

North Staffordshire Circuit (11/22)

Service Sheets For the Month of December 2025

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Sunday 7th December 2025 – 2nd Sunday of Advent

This service has been compiled by Rev Liz Singleton.

Prayer:

Lord of wisdom, power and might,
Lord of understanding and wise counsel,
we are here today to praise you.
And as we worship you
we look for a deeper understanding of your ways,
a greater appreciation of your grace,
and we desire to seek your face.
All because we want to bear fruit for you in our lives,
not just at Christmas,
but always.
Amen.

Hymn: Hark the glad sound! (StF 171)

Hark the glad sound! The Saviour comes,
the Saviour promised long;
let every heart prepare a throne,
and every voice a song.

He comes the prisoners to release,
in Satan's bondage held;
the gates of brass before him burst,
the iron fetters yield.

He comes the broken heart to bind,
the bleeding soul to cure,
and with the treasures of his grace
to enrich the humble poor.

Our glad hosannas, Prince of Peace,
your welcome shall proclaim,
and heaven's eternal arches ring
with your beloved name.

We're now already two Sundays into the season of Advent, the season of

promise and preparation, preparation to receive the promise of God for the world.

Peter and I love the 'Peanuts' comic strip and this one is especially pertinent to what I'd like to share with you today.



Advent is our chance to warm up! The time to prepare. The time when we put all the decorations in their place, buy and wrap the presents, send out the Christmas cards, stock the larder and the freezer, and do all those other things we do to get ready for Christmas Day.

And all too often that's where it stops and it's forgotten that actually it's about more than this. This time of year is about preparing ourselves as well, preparing ourselves spiritually. The trouble is that if we aren't careful the time of preparation will be over, the big day will be here, and all of a sudden it'll be the next day.

The presents will be open, the floor strewn with wrapping paper and ribbon, the turkey will be back in the fridge, cups of tea all round, gentle snoring from the corner as Mary Poppins floats across the Television screen, and suddenly that empty feeling – that Charlie Brown feeling of having been thrown into Christmas too fast!

But it doesn't need to be like that. Into the midst of all our preparation – the wrapping and the carols, the parties and the lights, comes a voice. A strident voice that turns up every year at this time, a bit like an unwanted

uncle who makes everyone feel uncomfortable. Into the midst of our preparations comes John the Baptist.....

Reading: Matthew 3: 1 – 12 NLT

In those days John the Baptist came to the Judean wilderness and began preaching. His message was, “Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.” The prophet Isaiah was speaking about John when he said,

“He is a voice shouting in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way for the LORD’s coming!
Clear the road for him!’”

John’s clothes were woven from coarse camel hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food he ate locusts and wild honey. People from Jerusalem and from all of Judea and all over the Jordan Valley went out to see and hear John. And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River.

But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to watch him baptize, he denounced them. “You brood of snakes!” he exclaimed. “Who warned you to flee the coming wrath? Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. Don’t just say to each other, ‘We’re safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.’ That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones. Even now the axe of God’s judgment is poised, ready to sever the roots of the trees. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire.

“I baptize with water those who repent of their sins and turn to God. But someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I’m not worthy even to be his slave and carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. He is ready to separate the chaff from the wheat with his winnowing fork. Then he will clean up the threshing area, gathering the wheat into his barn but burning the chaff with never-ending fire.”

John echoes the words of Isaiah “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’ John was doing his bit to help the people of the time, and us, to prepare. He is calling us to a time of preparation. His purpose

was to announce the coming of Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God. Because they'd forgotten. In the 30 short years before Jesus' ministry began, they'd forgotten the promise. And that's John's purpose...every year he appears in the midst of our Christmas preparations because we forget the promise, too.

Through the words of John the Baptist we are reminded that Christmas and the birth of Jesus is about more than what we give each other, it's about the gift God has for us.

Hymn: Wild and lone the prophet's voice (tune Aberystwyth) (StF 189)

Wild and lone the prophet's voice
echoes through the desert still,
calling us to make a choice,
bidding us to do God's will:
'Turn from sin and be baptised;
cleanse your heart and mind and soul.
Quitting all the sins you prized,
yield your life to God's control."

'Bear the fruit repentance sows:
lives of justice, truth, and love.
Trust no other claim than those;
set your heart on things above.
Soon the Lord will come in power,
burning clean the threshing floor:
then will flames the chaff devour;
wheat alone shall fill God's store."

With such preaching stark and bold
John proclaimed salvation near,
and his timeless warnings hold
words of hope to all who hear.
So we dare to journey on,
led by faith through ways untrod,
till we come at last like John
to behold the Lamb of God.

John preaches repentance but that doesn't come without the hope of forgiveness. Jesus, this baby whose birth we celebrate every year with lights and decorations, music and gifts; this baby who had no home to call his own; this child of love and grace came to offer us forgiveness. He gave himself on the cross to offer healing to this broken world filled with broken people.

A mother and her daughter are putting up the Christmas tree and talking about all the jobs that need doing before Christmas Day. "Mum," the daughter says, "I'll clean the house if I don't have to go with you to see Uncle Steve."

"Nice try," says her Mum, "but you're going."

"But Mum, why should I have to go. I hate that place. All those bad people..." The argument goes on but Mum doesn't give way.

The daughter relents and starts unpacking more Christmas decorations. She reaches into the box and pulls out her favourite, only to find it's broken. She's really upset and so is her Mum.

