**Christmas Day**

**Dursley Methodist church 2018**

I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. **11**Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.

**CAROL: O COME ALL YE FAITHFUL verses 1,5,6**

**Advent Candles:**

**174 Light a Candle verses 1,6**

**Prayer.**

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.

Christ the light of the world has come

to dispel the darkness of our hearts.

In his light let us examine ourselves and confess our sins.

*Silence is kept*.

God our Father,

you sent your Son full of grace and truth:

forgive our failure to receive him.

Jesus our Saviour,

you were born in poverty and laid in a manger:

forgive our greed and rejection of your ways.

Spirit of love,

your servant Mary responded joyfully to your call:

forgive the hardness of our hearts.

Lord, have mercy.

May the God of all healing and forgiveness

draw us to himself,

that we may behold the glory of his Son,

the Word made flesh,

and know peace,

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

**Reading Luke 2**

The Birth of Jesus

**2 1-5**About that time Caesar Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Empire. This was the first census when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Everyone had to travel to his own ancestral hometown to be accounted for. So Joseph went from the Galilean town of Nazareth up to Bethlehem in Judah, David’s town, for the census. As a descendant of David, he had to go there. He went with Mary, his fiancée, who was pregnant.

**6-7**While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. She gave birth to a son, her firstborn. She wrapped him in a blanket and laid him in a manger, because there was no room in the hostel.

An Event for Everyone

**8-12**There were sheepherders camping in the neighborhood. They had set night watches over their sheep. Suddenly, God’s angel stood among them and God’s glory blazed around them. They were terrified. The angel said, “Don’t be afraid. I’m here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Savior has just been born in David’s town, a Savior who is Messiah and Master. This is what you’re to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger.”

**13-14**At once the angel was joined by a huge angelic choir singing God’s praises:

Glory to God in the heavenly heights,
Peace to all men and women on earth who please him.

**15-18**As the angel choir withdrew into heaven, the sheepherders talked it over. “Let’s get over to Bethlehem as fast as we can and see for ourselves what God has revealed to us.” They left, running, and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. Seeing was believing. They told everyone they met what the angels had said about this child. All who heard the sheepherders were impressed.

**19-20**Mary kept all these things to herself, holding them dear, deep within herself. The sheepherders returned and let loose, glorifying and praising God for everything they had heard and seen. It turned out exactly the way they’d been told!

**Have you experienced Christmas**

**Who’s been to Bethlehem? Church of Nativity?**

**Ridden on a donkey?**

**Ridden on a camel?**

**Owned a sheep?**

**Shook hands with royalty?**

**Been rejected from a hotel or an inn?**

**Met an angel?**

**Worshipped Jesus**

**All experienced Christmas!**

**HYMN 195 Christains awake Verses 1,5,6**

**TAKE UP OFFERING FOR CHRISTIAN AID**

**Unexpected gift**

God’s action at this point in history takes place in a surprising way. An unmarried teenage woman in an occupied country is forced on a journey by the authorities. Displaced from their home, the young couple have no choice but to have their baby born in an animal shelter and to use a feeding trough for a crib. This is not how rulers, kings and heroes enter their stories, yet it is how Jesus begins to change the world. Where is God at work in surprising ways today? Is God at work at the homeless shelter down the road where volunteers are feeding today’s homeless people? Is God at work in all the refugees and internally displaced persons who are looking for safe shelter? Where is God’s spotlight? Where does God want to draw our attention?

***Give out Christmas gift tags and pens***.

The baby in the manger is a sign of God doing something unexpected. Where have you found God working in an unexpected place? What in your life was unexpected but a blessing? Can you think of an unlikely friendship, task or job that you came to love? Or someone who was unexpectedly kind? Invite people to write or draw one idea onto the gift tag and then to place it beside the manger as a prayer of thanksgiving.

 Most of us will have special places where we keep things that are really precious to us. Perhaps some jewellery that we keep in a special box when we aren’t wearing it, because it’s not something for everyday. Perhaps the latest electronic gadget that needs a special case to protect it. Mary receives something very precious that first Christmas, a child that was promised to her from God. But she has nowhere safe and special to put him. The manger is the best she can do. It is a very ordinary place for something so special. Sometimes we put God and faith in a box, and bring them out for the important occasions. Perhaps we think we have to put on our best face for God. But the message of Christmas is that God wishes to be close to us in the ordinary, in the everyday of life. Where is God with you today?

