

## THE BRIDE VALLEY AND CHESIL BENEFICE: Telephone Service for CHRISTMAS DAY 2023

1 Angels, from the realms of glory,  
wing your flight o'er all the earth;  
Ye who sang creation's story  
now proclaim Messiah's birth:

*Come and worship  
Christ the new-born King,  
come and worship,  
worship Christ, the new-born King.*

2 Shepherds in the field abiding,  
watching o'er your flocks by night,  
God with us is now residing;  
yonder shines the infant Light:

*Refrain*

A very happy and blessed Christmas to you all! This service for Christmas Day has been prepared by Liz Howlett and can be accessed by phone on Christmas morning on **01308 293062**. Welcome to this service for the Bride Valley and Chesil churches.

*Rejoicing*

**As the morning stars sing together, let us rejoice today!**

We rejoice in God's love poured out upon the world.

**We rejoice for the gift of the Christ-child.**

We rejoice in people's generosity of giving and the delight of receiving.

**We rejoice for people's praying for an end to all the pain.**

We rejoice in God's love for us in every detail of our lives.

**As the morning stars sing together, let us rejoice today!**

1 In the bleak mid-winter  
Frosty wind made moan,  
Earth stood hard as iron,  
Water like a stone;  
Snow had fallen, snow on snow,  
Snow on snow,  
In the bleak mid-winter,  
Long ago.

2 Our God, heaven cannot hold him  
Nor earth sustain;  
heaven and earth shall flee away  
When he comes to reign:  
In the bleak mid-winter  
A stable place sufficed  
The Lord God Almighty  
Jesus Christ.

We come together to receive the forgiveness of a new day.  
**We come together to rejoice in the freedom to begin again.**  
We come together to receive mercy from our heavenly Father.

Christ came in humility to share our lives: forgive our pride.  
Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

*Carol: Angels from the realms of glory*  
3 Sages, leave your contemplations;  
brighter visions beam afar;  
seek the great Desire of nations;  
ye have seen his natal star:

*Refrain*

4 Though an infant now we view him,  
he shall fill his Father's throne,  
gather all the nations to him;  
every knee shall then bow down:

*Refrain*

*James Montgomery (1771-1854) from Iris, 1816 and The  
Christmas Box, 1825 (Public Domain)*

*Carol: In the bleak midwinter*

3 Angels and archangels  
May have gathered there,  
Cherubim and seraphim  
Thronged the air –  
But only his mother  
In her maiden bliss  
Worshipped the beloved  
With a kiss.

4 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.

*Christina Rossetti (1830-1894) (Public Domain)*

*Invitation to Confession*

*Prayers of Penitence*

Christ came with good news for all people: forgive our silence.

Christ, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

Christ came in love to a world of suffering: forgive our self-centredness.

Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

### *Absolution*

May the God of love bring us back to himself, forgive us our sins, and assure us of his eternal love in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

### *The Collect*

Lord Jesus Christ, your birth at Bethlehem draws us to kneel in wonder at heaven touching earth: accept our heartfelt praise as we worship you, our Saviour and our eternal God. **Amen.**

### *First Reading Isaiah 52: 7 - 10*

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.

### *Gospel Reading John 1: 1-14*

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

### *Reflection*

So, why are we taking part in this phone service? Why are others gathering in churches across the benefice this morning? So much in our society today can make it seem that seeking to follow Christ is a bit irrelevant these days. I think some people imagine that as Christians we have to be a bit like the white queen in Alice Through the Looking Glass – she had to believe 6 impossible things a day before she could get up in the morning. So, why are we bothering? What is the good news for us, for our society and for the whole world at Christmas time?

Let's hear some of the reading from John's Gospel again, as if we were hearing it for the very first time:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

I wonder if you ever watch Strictly Come Dancing – I have enjoyed it for many years – it's real entertainment for the whole family to watch together. There is one judge who is feared by all the contestants – Craig Revel-Horwood, of course. If he doesn't like a dance he might use the dreaded phrase, 'That was a DISARRRSTER' – and of course no one wants to hear that about their dance! But, when he likes what someone has done, we all know it because he says, 'That was A-MA-ZING!!' - everyone wants to hear that!

Now, when we hear this reading from the beginning of John's Gospel as if for the very first time, I reckon our response could be, 'That was A-MA-ZING!!' This is why I think this passage is A-MA-ZING!!

One huge thing this reading says to me is this: we, every one of us, and every part of the created world, is valuable. Quite simply, we are treasure, for we have come into being, not as random accidents, not as consumers in a vast global supermarket, where our only reason for existing is to spend, spend, spend, or eat, eat, eat, but we have been brought into being in love through Christ. What happens to us and to our brothers and sisters around the globe and to the natural world in which we live, matters hugely to God. If we are dismayed at the war that continues to drag on in Ukraine; if we are devastated by the terrible massacre of Jews in Israel and the awful bombing and destruction in Gaza; if we have deep concerns for our planet, then we are joining in with God's compassionate concern for those God has

brought into being.