"You know, my Dad made this for me when I was six. He was so careful and put so much time into it. It's very precious to me. Every year I take it out of that box and I think of him. And Steve, when he was little, he used to take it off the tree and play with it. And I guess now, it kind of reminds me of him, too, because he's broken just like this. But you know, I can fix this. And Steve is very precious to God, because God made him, and God can fix him.

The daughter looked at the tree and the decoration.... "We'll go and see Uncle Steve together" she said and, giving her Mum a hug, they finished decorating the tree.

The purpose of this baby, whose birth we celebrate with such abandon, came to fix this world, to fix us, and whilst John's message can seem strident and almost jarring in the midst of the baby shower atmosphere of Christmas it is a message of hope.

And we can never forget the hope that was born on that night long ago. The hope that would grow into the man Jesus, the man who was one of us and who made the ultimate sacrifice for us. The manger can never be looked upon without the shadow of the cross falling across it for the birth

of our Saviour isn't just another sweet story. And we can't forget the cross because to do so would be to forget the hope.

The signs of Christmas are all around us – the tree, the lights, the nativity scenes, the candle, the decorations – they all point to the birth of Jesus. The promise of hope.

On Christmas Day a small manger scene sat on a table just inside the doorway to a neatly kept home. People hurried past it all day, barely noticing the tiny figures gathered around the infant tucked into golden straw. In the morning children raced past it on their way to the Christmas tree. At lunchtime, guests arrived and pushed past it, one accidentally knocking over a shepherd as they took off their winter coat.

Later in the afternoon the well-fed assembly of adults and children moved slowly past the manger again on their way from the dining room back to the living room. None of them even noticed the manger – except two. An older woman, walking with a stick, paused in front of the manger scene. Gently she put the shepherd back in the upright position. Then she looked at the infant child in the middle of the figures. After a while she became aware of her small grandson at her side. As voices drifted out from the living room the two continued to look deeply into the scene. After a while a smile spread across the woman's face and the child took her hand. In the midst of a day filled with much busyness, in the peace of that moment, the two of them quietly received God's gift.

That's how Christmas enters our lives. In quiet moments that we can easily miss if we are not prepared. Don't miss the promise of this wonderful time of year. Prepare not just your homes but your hearts this Christmas. Spend time in prayer. Read the gospel passages that tell of Jesus' birth. Prepare yourselves for the birth of Christ so that when the day comes you will recognise the quiet moment and be ready to receive the gift of hope.

Hymn: All I once held dear (StF 489)

All I once held dear, built my life upon,
all this world reveres, and wars to own,
all I once thought gain I have counted loss;
spent and worthless now, compared to this.

*Knowing you, Jesus,
knowing you,
there is no greater thing.
You're my all, you're the best,
you're my joy, my righteousness,
and I love You, Lord.*

Now my heart's desire is to know you more,
to be found in you and known as yours.
To possess by faith what I could not earn,
all-surpassing gift of righteousness.
Knowing you, Jesus.....

Oh, to know the power of your risen life,
and to know you in your sufferings.
To become like you in your death, my Lord,
so with you to live and never die.
Knowing you, Jesus.....

'Stop my child.....'

Stop, my child.
Stop rushing for a moment.

Put down the complex heavy baggage of your life.
Release your weary grip
upon the endless struggles which you battle with
and try to hide behind.

Dare to let go for a moment
And dare to walk away.

Take time.

Relax.

Be still.

Immerse yourself in stillness.

Drink deeply of the silence
and feel
the pulsing, heartbeat of your God.

Awaken your soul
to mystery;
reaffirm
the profound simplicity of his love.

Let the intimacy of his love
tenderly embrace you.

Let the warmth of his love
gently nurture you.

Let the joy of his love
enrich you.

Dwell on him in your heart
and know
that he
is less than a whisper away.

Prayers:

God of hope,
where things seem to be one big tangle of pain and unhappiness,
come with your saving love;
where people are in conflict
release them from the cycle of war and violence;
where your name is outlawed and your children are forced to hide,
break through their darkness with the light of your love;
where despair, depression and anxiety dominate,
fill those situations with unexpected peace and joy.

God of hope,
be with

Touch those we love and care with your healing hands and
surround them with your comforting presence.

God of hope,
God-with-us,
God of all time and every place:
may the earth be filled with the knowledge of you,
and may your light flow over the world,

bringing protection from darkness
and revealing to all the promise of your hope.

These and all our prayers we offer in the name of Christ our Lord
who came to bring new life to all.

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn: Hills of the north, rejoice (StF 172)

Hills of the north, rejoice,
river and mountain-spring,
hark to the advent voice;
valley and lowland, sing.
Christ comes in righteousness and love,
he brings salvation from above.

Isles of the southern seas,
sing to the listening earth;
carry on every breeze
hope of a world's new birth:
in Christ shall all be made anew;
his word is sure, his promise true.

Lands of the east, arise!
He is your brightest morn;
greet him with joyous eyes,
let praise his path adorn:
your seers have longed to know their Lord;
to you he comes, the final Word.

Shores of the utmost west,
lands of the setting sun,
welcome the heavenly guest
in whom the dawn has come:
he brings a never-ending light,
who triumphed o'er our darkest night.

Shout, as you journey on;
songs be in every mouth!
Lo, from the north they come,

from east and west and south:
in Jesus all shall find their rest,
in him the universe be blest.

Closing Words:

On your Advent journey may God bless you:
with courage to challenge restrictions,
with vision to see more than is seen,
with hope wherever you wander,
with rest whenever you are weary,
with faith to question and to ponder,
with wonder to kneel and adore.
On your Advent journey may God bless you.

Sunday 14th December 2025 – 3rd Sunday of Advent

This service has been compiled by Rev'd James Pritchard

Opening Words

We await the coming of Christ.

