

**Call to worship**

Here today there is love, freely available to all.  
Not our human loving, fragile and intermittent,  
but God's supreme love.  
May a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth,  
break forth into joyous songs of praise.

Here today is love, higher than our loftiest hopes,  
deeper than the immensities of time and space,  
God's inclusive love.  
Let the seas roar their praise,  
and everything in them.  
Let the rivers clap their hands  
and the hills sing together their happiness.

The joy of the living Christ Jesus be with you all.

**And also with you.**

Bruce Prewer

**Hymn** Good Christians all rejoice R&S 161

Good Christians all, rejoice  
with heart, and soul, and voice!  
Give good heed to what we say:  
Jesus Christ is born today!  
Ox and ass before him bow,  
and he is in the manger now.  
Christ is born today!  
Christ is born today!

Good Christians all, rejoice  
with heart, and soul, and voice!  
Now ye hear of endless bliss,  
Jesus Christ was born for this;  
He hath opened heaven's door,  
and all are blest for evermore.  
Christ was born for this!  
Christ was born for this!

Good Christians all, rejoice  
with heart, and soul, and voice!  
Now ye need not fear the grave;  
Jesus Christ was born to save,  
Calls you one and calls you all,  
to gain his everlasting hall.  
Christ was born to save!  
Christ was born to save!

J.M. Neale

**Advent Candles**

As we come to light the Christmas Day candle, we hear from the prophet Isaiah:  
The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light: those who lived in a land of deep  
darkness – on them light has shined...for unto us a child is born.

**The fifth candle is lit – *Shine on* p49**

**Let us pray**

We pray for welcoming, caring and loving communities. May our churches welcome all as Jesus has  
welcomed us. Help us to work with others in our local community to promote an openness to the  
stranger. We commit ourselves to 'lift up our voices mightily' to challenge those in our society who  
are not welcoming of others, and instead to be joyously welcoming to everyone. **Amen**

**Hymn** Hark the herald angel sing R&S 159

Hark! The herald angels sing,  
"Glory to the newborn King!  
Peace on earth and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled."  
Joyful, all ye nations rise,  
Join the triumph of the skies,  
With the angelic host proclaim:  
"Christ is born in Bethlehem."  
*Hark! The herald angels sing,  
"Glory to the new-born King!"*

Christ by highest heav'n adored,  
Christ the everlasting Lord!  
Late in time behold Him come,  
Offspring of a Virgin's womb.  
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,  
Hail the incarnate Deity,  
Pleased as man with us to dwell,  
Jesus, our Immanuel.  
*Hark! The herald angels sing,  
"Glory to the new-born King!"*

Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!  
Hail the Son of Righteousness!  
Light and life to all He brings,  
Risen with healing in His wings.  
Mild He lays His glory by,  
Born that we no more may die,  
Born to raise the things of earth,  
Born to give us second birth.  
*Hark! The herald angels sing,  
"Glory to the new-born King!"*

Charles Wesley

### Opening Prayers

Holy and mysterious Lover of the world,  
let this day be a worthy celebration of the birth of our God's love.  
Through the good news of the birth of Christ,  
encourage us to put away our worries, and to discard our fears,  
that with minds open to your Spirit  
we may better love you and more adequately worship your holy name.  
Through Christ Jesus, our living brother and Lord.

Loving God, help us remember the birth of Jesus,  
that we may share in the song of the angels,  
the gladness of the shepherds,  
and worship of the wise men.

Close the door of hate and open the door of love all over the world.  
Let kindness come with every gift  
and good desires with every greeting.  
Deliver us from evil by the blessing which Christ brings,  
and teach us to be merry with clear hearts.  
May this Christmas morning make us happy to be your children,  
and Christmas evening bring us to our beds with grateful thoughts,  
forgiving and forgiven, for Jesus' sake. **Amen.**

**Quiz** – what's in the Christmas story?

**Hymn** See, in yonder manger low R&S 157

See in yonder manger low,  
Born for us on earth below,  
See the gentle Lamb appears,  
Promised from eternal years.

*Hail the ever-blessed morn;  
Hail redemption's happy dawn;  
Sing through all Jerusalem:  
"Christ is born in Bethlehem!"*

Lo, within a stable lies  
He who built the starry skies,  
He who, throned in height sublime,  
Sits amid the cherubim.

Sacred Infant, all divine,  
What a tender love was Thine,  
Thus to come from highest bliss  
Down to such a world as this.

Edward Caswall

**Bible readings:      Isaiah 9:2-7  
                                 John 1:1-14**

John's gospel begins with the same words that start the whole Bible in Genesis – 'In the beginning...' The first chapter of Genesis describes the beginning of creation when God turned chaos into an orderly form and brought the universe and all creatures into existence simply by uttering a word. The story articulates the creative power of the word and God's engagement with the universe. John's use of that phrase 'in the beginning' reminds us that God continues to act in history and engenders an anticipation of yet another divine intervention in human history, an intervention that will have immense significance for humanity. John reminds us of the role of the Word in the process of creation and of its life-giving power. The focus is no longer on the process of creation or creation itself, but on the journey of the Word that brought the universe into existence. The Word that created the universe now becomes the created, in human form and enters the universe. In the first two verses, John is not yet using the Word as a synonym for Jesus, but rather as a metaphor. The word is "God's self-expression" and later Jesus' self-expression as well. The word is a metaphor about God because it reveals the nature and attributes of God.

