

Sunday 31 December 2023

First Sunday of Christmas



Sermon © Gareth Farnon-Jones.

Liturgy and prayers of intercession © 2000 The Archbishops' Council.

Bible readings © the publishers of the NRSV translation.

The liturgy assumes the service is Eucharistic. The prayers of consecration appear at the end.

All the hymns are hosted on YouTube. Please click on the links to hear them.

To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page,

<http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm>

Introduction and welcome

HYMN 1 [Good Christian men rejoice](#)
[Good Christian men rejoice](#)

[\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)
[\(different version\)](#)

The Welcome

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

All Amen.

The Lord be with you

All And also with you.

The Preparation

**All Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all your mind,
and with all your strength.’

And the second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’

There is no other commandment greater than these.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

All Amen. Lord, have mercy.

Hear the words of the angel to Joseph:

‘You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’

Let us therefore seek the forgiveness of God through Jesus the Saviour of the world.

All Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name.
Amen.

Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you,
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,
and keep you in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

The Gloria

All Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to his people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:
receive our prayer.

**For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.**

The Collect for the First Sunday of Christmas

Almighty God,
who wonderfully created us in your own image
and yet more wonderfully restored us
through your Son Jesus Christ:
grant that, as he came to share in our humanity,
so we may share the life of his divinity;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
All Amen.

First reading

A reading from the book of the Prophet Isaiah

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,
my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,
until her vindication shines out like the dawn,
and her salvation like a burning torch.
The nations shall see your vindication,
and all the kings your glory;
and you shall be called by a new name
that the mouth of the Lord will give.
You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Isaiah 61:10—62:3

This is the Word of the Lord
Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from St Paul's Letter to the Galatians

When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

Galatians 4:4–7

This is the Word of the Lord
All Thanks be to God.

HYMN 2 [Angel voices ever singing](#)

[\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke

All Glory to you O Lord.

When the angels had left the shepherds and gone into heaven, they 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.' So they went with haste and found Mary and

Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Luke 2:15-21

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All Praise to you O Christ

Sermon

When I first thought about writing this particular sermon, I thought to myself, 'Oh yes, New Year's Eve: I can talk about a New Year, a new me, new beginnings and, of course, resolutions. I know exactly what I'm going to talk about!' We all like to set ourselves resolutions; maybe we really intend to keep some of them, maybe some are made in haste without much commitment. I've certainly made enough and I certainly haven't kept enough of them. We will come back to resolutions shortly.

Today's gospel reading tells part of the nativity story. We know this story so very well. We have heard it since childhood and in all probability we heard it before we could discern the difference between the birth of our Saviour and the part about the friendly man in red who brings presents down our chimney ... providing, of course, that we have been good!

So, with a passage that is so familiar to us all how do we go about looking for God's message in this passage of scripture? Apart from hearing a story that we know and love, what can we discern from this Gospel passage? Let's look at the text together and see what we can discover.

We have heard from Luke's Gospel his account of the Saviour's birth.

We are told by Luke that the shepherds departed to Bethlehem 'in haste'. We are talking about shepherds so surely their job is to look after the sheep but, presumably, if they left 'in haste' in the middle of the night they didn't have much time to care for the flocks.

The angels told them that the long-awaited Messiah had finally arrived, so no wonder they rushed down from the hillsides. And to be sure that they knew which baby they should look for, the angels told them to look for one lying in an animals' feed trough, not in a palace or a grand house but in a stable with the animals.

Having found Mary and Joseph with the infant Jesus, they did as the angels had commanded them. They told everyone that this child was the Messiah, the Saviour they had waited for. The shepherds were the first to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The gospel continues by telling us that Mary pondered all these words in her heart. No wonder she did because she found herself being the mother of the Saviour of humankind: that's quite a lot to digest for anyone.

We are then told that the shepherds returned to their flocks, praising and glorifying God for all that they had seen.

The Jewish nation of the time were waiting for their Messiah. They had been promised a saviour. Surely this would be a king, a mighty warrior ... perhaps mounted on a horse sweeping all before him, freeing them from the yoke of Roman oppression? But no, the promised messiah was nothing like that. He was not born to royalty nor a mighty warrior riding on a warhorse. No, their messiah was a newborn infant, helpless, lying not in a cradle but an animals' food trough. Not born to well-placed well-appointed people, but to a jobbing carpenter and his young wife.

As the shepherds, and indeed the whole of the Jewish race found, the messiah was both unexpected and not in the form that they had waited and longed for. So, as we enter the two thousand and twenty fourth year since His birth, let us be mindful. For Christ will come again. We do not know when, or where or indeed what form He will take.

Whether He will come as a mighty warrior or a tiny baby we do not know. But let us all be aware. There is something of Christ in everyone, perhaps the person you meet tomorrow or the day after will be that person. That Christ will come again is certain so when that time comes let us be like the shepherds and be ready to make haste and pay homage to our King, our Prince of peace.