Let us open out hearts and minds to welcome him into our world and into our lives **Amen**

Hymn: Sing we the King who is coming to reign (StF 185)

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.*

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:

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:

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:

Charles Silvester Horne (1865–1914)

Opening Prayer

Mighty, Holy God, we adore you for:
revealing yourself to humanity through the ages;
the promises to Abraham and all his descendants for ever;

inspiring the prophet Isaiah to offer hope on the journey home;
the blessing of Mary, the joy in her soul and the praises she sang,
and today for the blessings we have in our lives.

Amen.

Reading: Psalm 146:5-10 New International Version - UK

⁵ Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord their God.

⁶ He is the Maker of heaven and earth,
the sea, and everything in them –
he remains faithful for ever.

⁷ He upholds the cause of the oppressed
and gives food to the hungry.

The Lord sets prisoners free,

⁸ the Lord gives sight to the blind,
the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down,
the Lord loves the righteous.

⁹ The Lord watches over the foreigner
and sustains the fatherless and the widow,
but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.

¹⁰ The Lord reigns for ever,
your God, O Zion, for all generations.

Praise the Lord.

Hymn: Light of the world (StF 175)

Light of the world,
you stepped down into darkness,
opened my eyes, let me see
beauty that made this heart adore you,
hope of a life spent with you.

*So here I am to worship,
here I am to bow down,
here I am to say that you're my God,
and you're altogether lovely,
altogether worthy,
altogether wonderful to me.*

King of all days
oh so highly exalted,
glorious in heaven above.
Humbly you came
to the earth you created,
all for love's sake became poor.

So here I am to worship ...

And I'll never know how much it cost
to see my sin upon that cross.
And I'll never know how much it cost
to see my sin upon that cross.

So here I am to worship ...

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Reading: Matthew 11:2-11 New International Version - UK

² When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples ³ to ask him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?'

⁴ Jesus replied, 'Go back and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵ the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. ⁶ Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.'

⁷ As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? ⁸ If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. ⁹ Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ This is the one about whom it is written:

"I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you."

¹¹ Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Reflection:

As we rapidly approach Christmas it would be easy to jump to our celebration of a child laying in a manger – to remember that precious gifts of God amongst us yet today we are given a moment to pause - amongst our preparations, amongst our preliminary celebrations we stop to remember and ponder that which lays behind our Christmas message. For to celebrate Christ coming as a child is all very well but children are born every day and have been ever since that night in Bethlehem all those years ago. What we remember and prepare to celebrate is the birth of not just any child but of a child we come to know as our saviour as the Messiah.

The Psalm earlier gives to us a foretaste of God's ways – it describes to us the wonder of God's ways and of God's kingdom – it took the early Jews, as it takes us, out of the ordinary experience of frail human life, it offers a vision of how things are with God. It contrasts that with how things are when human leaders take the fore. It talks of a world transformed and whole. We read that unlike human leaders, God keeps faith with his people, God keeps faith forever. It gives a glimpse of the coming reign of God, a reign which means richest blessings for the oppressed, for the hungry, poor. It is a foretaste of God's justice and God's riches not just for the well off or powerful but for those who need them most! No wonder the psalm ends by saying 'Praise the Lord' for we are given such a wonderful vision, a vision of how God would have things be.

Following that vision and foretaste given to us in the Psalm our second reading transformed to a different stage in the Christian story to after Jesus' birth – like Dr Who travelling to the next new adventure. In the passage from Matthew, we come to a time when Jesus' ministry has really begun, we once again come across Jesus' cousin John the Baptist the one who come and prepared the way. Things have not worked out well for John, he has found himself deeply out of favour and is in prison and whilst he is there, he hears news of Jesus and he wonders to himself is Jesus the one? *Is Jesus the fulfilment of all that has been promised...* Maybe he is wanting to reaffirm himself to know for sure that he is right, maybe like so many of us he is having a moment of doubt when his previous certainty is wavering?

Whatever the reason John sends words asking is Jesus the one and then we hear of Jesus' response. He tells John's followers to tell him what he is doing, of how the blind are given sight how those who are lame are healed, how even the dead are raised and of the good news to the poor. What has previously been proclaimed as 'the ways of God' and 'God's kingdom' are coming to reality in Jesus - he comes to live and show God's ways and he is transforming lives and the life of the world in which he ministers.

That is the good news that is behind our celebration of the child in the manger for we remember not only the precious gift of the child, but all that Christ comes to do, all that he comes to change, all that he comes to fulfil is through Jesus. In Christ God's ways are known like they have never been known before, and God's kingdom really breaks in...

Hymn: On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry (StF 182)

On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry
announces that the Lord is nigh;
awake and hearken, for he brings
glad tidings from the King of kings!

Then cleansed be every life from sin;
make straight the way for God within,
and let us all our hearts prepare
for Christ to come and enter there.

For you are our salvation, Lord,
our refuge, and our great reward;
without your grace we waste away
like flowers that wither and decay.

To heal the sick stretch out your hand,
and bid the fallen sinner stand;
shine forth, and let your light restore
earth's own true loveliness once more.

To God the Son all glory be
whose advent sets his people free,
whom, with the Father, we adore,
and Holy Spirit, evermore.

John Chandler (1806–1876)

Confession:

John encouraged people to repent to turn away from what they were doing and turn to God. So we are invited to turn from our failings and the things we have done wrong, to turn once again to God who is full of mercy and Grace

(Silence for reflection)

Forgive us Lord when we only want you to come on our terms.