Shepherds were among the first people to see and worship Jesus. Sheep are dirty, messy things.

To make a sheep’s fleece into a ball of useful wool, it has to go through many stages of cleaning and processing. The Christmas story also goes through a lot of cleaning and processing before it gets to our Christmas cards, carols and nativity scenes. We can lose sight of the reality of an unmarried teenager giving birth in an animal shelter – and of the message that God wants to be close to us in our messy lives, not just in the nice bits.

***To remind us of this, pass round balls of wool (ideally unbleached, but if not,*** use a ‘drab’ colour) and some scissors. Invite everyone to cut themselves a length of wool and to tie it round their wrist. Ask people to help each other with this. Remind everyone that God wants to be that close to us; not just today but every day. End with a prayer – you could use [*A prayer of confession*](https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2018/98-november-december-2018-bc/christmas-day/prayers/prayer-of-confession) or [*A prayer of thanksgiving*](https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2018/98-november-december-2018-bc/christmas-day/prayers/prayer-of-praise-and-thanksgiving).

**A prayer of confession**

Forgive us, Lord

Forgive us, Lord,
when we look for your presence in our world
in places of wealth, and miss you in the manger;
when we pay attention to those in power
and miss you speaking through the vulnerable.
Forgive us, and bless us
with the enthusiasm and faith of the shepherds,
the quiet obedience and humility of Mary,
and the loyalty and strength of Joseph.
**Amen.**

**prayer of praise and thanksgiving**

Thank you, gracious God

Thank you, gracious God,
for choosing shepherds to be witnesses to your Son’s birth.
They were not rich or influential or of high standing,
but they listened to the good news of the angels.
They hurried from the fields to the stable.
They saw Jesus and believed him to be the Messiah.
They shared their joy with all those around them.
May we be like them and see, believe and share.
We ask this in the name of Jesus,
Good Shepherd, Messiah and King.
**Amen.**

**Carol 196 Come and join the celebration**

If you lived in first-century Palestinian society and you wanted an influential group of people to witness an event and spread the word about it, shepherds would be the last people to ask. They are not well known. They don’t go to synagogue. Their work keeps them away from the towns and cities. They are probably the best people to ask to keep a secret! But it is to shepherds that the angel goes. It is to them that the news is given. The shepherds are quick to recognise God’s hand in this. The first thing they do is to go and see for themselves. And having seen, they tell others. What a life-changing experience this must have been to turn unlikely witnesses into evangelists! How does the shepherds’ story challenge us to share the good news we have received?

**The light shines**

We are asked to take the light of Christmas – the light of Christ – out with us into the world. Give everyone a tealight, and during the final song/carol pass the light from the Christmas candle around until everyone’s tealights are lit. People will blow them out as they leave, but ask them to take their light home and relight it, and keep it lit for as long as possible as a reminder that God’s light and hope goes with them today, and into all other days.

**Intercessions**

In peace let us pray to the Lord.

Father, your Son our Saviour

was born in human flesh.

Renew your Church as the Body of Christ.

Holy God

 there was no room for your Son in the inn.

Protect with your love those who have no home

and all who live in poverty.

Holy God

Mary, in the pain of labour,

brought your Son to birth.

Hold in your hand all who are in pain or distress.

Holy God

 your Christ came as a light shining in the darkness.

Bring comfort to all who suffer in the sadness of our world.

Holy God

the angels sang, ‘Peace to God’s people on earth.’

Strengthen those who work for peace and justice

in all the world.

Holy God

 shepherds in the field heard good tidings of joy.

Give us grace to preach the gospel of Christ’s redemption.

Holy God

strangers found the Holy Family,

and saw the baby lying in the manger.

Bless our homes and all whom we love.

Holy God

 heaven is come down to earth,

and earth is raised to heaven.

Hold in your hand all those who have passed through death

in the hope of your coming kingdom.

Holy God

Christians the world over celebrate Christ’s birth.

Open our hearts that he may be born in us today.

Holy God

angels and shepherds worshipped at

the manger throne.

Receive the worship we offer in fellowship with Mary,

Joseph and the saints

through him who is your Word made flesh,

our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen.

**Carol See amid the winters snow verses 1,3,5**

**Hospitality – setting tables**

**Blessing of food and friendship**

**CAROL 213 O LITTLE TOWN**

**Blessing**

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.

Christ, who by his incarnation gathered into one

things earthly and heavenly,

fill you with peace and goodwill

and make you partakers of the divine nature;

and the blessing …

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