggling with the impacts of poverty on their daily lives; for schools who are often doing the work of feeding and clothing and for churches, libraries and other spaces in our communities that are welcoming people in for warmth and company in freezing temperatures. In a system that sometimes seems deaf to basic needs for food, shelter and warmth, may we, your church, be responsive and generous with what we have, so that others might have their basic needs met.

Restore us O God, let your face shine. **Come into our midst: come and give us life.** Disperse the long shadows that surround us. Lighten our pathway, show us the way to go and lead us onwards to the light of your coming. Come, Lord Jesus, Come. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father ...

StF no. 185 *Sing we the King who is coming to reign*

1 Sing we the King who is coming to reign; glory to Jesus, the Lamb that was slain! Life and salvation His empire shall bring, Joy to the nations when Jesus is King:

Come let us sing: praise to our King, Jesus our King, Jesus our King: this is our song who to Jesus belong: glory to Jesus, to Jesus our King.

- **2** All shall be well in His kingdom of peace; freedom shall flourish and wisdom increase; justice and truth from His sceptre shall spring; wrong shall be ended when Jesus is King:

 Come let us sing: praise to our King...
- **3** Souls shall be saved from the burden of sin; doubt shall not darken his witness within; hell has no terrors, and death has no sting; love is victorious when Jesus is King:

 Come let us sing: praise to our King...
- 4 Kingdom of Christ, for your coming we pray; hasten, O Father, the dawn of the day when this new song your creation shall sing:
 Satan is vanquished and Jesus is King:
 Come let us sing: praise to our King...

CCL821965 Charles Silvester Horne

A prayer of blessing

May we walk in and reflect the light of God with courage as we prepare to receive once again the blessing of God with us. Come, Lord Jesus, come. **Amen.**

This worship service has been prepared by Sue Taylor