We want to be at Bethlehem,

but we don't want the bother of the journey.

We want the word made flesh,

but we don't want the pains of labour.

We want reconciliation,

but we don't want change.

We want resurrection

but we don't want the tomb.

We do want you to come, Lord, but perhaps not just yet.

Forgive us, Lord, when we limit your coming and fix our terms.

Forgive us, bless us and come soon.

Help us to receive your forgiveness and live in anticipation of all you can do. **Amen.**

A Prayer Of Intercession:

This day we pray for all who journey:

children at the beginning of life's journey,

adults with family and social responsibilities,

men and women whose decisions affect the lives of others.

Jesus, our guide through life, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those whose journeying is intolerably difficult,

those denied the warmth and security of love and home,

those who struggle with internal and external pressures beyond their capacity,

those who are intimidated by the complexity of life.

Jesus, our willing guide, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those for whom this approaching Christmas is a nightmare,

those who have no resources to share,

those who, like Christ, have no place to call their own,

those who struggle with faith.
Jesus, our loving guide, **hear our prayer.**
Into your care and keeping
we commit those near and dear to us
in sickness or in health,
in wealth or in poverty,
in love or alone.
Come close, O Spirit of God,
and journey with them.
We ask this in Jesus' name.
Amen.

You may wish to say the Lord's Prayer

Hymn: Come, thou long-expected Jesus (StF 169)

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.

Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art,
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a king,
born to reign in us for ever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.

By thine own eternal Spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all-sufficient merit
raise us to thy glorious throne.

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

Closing Prayer:

As we journey towards the manger keep us mindful of your ways and your wisdom, continue to break into our world and bring your transformation. Loving God may we know your peace and joy today and always. Amen

Sunday 21st December 2025 – 4th Sunday of Advent

This service has been compiled by Rev'd Joy Ventom

Call to Worship:

Come, Lord Jesus. Come be with us.
Come be with us in our joys and celebrations.
Come be with us in our doubts and difficulties.
Come be with us to bless us and inspire us.
Come be with us to correct and guide us.
Come be with us to heal and save us.
Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Hymn: Come thou long expected Jesus (StF 169)

born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.

Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a King,
born to reign in us forever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.

By thine own eternal spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all sufficient merit,
raise us to thy glorious throne.

Prayers:

As Christmas approaches, we prepare to
join in adoration of you with the humble shepherds,
the proclaiming angels and the gifting wise men.
We adore you with our all, with our everything.

Amen.

The Almighty God brings us from the depths of
our sorrow and shame,
saves us, redeems us, renews and refreshes us.
Go in peace, go in joy, go in love, go in the light,
knowing God has forgiven you and gifted you life.
Amen.

Hymn: Sing we the King who is coming to reign, (StF 185)

Glory to Jesus, the Lamb that was slain;
Righteousness, peace then 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.*

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.

Souls shall be saved from the burden of sin;
Doubt shall not darken the witness within;
Hell has no terrors and death has no sting;
Love is victorious when Jesus is King.

Kingdom of Christ, for you 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.

Bible Reading: Matthew 1:18 - 25

¹⁸ This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did

not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement^[a] quietly.

²⁰ As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. ²¹ And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

²² All of this occurred to fulfil the Lord’s message through his prophet:

²³ “Look! The virgin will conceive a child!

She will give birth to a son,
and they will call him Immanuel
which means ‘God is with us.’”

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus.

Thought For The Day:

The coming of Jesus was better than anyone could have expected. Human beings have often looked for signs of God’s presence. In the Old Testament reading, Isaiah declares that God will give the people a sign far greater than anyone could have asked for or imagined – a child, named Immanuel, meaning God is with us.

For Joseph, the news of a child on the way was not good news to start with. Quite the opposite! Jewish marriage was a two-step process. It began with betrothal when the man would present the woman with a ring and the woman would then be deemed to be holy to the man. At this point, they may well have lived together while the details of the marriage contract (a kind of pre-nup in today’s world) was drawn up and agreed. This could include such details as inheritance arrangements and whether the wife would allow another woman (a maid for example) to live in the home. The period between betrothal and final marriage contract was often seen as a kind of trial period to see if the couple were compatible. This trial may have included sex. If this resulted in conception then that would not have been a problem had the marriage gone ahead. If it didn’t, it would be very difficult for the mother and child.

So, for Joseph the problem was not so much that Mary was pregnant but that the child was not his. Under the rights of betrothal, he would have been entitled to send Mary away. That before his angelic visitation he intended to do this quietly says a lot about Joseph's character. That he takes Mary as his wife after the visitation says a lot about his faith and even more about his character. For Joseph, the news turned out to be way better than he could ever have imagined. For the child to be born was the gift of God. Not just Immanuel, but Jesus who would save his people from their sins.

The better-than-expected news for Joseph was also better than expected news for Mary who now received the loving care of Joseph rather than the cold shoulder of dismissal, and for the infant Jesus who would know the security of two loving human parents.

There is something glorious, encouraging and helpful in Joseph discovering God to be with him in the midst of his life – in his sleeping as well as his waking; in his believing and his doubting; in his doing what he believed to be right and his willingness to be guided on a different pathway; in the complexities of being in love and the responsibilities of parenthood; and in the life-changing gift of a child. In many ways, Joseph is an unremarkable character, which probably makes him like many of us. The wonder is that we too can know God with us in the mix of our everyday lives. And we can know God – through the same Jesus, born to Mary and Joseph but now risen and ascended and yet present with us by his Spirit – better than could ever be expected.

