



The United Benefice of St Michael
Lichfield and St John, Wall

Christmas Day – 25 December

Canticle A Song of Redemption

Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

The Father has delivered us from the dominion of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son;

In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

**For in him all things were created,
in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.**

All things were created through him and for him, he is before all things and in him all things hold together.

He is the head of the body, the Church, he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead.

In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell; and through him God was pleased to reconcile all things.

Colossians 1.13-18a,19,20a

**Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

Collect

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

Old Testament Reading

Isaiah 9.2-7

²The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined.

³You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder.

⁴For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.

⁵For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

⁶For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he

is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
⁷His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onwards and for evermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Psalm 96

¹ O sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth.

² **Sing to the LORD, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day.**

³ Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvellous works among all the peoples.

⁴ **For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; he is to be revered above all gods.**

⁵ For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the LORD made the heavens.

⁶ **Honour and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.**

⁷ Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

⁸ **Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts.**

⁹ Worship the LORD in holy splendour;
tremble before him, all the earth.

¹⁰ **Say among the nations, 'The LORD is king! The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved. He will judge the peoples with equity.'**

¹¹ Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it;

¹² **let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy**

¹³ before the LORD; for he is coming,
for he is coming to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with his truth.

**Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

Gospel Reading: Luke 2: 1– 20

¹In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.'

¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ¹⁴'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'

¹⁵When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.' ¹⁶So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Sermon

Lord, take my words and speak through them, take our hearts and set them on fire with love for you. Amen

This year, our Christmas plans have had to be adapted to the present circumstances and many of the usual activities have had to be changed or abandoned. Many of our usual family Christmas traditions have had to be put aside at least for this year and at times we may well have wondered if any of the celebrations would survive the restrictions, as they changed and tightened.

On the positive side, all these restrictions and uncertainties have perhaps made us think about what is really important about Christmas and why and how we celebrate.

We often have our own family traditions that seem to make Christmas special for us, but Christmas is not just about traditions, lovely though they may be – it is so much bigger than that. It is about that moment, right now, when preparations are done and we can calm ourselves and open our hearts to receive God's great gift of the Christ-child once more. The true meaning of Christmas is not **seen** in all the trappings – it is **felt** within each one of us, if we allow that to happen.

Listening to some of the sound-bites on the news broadcasts it is as if we are the ones who make Christmas special. And yet, even if we did not buy a single present and did not have any decorations and bought no special food, Christmas would still come and it would still be amazing!

Jesus was born on that first Christmas night. His was not the best organised Christmas. The plans of Mary and Joseph were also thwarted by edicts from government – there was no perfection in **their** plans and organisation - they did not even have a room to stay in - but that did not make the event any less amazing and wonderful.

Our first reading this morning from Isaiah is about the coming of the light – *The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light*. And that is what Christmas is all about – the light of Christ coming into the world.

There was a physical light on that first Christmas night – as we heard in our gospel reading – the light that the angel brought to the shepherds on the hillside outside Bethlehem; shepherds who would have known themselves to be among the least important in society. They were often seen as outcasts, because of their work with animals. But it was to them that the angel came with the message of the birth of the Saviour, the Messiah, the one who would save the whole of humanity.

When the angel appeared, it is clear that this was not an event that immediately filled them with feelings of peace, joy and well-being, but rather of absolute terror! This was not the glittery, cute angel of nativity plays, but a fearsome messenger of God.

But what the angel told the shepherds was the message of Christmas for us all – that God is with us; the message that replaces fear with joy, not just for the shepherds on that hillside, but for us now, today.

The shepherds heard the message of the angel and the wonderful thing is that despite their shock and fear, they set off and went to see what the angel was telling them about.

When the shepherds had seen the baby in the manger, just as they had been told, it says they *returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen*, in other words, they became the first Christian evangelists, spreading the good news to anyone who would listen!

These uneducated outcasts of society – hardly the sort of people, you might think, who would be selected for such a task.

And just as God had a role for those humble shepherds, there is still a role for each of us today. But I wonder how we would have reacted if we had received that message as we went about our work or were sitting at home one evening? Would we have gone into Bethlehem, or even into Birmingham, to find out what was going on? Would we have risked leaving our earthly responsibilities in order to follow the heavenly message and to go and see this new-born baby who was apparently to save us all?

It is easy to think that the appearance of the angel would have been something that could not be ignored, but I do wonder. These were not educated theologians, awaiting the coming of the Messiah; they were uneducated shepherds whose main aim in life was to keep the sheep safe from wild animals, and so keep their jobs. Yet they were open to receiving the message that came to them in this totally unexpected way.

Would I have been so willing to respond to some weird apparition telling this strange story or would I have dismissed it as a sign of severe overwork or too much rich food? I do wonder. But they did respond and for them and indeed for all humanity, life would never be the same again. Jesus came to be the light of the world. But he did not come as a blazing floodlight, not even as the light brought by the angel to the shepherds, but as a tiny flame, as a baby.