This passage from John's Gospel speaks to me of God's great love for us – God does not choose to stay far off, speaking at a great distance from us through a megaphone, sealed off from the turmoil of human existence on this planet. This passage tells of a God who draws so near as to enter fully into our existence. This is the deep good news of Christmas I believe. God, diving into our world, as it were, plunging in and becoming totally submerged into our human experience. We are relational beings – we need one another to live well and for us to hear and respond wholeheartedly to God, we need God to draw close to us, to know how life is for us and for our brothers and sisters around the world, many of whose lives are hard and painful. And as Christ entered fully into our world, so we too can be submerged into the depths of God's great love for us. This is a message of hope and joy. The picture I have in mind here is of the font at Salisbury Cathedral – that great medieval building at the heart of our diocese, with the wonderful 21<sup>st</sup> century font right in front of you as you enter – you cannot miss it. So what is it about this font that I find so powerful? The very first time I saw it, a number of things caught my eye. The font itself is huge and its outline is like one of the pillars – it isn't round, but it goes in and out and in effect has the shape of a cross. If you go near one of the parts that goes in, you can be very close to the water. The most striking thing about this font for me is the water itself – for it comes completely to the top of the font – there is no gap between the top of the water and the rim of the font. It is full to the brim. This speaks powerfully to me of God's love, full to the brim, no half measures. And there is more, for as I turned away from the font, I started to hear the sound of running water and then as I turned back to look, I saw the water overflowing the top of the font – there are four 'lips', if you like, where the water can overflow into grilles in the floor beneath. But even as the water overflowed, yet the font stayed full to the very brim. The overflowing love of God, full to the brim and yet generously washing over us and over the whole world too. A love so full, that as Christ entered the world completely and submerged himself, so likewise we can plunge ourselves into this love of God. There is plenty for everyone – it never runs out or dries up.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory...

### **A-MA-ZING!!**

### *Hymn: O little town of Bethlehem*

1 O little town of Bethlehem,  
how still we see thee lie!  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep  
the silent stars go by.  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth  
the everlasting light;  
the hopes and fears of all the years  
are met in thee tonight.

2 O morning stars, together  
proclaim the holy birth,  
And praises sing to God the King,  
and peace to men on earth;  
For Christ is born of Mary;  
and gathered all above,  
while mortals sleep, the angels keep  
their watch of wondering love.

3 How silently, how silently,  
the wondrous gift is given!  
So God imparts to human hearts  
the blessings of his heaven.  
No ear may hear his coming;  
but in this world of sin,  
where meek souls will receive him, still  
the dear Christ enters in.

4 O holy Child of Bethlehem  
descend to us, we pray;  
cast out our sin and enter in,  
be born to us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels  
the great glad tidings tell:  
O come to us, abide with us,  
our Lord Emmanuel.

*Phillips Brooks (1835-1893) CCLI Licence 2370586*

### *Prayers*

Let us pray to Jesus our Saviour. Christ, born in a stable, give courage to all who are homeless.

Jesus, Saviour, **hear our prayer.**

Christ, for whom the angels sang, give the song of compassion to all who weep. Jesus, Saviour, **hear our prayer.**

Christ, worshipped by the shepherds, give peace on earth to all who are oppressed. Jesus, Saviour, **hear our prayer.**

Christ, before whom the wise men knelt, give humility and wisdom to all who govern. Jesus, Saviour, **hear our prayer.**

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

Jesus, Saviour, **hear our prayer.**

Jesus, Saviour, born of Mary, you know us and love us, you share our lives and hear our prayer.

**Glory to you for ever. Amen.**

And as our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory. For ever and ever. Amen**

*The Blessing*

May the joy of the angels, the eagerness of the shepherds, the perseverance of the wise men, the obedience of Mary and Joseph, and the peace of the Christ-child be yours this Christmas; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you and with all whom you love, this day and evermore. **Amen.**

*The Work of Christmas*

When the song of the angel is stilled,  
When the star in the sky is gone,  
When the kings and princes are home,  
When the shepherds are back with their flock,  
The work of Christmas begins:  
To find the lost,  
To heal the broken,  
To feed the hungry,  
To release the prisoner,  
To rebuild the nations,  
To bring peace among brothers,  
To make music in the heart.

*Howard Thurman*

*Carol: Joy to the World*

1 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.

2 Joy to the earth! The Saviour reigns!  
Your sweetest songs employ  
while fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains  
repeat the sounding joy,

repeat the sounding joy,  
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

3 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)(Public Domain)*

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*New Patterns for Worship*, is copyright The Archbishop's Council (2002).

Rejoicing adapted from *The Celtic Wheel of the Year: Celtic and Christian seasonal prayers*, Tess Ward, O Books (2007) p276.

Invitation to Confession adapted from *Praying with the Earth: a prayerbook for peace*, John Philip Newell, Canterbury Press (2011).

'The Work of Christmas,' by Howard Thurman, in *The Mood of Christmas* (Friends United Press: 2001 4<sup>th</sup> ed.) p26.