Hymn: God Sent His Son, They Called Him Jesus

He came to love, heal and forgive
He lived and died to buy my pardon
An empty grave is there to prove my saviour lives

Because he lives, I can face tomorrow
Because he lives, all fear is gone
Because I know he holds the future
And life is worth the living, just because he lives

How sweet to hold a newborn baby
And feel the pride and joy he gives

But greater still the calm assurance
This child can face uncertain day, because he lives

And then one day, I'll cross the river
I'll fight life's final war with pain
And then, as death gives way to victory
I'll see the lights of glory and I'll know he reigns

Intercessions:

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. Restore us O God, let your face shine. **Come into our midst: come and give us life.**

Light in our darkness, give us, your church, courage to challenge unjust structures,
to tend and welcome all in need, and to offer what often seem limited resources of faith and love, to further the wellbeing and sustenance of all your children. Restore us O God, let your face shine. **Come into our midst: come and give us life.**

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. Restore us O God, let your face shine. **Come into our midst: come and give us life.**

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. Restore us O God, let your face shine. **Come into our midst: come and give us life.**

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. Surround them with your loving care. Restore us O God, let your face shine. **Come into our midst: come and give us life.**

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 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. Restore us O God, let your face shine. **Come into our midst: come and give us life.**
Amen

Hymn: Longing for light we wait in darkness (StF 706)

Longing for truth, we turn to you.

Make us your own, your holy people,

Light for the world to see.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in your church gathered today.

Longing for peace, our world is troubled.

Longing for hope, many despair.

Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice.

Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others,
Shared until all are fed.

Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
Walls made of living stone.

Many the gifts, many the people,
Many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
Making your kingdom come.

Blessing:

Thank you, Lord, that you came at Christmas to be with us
and that you come afresh to us each new day.
Send us out now to be signs of your loving presence
to others who need you too.
For your name's sake, we pray.

Amen.

Thursday 25th December 2025 – Christmas Day

This service has been compiled by Rev'd Liz Singleton

With people around the world
and with the angels of heaven,
we gather to say:
'Glory to God in the highest
and on earth peace among those on whom your blessing rests.'
Receive our praise and hear our prayers,
For we offer both in the name of Jesus,
The name above all names. Amen

Hymn: Joy to the world, the Lord is come! (StF 330)

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, and wonders of his love.

'It's Christmas'

It's Christmas,
and everywhere are goodies –
piled high, overflowing –
glittering trinkets of modernity
submerging us,
imprisoning our souls,
offering us a transient joy.

Yet in
silent places of the heart
we rebel –
longing for that
inner freedom of the Spirit
which came
with the first Christmas,
and can transform
us still.

We touch
these gifts beyond price,
and, awakening to
the sacred within us,
experience again
that surprising,
tender love
which – centuries ago –
the shepherds encountered
in the midst of their work,
on those dry fields
near Bethlehem.

Reading: Luke 2: 1 – 20 NLT

At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. And because Joseph was a descendant

of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He travelled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child.

And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."

When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.

Hymn: See him lying on a bed of straw (StF 216)

See him lying on a bed of straw;
draughty stable with an open door,
Mary cradling the babe she bore;
the Prince of Glory is his name:

*O now carry me to Bethlehem
to see the Lord appear men,
just as poor as was the stable then,
the Prince of Glory when he came.*

Star of silver, sweep across the skies,
show where Jesus in the manger lies;
shepherds, swiftly from your stupor rise
to see the Saviour of the world:

Angels, sing again the song you sang,
bring God's glory to the heart of man;
sing that Bethlem's little baby can
be the Saviour of us all:

Mine are riches from your poverty;
from your innocence, eternity;
mine, forgiveness by your death for me;
child of sorrow for my joy:

'No and yes' by Roddy Hamilton from *'Spill the Beans'*

The innkeeper was used to saying 'No'. He'd been saying 'No' all night.

'No, you can't get a room here tonight.'

'No, you can't have more towels.'

'No, you can't get another pudding.'

'No, you can't invite your mother-in-law and her whole family to share your room.'

'No, no, no, no, NO!'

It had made him very grumpy. In fact he was always grumpy. And then the doorbell went once more.....

'Oh no,' he said. 'Do they not know there is no more room?'

He swung open the door and was about to launch into his usual spiel about there being no room, when he hesitated and stuttered.

He was aware he was trying to say 'No' because he was so used to saying 'No' but this man looked so concerned and this woman was clearly about to have a baby, and his lips were moving in another direction and instead

of 'No' he found himself saying 'Yes' and it surprised him how good that felt.

Mary and Joseph, who were the ones standing at the door, looked at each other, and then at the innkeeper and said, 'But we haven't asked you anything.'

The innkeeper just said, 'Yes.'

'So you have room?' asked Joseph.

'Yes,' said the innkeeper, who was feeling particularly good now.

'For two of us and perhaps a baby?'

'Yes,' said the innkeeper and a smile grew round his face.

'In here?' questioned Joseph. 'Or round the back?'

'Yes,' said the innkeeper; he was positively beaming.

'Which?' asked Joseph.

'Sorry' said the innkeeper coming out of his daze. 'Round the back.'

So he took them to a stable where it was warm, though the innkeeper's smile was even warmer. And having let Mary and Joseph in, he stood guarding the door of the stable while Jesus was born.

Later, as a bundle of shepherds arrived, asking to see the new baby, the innkeeper found himself saying only one thing: 'Yes, come in. there is room. There is always room.'

And such has been the way of all those caught up in the Christmas story: Mary, shepherds, Joseph, travellers, and now the innkeeper.

The answer to Christmas is 'Yes', and it changes everything.