Jesus came into the world on that first Christmas night as a tiny flame to light the darkness of the world, to drive back all that darkness symbolises – evil, violence, war, sadness, despair and so much more. So we must, each one of us, be willing to open ourselves to receive that light, the light of Christ, into our own hearts, especially at this Christmastime, but also throughout the year so that we, through our lives can shine Christ's light into the darkness of the world.

God relies on us now, each one of us, to share the light of Christ with those we encounter as we travel through life. We may feel totally inadequate and unworthy to undertake this great task – it certainly is a daunting thought to carry and share Christ's light in the world, but we do not do it without the support of God.

So at this rather different Christmas time, with all its worries and anxieties, let's focus on the coming of the light of the world, as a tiny baby, a tiny flame that still burns brightly and that we must allow into our hearts so that each one of us can reflect that light through our lives into the darkness of the world.

We cannot offer God a gift that adequately repays the gift that was given to us, but we can offer the one gift that God wants – that is ourselves. As the poet Christina Rossetti wrote:

What can I give Him,
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb,
If I were a wise man
I would do my part,
Yet what I can I give Him,
Give my heart.
Amen

Revd Ruth Bull

FOR YOUR PRAYERS

ST JOHN

Pat Crowe, Jo Hearn, Ann Kinson, Allan Law

Those who have died

Eileen Fletcher

FOR YOUR PRAYERS

ST MICHAEL

Those newly in need of prayer

Robert McAllester-Jones, David Edge, Martin Dewes, Chris Clayton,

Those in continuing special need of prayer:

Sam Bassett, Mark Berry, Elizabeth Chapman, Dorothy Clayton, Jo Cobb, Dottie Collins, Alison Cox-Toplis, Chris Dickerson, Sonia Doidge, Colin Eastwood, Joseph Harrington, Robert Harris, James Knight, Matthew and Emmeline and their parents, Ruth and Andrew Martel, Marielouise Oliver, Arthur Palin, Nick Rutter, Anthony Staples aged 6, John Tipper, Sheila Vaughan, Judith Watson, Renee Wellings, Peter and Anne Watson, Felicity Woodfield, Jamie, Gary and Denise, Julian & Wendy,

Those who have died

Margaret Harris, Bill Hill, & Samuel Lamburn

Post Communion Prayer

God our Father,
whose Word has come among us
in the Holy Child of Bethlehem:
may the light of faith illumine our hearts
and shine in our words and deeds;
through him who is Christ the Lord.

Amen.

CHURCH NOTICES

WORSHIP BY ZOOM

Our regular zoom worship is on the first and third Sundays of each month.

Next regular services

Sunday 3rd January 2021 6.00pm

You can join the service from 5.45pm. The service will last about 40mins. ***If you have not had a link by Friday at 11am please contact the office***

office@stmichaelmaryjohn.org.uk

ST MICHAEL'S CHURCHYARD CHRISTMAS TRAIL PUZZLE!

A fun, half hour outdoor Christmas activity suitable for age 4/5 plus.

This is available to explore until Christmas. It consists of four A4 stations which you need to find. They introduce and tell the Christmas story through QR codes, revealing video story clues which give you the password for the final instalment. All stations are in the area around the turning circle at front of church. It requires a QR code reader/app on a tablet/phone with mobile data, and a pencil and paper to note the clues! Have fun, enjoy the reason for the season - and please observe social distancing and all Govt guidance!

MAGAZINE SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 2021 will be £8.50 payable by cheque to "P.C.C. of St, Michael and St. Mary". This will not be collected in the normal way by your deliverer. Please post it directly to me. Details are in the December and January magazine. Thank you for your cooperation Barbara Homewood Tel 255909

PARISH DIARY

Friday 25th December

8:00am	Holy Communion	St Michael's
9:00am	Holy Communion	St John's
10:00am	Holy Communion	St Michael's

Saturday 26th December

Sunday 27th December

8:00am	Holy Communion	St Michael's
10:00am	Holy Communion	St Michael's
10:00am	Holy Communion	St John's

Monday 28th December

All day **OFFICE CLOSED**

Tuesday 29th December

8:15am	Morning Prayer	Zoom
--------	----------------	------

Wednesday 30th December

8:15am	Morning Prayer	Zoom
--------	----------------	------

Thursday 31st December

All day	OFFICE CLOSED	
8:15am	Morning Prayer	Zoom
6:00pm	Floodlights in memory of Alan Mountford	St Michael's

Friday 1st January

All Day **OFFICE CLOSED**

Saturday 2nd January

Sunday 3rd January

8:00am	Holy Communion	St Michael's
10:00am	Holy Communion	St Michael's
10:00am	Holy Communion	St John's
6:00pm	Evening Worship	Zoom

CHURCHES TOGETHER www.stmichaelmaryjohn.org.uk/churches-together.html