

## WELCOME

### LIGHTING ADVENT CANDLES

One: Arise and celebrate: God loves the world. A child is born

All: **The glow of the Divine lightens our hearts like an infant stepping to love**

One: Here we are together in a world caught between anxiety and hope, celebrating what God has done in Christ. We will never be alone. May our remembering and celebrating change how we live, open our hearts and communities, so that all can together live and share in fullness of life *[the Christ candle is lighted]*

All: **Because God loves, holiness continues to break into the messiness of our lives.**

We pray:

God-always-with-us, we thank you for your love that keeps faith with and encourages us to see a world where the power of love can loosen the grip on restrictive ways to embrace a new life of flourishing possibilities. Through Jesus, stir us by the light of your love, so that we may re-turn to your way of fullness of life you intend for all.

**HYMN**            O Come all ye faithful

### PRAYERS

All praise to you, O God, for Jesus,  
born for us, not in grandeur, but in humility.

All praise to you, O God, for Jesus,  
a babe laid in a manger and shrouded with love.

All praise to you, O God, for Jesus,  
given in a time of chaos to still the world.

All praise to you, O God, for Jesus,  
who showed us how to live, how to love and how to be.

All praise to you, O God, for Jesus,  
who followed where you led, even unto death.  
All praise to you, O God, for Jesus,  
born then and now, for them and us and me.  
All praise to you, O God, this Christmas Day. **Amen.**

### **A PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Generous, overwhelming God, in the excitement and joy of this day,  
we take a moment to reflect and ponder on the immensity of the  
gift given.

Forgive us if we have belittled the most precious gift of all.  
Forgive us if we have cast it aside, put it on the back burner, left it  
packed away since last Christmas with all the tinsel and trappings.  
Forgive us for not pondering enough the depth of your giving and  
sacrifice for us.

As you give to us, so we give to you our sorrow and confession for  
all that has not been worthy of your name.

**Amen.**

### **ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS**

God gives to us his Son,  
and to those who seek it, forgiveness for their sins.  
Go and share the gift,  
show the love and know the peace that God gives.

**Amen.**

**HYMN**                      Good Christians all rejoice!

**READING**                      Luke 2: 1-20

### **REFLECTION**

Breathe! We've done all we can do, the shops are closed and the  
cupboards are full and we've managed to escape from the chaos of  
life outside into the quiet of the church to remind ourselves of the  
full meaning of Christmas, or so we tell ourselves!

Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright! Sleep in heavenly  
peace! Say the words of the carol we all love singing

So what are your plans for Christmas? We often ask or are asked and often the reply is something along the lines of “nothing much, just having a quiet time, just the family, nothing unusual”

But hang on, let’s think again about this story that Luke is telling us. It’s not a story of silent nights and peaceful scenes, the real Christmas is not an escape from the noisy world, it takes place right in the middle of it!

Luke’s account of Jesus birth is about the noisy, busy high street. Hundreds of people setting off from their small communities to the larger towns, people didn’t travel alone in the privacy of their own cars – it would have been much more like a coach trip to the Christmas markets – groups of family and friends setting off together, with the laughing, moaning, pushing and shoving that goes with it. Luke highlights Mary and Joseph in the midst of this crowd, noticeable only because she’s pregnant. Why would you put yourself through that?

The noise reaches a crescendo as they push their way into a crowded pub desperate to find somewhere to stay and ending up in the animal house, not great but better than nothing. Then comes the birth, no gas and air for Mary, just lots of screaming and crying and literally blood sweat and tears! Not much peace and quiet here then! Mary’s head must have been spinning with noise. Then one final shout and the baby is born – “She gave birth to her first born wrapped him in swaddling bands and laid him in a manger” Maybe the quiet came then as this new family are absorbed in the silence of their love

Then quick as a flash Luke moves the story back to the noise of the real world, where shepherds working through the night are called in the midst of the noise of their lives to the stillness and quiet of the manger scene. The whole world is to know the good news, as the sky fills with the great song of the angels, declaring the mystery of God’s love.

We too will hopefully find our quiet Christmas on this day. Some will find the love of God here, some in the love of friends and family as we meet as we exchange gifts and messages.

It will be the heart of Christmas when the only voice we hear is the voice of God reminding us that we too can meet the baby, not as visitors but as welcome family. So in the noise of this day let us listen well, for at the heart there will be the presence of God, revealed in the Christ-child, who is God with us, Emmanuel. Glory to God in the highest! Amen

**HYMN**            Away in a manger

## **PRAYERS**

We will pray for all of those for whom Christmas is a difficult time, for those who are ill and those who are alone at this time.

## **LORD'S PRAYER**

**HYMN**            Hark! The herald angels sing

## **BLESSING**

Loving God,  
today, Christmas Day,  
help us to look upon the food we share with thanks,  
help us to take joy in the company of our friends and family,  
help us to be thankful for all the gifts with which you bless us.  
In the name of Jesus, who is born in hearts again today.  
**Amen.**