Hymn: Come and join the celebration (StF 196)

*Come and join the celebration, it's a very special day;
come and share our jubilation, there's a new King born today!*

See the shepherds hurry down to Bethlehem,
gaze in wonder at the Son of God who lay before them:
*Come and join the celebration, it's a very special day;
come and share our jubilation, there's a new King born today!*

Wise men journey, led to worship by a star,
kneel in homage, bringing precious gifts from lands afar, so,
*Come and join the celebration, it's a very special day;
come and share our jubilation, there's a new King born today!*

'God is with us', round the world the message bring,
he is with us, 'Welcome', all the bells on earth are pealing:
*Come and join the celebration, it's a very special day;
come and share our jubilation, there's a new King born today!*

Prayers:

In the beginning – you were.
In this moment – you are.
You are strength and weakness.
You are light and glory.
You are God and you welcome us:
you listen for our prayers.....

We pray today for peace, peace in the Holy Land and Ukraine,
peace in the dark places of the world.
We pray for leaders and negotiators, for peacemakers and peacekeepers,
For all who are caught up in conflict, violence and fear.
We pray for peace that comes with integrity and compassion.
God, in your mercy:
hear our prayer.

We pray for all who sit and eat with us today.
We thank you for our families and for our friends,
for those who love us, for those who share our laughter and our pain.
We pray for those who, by choice or by circumstance, eat alone today.
And we pray for justice for those are hungry.
God, in your mercy:
hear our prayer.

We pray for all who are sick and for those who care for them.
We remember, and pray for, those who have died and who we miss at our
table.
Tell them how much we love them, how we miss them,
and how we carry their stories in our lives.
God, in your mercy:
hear our prayer.

We pray for ourselves, for our needs, our concerns,

our hopes and our dreams.....

Silence

God, in your mercy:

hear our prayer.

Bright loving God, Emmanuel, God-with-us,

help us to recognise you today

and to welcome you into our lives

in wonder, in truth and in holy joy.

Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn: Hark! The herald-angels sing (StF 202)

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.'

Hark! The herald-angels sing

glory to the new-born King.

Christ, by highest heaven adored,

Christ, the everlasting Lord,

late in time behold him come,

offspring of a virgins's womb.

Veiled in flesh the Godhead see!

Hail, the incarnate Deity!

Pleased as man with men to dwell,

Jesus, our Immanuel!

Hark! The herald-angels sing

glory to the new-born King.

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.
*Hark! The herald-angels sing
glory to the new-born King.*

Closing Words:

May the song of the angels,
the joy of the shepherds,
the wonder of the wise men,
and the peace of the newborn king
fill our hearts and homes
this Christmastime and always.
Amen

Sunday 28th December 2025 – 1st Sunday of Christmas

This service has been compiled by Mrs Sheila Heap

**Wherever you are, welcome to this time of worship.
May you find it to be a time of blessing.**

Call to Worship:

In the midst of the wonders of Christmas,
we come to worship God with our joys
but are mindful too of the sorrows
of those who struggle at this time.
Let us worship the God who, in Jesus,
came to be one with us in sorrow and in joy. **Amen.**

Hymn: 'Joy To The World' (StF 330)

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.

Isaac Watts (1674 – 1748)

Prayer of Praise and Adoration:

Lord of glory, on this day, we lift our hearts in wonder.
The Light that no darkness can overcome has entered our world,
and hope has taken root in human hearts.
We praise You for the gift of Your Son,
for the tenderness of His coming,
and for the majesty hidden in the manger.
Eternal God, from the first dawn to this very moment,
You have been faithful.
You weave mercy into every season,
and Your love outlasts every shadow.
We adore You for Your patience with us,
for the beauty of Your holiness,
and for the joy that fills the hearts of those who trust You.
Receive our worship, for You alone are worthy. **Amen.**

Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness:

In the light of Christmas,
in the light of the gift of Christ Jesus our Lord,
in the light of all this goodness and joy,
we want to cast off our weaknesses and failings:
our failure to stand with others in their times of need,
our turning away from the pain of others,
our reluctance in the face of injustice and violence
that affects the weakest and poorest the most.
Forgive us, Lord, and change our hearts.

God assures us that the dark shadows of our wrongs
are wiped away, our sins forgiven, our slate wiped clean.
With the gift of forgiveness, let us live in the light. **Amen.**

You may like to join in the words of the Lord's Prayer: Our Father, who art in heaven ... Amen

Reading: Isaiah chapter 63 vs. 7 – 9 NRSV**Introduction:**

These verses are in praise of God's loving kindness and steadfastness.

They are a reminder of the many times in history that God has acted miraculously to save His people. God's love and mercy have always been there in the past. Christians reading this have seen special resonance in the idea of God's presence (in Jesus) saving them, not an angel or messenger. The passage asks us to remember that God is not, and never has been, far from us in our distress.

⁷ I will recount the gracious deeds of the Lord, the praiseworthy acts of the Lord, because of all that the Lord has done for us, and the great favour to the house of Israel that He has shown them according to His mercy, according to the abundance of His steadfast love.

⁸ For He said, "Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely"; and He became their Saviour

⁹ in all their distress. It was no messenger or angel but His presence that saved them; in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; He lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

Poem: 'If You Had Not Come'

Lord, if You had not come among us
We would still be living in darkness;

We would never have been enlightened
By Your words that give us life;

We would never have been touched
By Your mercy and compassion

We would never have felt
The marvel of Your friendship;

We would never have been blessed
With the joy of Your presence;

We would never have lived
With any hope or meaning to our lives
Beyond our stay on earth.