I mentioned at the start of this sermon about making resolutions.

I would like to everyone to join with me in making some resolutions for the New Year.

- Resolve to be like the shepherds, alert and watching for signs.
- Resolve to make haste when you yourself hear God's message: don't wait, don't prevaricate too long because God will send His Holy Spirit to guide you.
- Resolve to look for Jesus in unexpected and unlikely places, not just here in church or among people that you know; don't forget that Jesus went among the tax collectors and sinners, the marginalised of those times. There's something of Jesus in all of us so learn to look to see something of our Lord in everyone you meet.
- Resolve to spread the Good News of God's love and salvation just like the shepherds did.
- Resolve to ponder like Mary, take God's holy word into your hearts. Think on them and do as Mary also did, treasure them.
- Resolve to praise and glorify God as the shepherds did.

And I'll conclude with one last resolution: resolve to be ready, in both heart and mind for the time when our Lord will come again.

Amen.

The Creed

All We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,
was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;

he ascended into heaven

and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit,

the Lord, the giver of life,

who proceeds from the Father and the Son,

who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified,

who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead,

and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

Prayers of intercession

Let us pray to Jesus our Saviour.

Christ, born in a stable,
give courage to all who are homeless.

Jesus, Saviour,

All hear our prayer.

Christ, for whom the angels sang,
give the song of the kingdom to all who weep.

Jesus, Saviour,

All hear our prayer.

Christ, worshipped by the shepherds,
give peace on earth to all who are oppressed.

Jesus, Saviour,

All hear our prayer.

Christ, before whom the wise men knelt,
give humility and wisdom to all who govern.

Jesus, Saviour,

All hear our prayer.

Christ, whose radiance filled a lowly manger,
give the glory of your resurrection to all who rest in you.

Jesus, Saviour,

All hear our prayer.

Jesus, Saviour, child of Mary,

you know us and love us,

you share our lives

and hear our prayer.

Glory to you for ever.

All Amen.

Merciful Father,

**All accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

The peace

Unto us a child is born,
unto us a son is given,
and his name shall be called the Prince of Peace.

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

All And also with you.

HYMN 3 Come and join the celebration [\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)
Come and join the celebration [\(different version\)](#)

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below

The Dismissal

May the joy of the angels,
the eagerness of the shepherds,
the perseverance of the wise men,
the obedience of Joseph and Mary,
and the peace of the Christ-child
be yours this Christmas;
and the blessing.

All Amen.

HYMN 4 Ding dong merrily on high [\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)
Ding dong merrily on high [\(different version\)](#)

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All In the name of Christ.

Amen.

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

Eucharistic Prayer (prayer E)

The Lord be with you

All and also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

All We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All It is right to give thanks and praise.

All glory and honour be yours always and everywhere,
mighty creator, ever-living God.

We give you thanks and praise for your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ,
who for love of our fallen race humbled himself,
and was born of the Virgin Mary by the power of your Spirit,
and lived as one of us.

In this mystery of the Word made flesh
you have caused his light to shine in our hearts,
to give knowledge of your glory in the face of Jesus Christ.
In him we see our God made visible
and so are caught up in the love of the God we cannot see.
Therefore with all the angels of heaven
we lift our voices to proclaim the glory of your name
and sing our joyful hymn of praise:

**All Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

We praise and bless you, loving Father,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord;
and as we obey his command,
send your Holy Spirit,
that broken bread and wine outpoured
may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his friends
and, taking bread, he praised you.

He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.

When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.
Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:
Drink this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did,
in him we plead with confidence his sacrifice made once for all upon the cross.

Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of salvation,
we proclaim his death and resurrection
until he comes in glory.

Great is the mystery of faith:

All Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

Lord of all life,
help us to work together for that day
when your kingdom comes
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.

Look with favour on your people,
gather us in your loving arms
and bring us with all the saints
to feast at your table in heaven.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,
for ever and ever.

All Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**All Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

**All Though we are many, we are one body,
because we all share in one bread.**

**All Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
grant us peace.**

Draw near with faith.

Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ
which he gave for you,
and his blood which he shed for you.

Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you,
and feed on him in your hearts
by faith with thanksgiving.

All We do not presume
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,
trusting in our own righteousness,
but in your manifold and great mercies.
We are not worthy
so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.
But you are the same Lord
whose nature is always to have mercy.
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ
and to drink his blood,
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body
and our souls washed through his most precious blood,
and that we may evermore dwell in him,
and he in us.
Amen.

Communion is distributed.

Prayer after Communion

Heavenly Father,
whose blessed Son shared at Nazareth the life of an earthly home:
help your Church to live as one family,
united in love and obedience,
and bring us all at last to our home in heaven;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen

All Almighty God,
we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work
to your praise and glory.
Amen.