Thank You, Lord, for coming.

Hymn: Singing the Faith: ‘Who Would Think’ [Tune: ‘Scarlett Ribbons’ (StF 222)]

Who would think that what was needed
to transform and save the earth
might not be a plan or army,
proud in purpose, proved in worth?
Who would think, despite derision,
that a child might lead the way?
God surprises earth with heaven,
coming here on Christmas Day.

Shepherds watch and wise men wonder,
monarchs school and angels sing:
such a place as none would reckon
hosts a wholly helpless thing.
Stable beasts and by-passed strangers
watch a baby laid in hay:
God surprises earth with heaven,
coming here on Christmas Day.

Centuries of skill and science
spend the past from which we move,
yet experience questions whether,
with such progress, we improve.
While the human lot we ponder,
lest our hopes and humour fray.
God surprises earth with heaven,
coming here on Christmas Day.

John L. Bell (b. 1949) and Graham Maule (b. 1958)

Reading: Matthew chapter 2 vs. 13 – 23 NRSV

Introduction:

We pick up the Christmas story after the visit of the Magi to the child in the manger. Joseph again has a dream that forces a decision – he is told that Jesus’ life is in danger from a vengeful Herod and to flee with his young family to Egypt. A slaughter of innocent life in Bethlehem follows. Only when this Herod dies is it safe for Jesus and His family to return.

¹³ Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.”

¹⁴ Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, ¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, “Out of Egypt I have called my son.”

¹⁶ When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. ¹⁷ Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

¹⁸ “A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.”

¹⁹ When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ²⁰ “Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child’s life are dead.”

²¹ Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. ²³ There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, “He will be called a Nazorean.”

Thought: ‘PACK YOUR BAGS AND RUN FOR IT!’

We had to pack our bags,

grab the baby

and run for it –

away from Bethlehem, Judea, the land we knew and loved,

and off to the arid deserts of Egypt.

That wasn't in the script, surely!

I'd expected joy at His birth,

mass celebrations, even a fanfare of trumpets,

for wasn't this our child Emmanuel,

God with us?

Why then were we slipping off into the night,
fleeing for our lives?

It didn't make sense.

Yet that's what we were told to do,
and good thing too,

next thing we heard there was carnage back home,
a senseless slaughter of the innocents.

I'd imagined our son's birth meant an end to all that –
a new era of peace, harmony and justice –
but such dreams seem as far away as ever,
for the world is still as bruised and broken as ever.

Does God know what He's doing?

I hope so,

for His purpose seems to be hanging on a thread –
one tiny child in a dark and dangerous world.

You'd almost think He's ready to share not just our life
but also our death,
only, of course, that couldn't be.....

could it?

Reflection:

A minister was invited to view a Sunday school class' artwork. Pinned to the wall were pictures of the Holy Family at the Manger, angels singing to shepherds in the field and Wise Men bringing gifts to Jesus. One picture, however, puzzled the minister. It was a picture of the Holy Family boarding a jet plane with the pilot already in the cockpit. The minister was intrigued and asked the little boy who drew it to tell him about it. "Well," he said, "that is Mary and Joseph with Jesus making the flight to Egypt." "Oh," said the minister, "and who is that flying the plane?." "Oh, that is Pontius the Pilot," said the boy with a smile.

We catch up today with the Holy Family on the run. It was night and they had to get out of Bethlehem in a hurry. In biblical times, dreams were often considered to be a means by which God communicated with His people. In Genesis, King Abimelek is warned by God not to take Abraham's wife, Sarah, as his own. Joseph is well known for his dreams and his gift to

interpret them. Jacob dreams of the stairway to heaven at Bethel where God reaffirms His promise to make his descendants numerous. In Matthew's gospel dreams play an important role in the story of Jesus' birth, so Mary and Joseph had no reason to doubt that this was God's will to protect them and their son. Joseph had had a dream which had a stark warning: "Get up! Take the child and His mother and escape to Egypt." King Herod was on the rampage. Christ – our Saviour - quickly becomes Christ - the refugee. Herod feels threatened by the presence of a child. Realising he had been outwitted by the Wise Men, he orders all male toddlers under two living in the vicinity of Bethlehem to be killed.

Before we can understand what caused Herod to kill the baby boys in Bethlehem, we need to understand Herod's history. In the thousand years between King David in Old Testament times and Herod, no king of Israel wanted to be loved by his people more than Herod. It was a consuming passion. Although a member of the royal family by birth, Herod ruled by authority of the Roman Emperor. His task was to balance the needs and demands of Rome with the hopes and dreams of his own people, and that was an impossible task. First century Palestinians did not want any king who collaborated with the Romans. Herod was hated.

The Christmas story is not just about love, joy and peace, it's also about hate and greed, and sometimes the best defence against evil is escape. So they exiled to Egypt and stayed there until Herod died.

Their journey was long. At that time, Egypt was a dirty, poverty-stricken land - not the country we see today. It was a land of slavery where people were forced to make bricks without straw and endure whippings for no reason. The Holy Family lived as refugees moving from place to place. First they camped in Farama, East of the Nile river for four months, then moving on to Mostorod, a city north of Cairo. Next came Sakha, here there is a site that is said to have an imprint of baby Jesus' foot. From there, they camped at Wadi El Natroun, just outside Cairo. Passing the ancient pyramids, they travelled to Maadi where they took a boat to Deir El Gamus. Moving on to Gabal Al Teir, they finally stopped and camped in Gebel Qussqam where they stayed for about six months before returning home to the Holy Land once it was safe. This route is known as "The Path Of The Holy Family". [These are modern day names and can be found on a

map.] It has recently become a UNESCO World Heritage site, visited by the late Pope Francis and is also now a place of Christian pilgrimage. No one would choose to become a refugee without good reason.

So what does this story tell us? We have in the Christmas story and in the Herod story a contrast in styles of loving. While Herod is a king who wants his people to love him, that love is a self-all-consuming passion to be loved. It is centred on himself and his own desires and needs. God, on the other hand, first loves His people and from that draws love in return. God's passion is centred on all whom He loves and on our eternal welfare.

At Christmastime, we are never far from the love of God. We experience it in things soft and tender; memories sweet and fragrant; stories poignant and touching. Today we are reminded of the sacrificial nature of God's love and the high cost as a consequence. In all the circumstances of life, we celebrate the love with which God loves us - not Herod's selfish punishing, but with holy love, given freely. We celebrate that we have been bought with a price - that having been so loved and set free, we can pass that love on, knowing that we are cared for by a loving God.

Last month, BBC's 'Children In Need' faced an almost impossible challenge. 'The Joseph Tree' – a local charity succeeded in securing a grant to extend the work they are involved in by doubling the size of their premises. DIY SOS took on the challenge and were given just eight days to complete the work that would normally take six months. It involved over 600 trades people to get the job done – and they did not disappoint. Some gave just a few hours time or a piece of equipment – whatever was needed. The result was beyond incredible and a deeply emotional experience. Double the number of children and their families will now be helped – because people passed on the love.

I wonder what challenge each of us might take into the New Year: to do everything we can to love and care as we are loved and cared for by God. What might you and I resolve to do to show God's love and care to others in a new way? It could be something very simple which may only take a short amount of time or effort – but make an incredible difference. Let us all be open to the Spirit's prompting. **Amen.**

Hymn: Unto Us A Boy Is Born (StF 218)

Unto us a boy is born!
King of all creation,
came He to a world forlorn,
The Lord of every nation
the Lord of every nation.

Cradled in a stall was He
with sleepy cows and asses;
but the very beasts could see
that He all folk surpasses,
that He all folk surpasses.

Herod then with fear was filled:
'a Prince,' he said, 'in Jewry!'
All the little boys he killed
at Bethlem in his fury
at Bethlem in his fury.

Now may Mary's son, who came
so long ago to love us,
lead us all with hearts aflame
unto the joys above us
unto the joys above us.

Omega and Alpha He!
Let the organ thunder,
while the choir with peals of glee
now rends the air asunder
now rends the air asunder.

Percy Dearmer (1867–1936)

Prayers of Love and Concern:

God whose love reaches every situation, we pray for:
Those who are fleeing their country because they are in danger through
their race, colour or creed. We pray especially for those who have lost all
they had because of war zones. Grant them a safe passage and a secure
place to make new homes.

Those who are fleeing their homes because of natural disasters – floods, fires, crop failures, drought. In the face of such loss, may they find new opportunities to rebuild their lives.

Those who are fleeing their homes because they have lost the means to provide for their families and they face the threat of losing their homes and maybe their children taken into care.

Those who are fleeing their families because of abuse, bullying, trolleying, human trafficking, catfishing, drug running or physical and emotional harm, praying that they will find someone to listen, understand and act.

We pray for those who cannot flee from illness, bereavement, loneliness, anxiety, depression, addiction. May the light and love of Jesus surround them in their need and bring them comfort and relief.

We pray for ourselves and all those things which hold us back that we would leave behind. May Your Spirit work in our lives to give us clarity of vision and purpose to become the people You call us to be.

A Prayer for the New Year:

Thank You, Lord, for a new year that is waiting to unfold its secrets.

Thank You for the truth that, with You, not just some days are special, but all are,

each offering new experiences of Your love and fresh opportunities to celebrate.

Teach us, then, as we look forward to celebrating New Years Day, to celebrate **every** day, to see each moment as Your gift to be gratefully received and joyfully lived, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

As we look back over the past year and give thanks for all the blessings we have experienced and look towards the coming year with all the possibilities God has in store for us, let us celebrate our journey with God:

Hymn: 'Lord For The Years' (StF 470)

Lord, for the years Your love has kept and guided,
urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way,
sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided,
Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today.

Lord, for that word, the Word of life which fires us,
speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze,
teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires us,
Lord of the word, receive your people's praise.

Lord, for our land, in this our generation,
spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and care,
for young and old, for Commonwealth and nation,
Lord of our land, be pleased to hear our prayer.

Lord, for our world; when we disown and doubt Him,
loveless in strength, and comfortless in pain:
hungry and helpless, lost indeed without Him,
Lord of the world, we pray that Christ may reign.

Lord, for ourselves, in living power remake us,
self on the Cross and Christ upon the throne;
past put behind us, for the future take us,
Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone. Timothy Dudley-Smith (b. 1926)

Blessing:

As we look forward towards the beginning of a New Year:

May Your love fill our hearts,

May Your joy shine in our minds,

May Your peace radiate in our lives, in our homes, in our families and in
every place we go

That Your Kingdom may come a little closer to us all and our world will be
a better place. **Amen.**

Some material is adapted from 'Roots For Churches'

Our printed services do not include an offering but if you feel you would like to respond to God's love in this way please contact the treasurer of your church or contact the Circuit Office. Thank you.

If you no longer wish to receive this printed sheet, could you let either your Minister or the Circuit Office (tel: 01782 612648)
e-mail: northstaffscircuit@hotmail.co.uk know please, or equally, please let us know if there's someone you know who would like to receive it.