We recognise Jesus, as the 'word' that was in the beginning with God, and so we use the pronoun 'he'. It is clear from what John goes on to say, that he means Jesus is the word. But in Spanish, for example, the word for Word – *la palabra* is feminine, so the Spanish Bible uses the pronoun 'she'. It works the same in French too. We know that God is not gendered, so while God was made flesh in a male human form, wouldn't a better word for God be love? –

In the beginning was Love, and Love was with God, and Love was God. Love was in the beginning with God and all things came into being through love, and without love not one thing came into being. What has come into being through love was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it... Love was in the world, and the world came into being through love; yet the world did not know it. Love came to its own and its own people rejected it, they chose selfishness, and greed, and money and things, and Love was sad and decided to come again as a human child – for who cannot love a baby, Love thought? So Love was born among us, took flesh

and lived among us, and we have seen Love's glory, the glory of God made human, full of grace, truth and love.

Though of course this doesn't then reflect the link between Genesis and John's Gospel, though I think we could think of love as a creative force – we could say God loved the world into being, rather than spoke it into being.

The Word becoming flesh calls attention to the timelessness of the divine. John highlights how God remains consistent in a world that seems unstable and chaotic. The word that John describes is eternal and undefined by the confines of time, but the eternal seeks to dwell among us in a specific period of time. The word has the ability to transcend time and manifest itself in various forms and contexts. The word is both eternal and particular. The seemingly abstract word takes a concrete form in a specific time in human history as Jesus Christ. The word becomes flesh through Christ and disrupts the human state of affairs. Just as God intervened amid chaos at the beginning of the universe, God again disrupts the status quo of business as usual. John's Gospel sets the stage to talk about how God placed God's body on the line for the sake of humanity.

The word becoming flesh suggests that commitments to justice actually need to take concrete shape, dwell among the victims and put one's body on the line. Words have creative and transformative power, but solidarity can only occur when words become flesh and take concrete form.

Words have power, transformative power, but solidarity with the oppressed can only occur when the word takes its bodily form and identifies with people and dwells with them in their lived contexts. This text is about the power of words but also about how words are limited unless they take concrete shape in actions. On another level, the opening of the gospel of John calls attention to how we choose to use words, to deploy the power of words. Words have an amazing ability to breathe life into people and can rejuvenate people and communities – think of something like Martin Luther King's I Have a Dream speech. But if and when words are misused, they can cause significant harm. By describing God as the Word, something timeless, and creative, loving and incarnate for a time, John emphasizes the power of words, but that they are meaningless without actions.

### **Open wrapped boxes**

You will see that all your gifts are words – Christmassy words. And we are going to stick those words to the outside of the boxes they came in and put them in the window when we leave so that the word of God goes out into the world.

**Hymn** Love came down at Christmas R&S 614

Love came down at Christmas  
Love all lovely love divine;  
love was born at Christmas,  
star and angels gave the sign

Worship we the Godhead,  
love incarnate, love divine;  
worship we our Jesus:  
but wherewith for sacred sign?

Love shall be our token  
love be yours and love be mine,  
love to God all men,  
love for plea and gift and sign

Christina Rossetti

### **Prayers of intercession**

As we come to our prayers of intercession, I read an extract from the poem *Yesterday's News* by Peter Trow from *Shine on Star of Bethlehem*

'...in Bethlehem few heard angels, for they were busy with other things;  
and Jesus from his birth was homeless,  
and as a man he depended for shelter on others.  
We remember Herod and recall that lies are the weapons of power,  
oppression and the death of innocents are part of the story  
which we have sanitized into insignificance.

This was yesterday's news. Here is today's news:  
In this world of selfishness and sin of politics and pain  
Christ was born. For this world he died on a cross and was raised.

God is with us: In this world we have hope, in this darkness we have light  
a love which cannot die and eternal life - Glory to God!

### **Let us pray – response is Let there be light**

This Christmas, as we remember the birth of Jesus amongst the animals,  
we are reminded that hope comes in unexpected ways and in unfamiliar places.  
We pray for the work of schools, colleges, teachers, and youth organisations  
Wherever the world is in darkness, Lord **Let there be light.**

This Christmas, as we remember the violence with which soldiers came searching for Jesus,  
we are reminded that conflicts still have devastating effects on children trapped between  
warring sides. We pray for conflict zones, such as Ukraine, Syria and Yemen, and particularly this  
year Palestine and Israel, and look for peace.  
Wherever the world is in darkness, Lord **Let there be light.**

This Christmas, as we remember the flight of Jesus' family to Egypt,  
we are reminded of the millions of families who have no shelter and who face eviction from their  
homes. We pray for all homeless people wherever they are in the world, and for Syrian, Afghan,  
Yemeni, and all refugees, and for the millions of people displaced in Gaza.  
Wherever the world is in darkness, Lord **Let there be light.**

This Christmas, as we think of Simeon, Zechariah and Elizabeth,  
we are reminded of all the elderly who have died with COVID-19, flu or other diseases, those living  
in care-homes and those unable to leave hospital because there is no care for them at home.  
We pray for doctors, nurses, paramedics and all who work in the NHS, that the new year may bring  
better working conditions and hope for the future.  
Wherever the world is in darkness, Lord **Let there be light.**

Christ Church, Christmas Day 2023 **MERRY CHRISTMAS – CHRIST IS BORN, ALLELUIA!**

This Christmas, while we enjoy the warmth of our homes and the warmth of our families, we pray for all those without food, without heat, and those who are spending Christmas alone, or who feel lonely even while surrounded by family.

Wherever the world is in darkness, Lord **Let there be light.**

This Christmas, as we remember those who went to find Jesus,  
we are reminded that we need to make a journey.  
We pray for ourselves that as you have come to us,  
we may also come to know you,  
to know you and to love you more  
as we serve other people and reach out to the community around us.

Wherever the world is in darkness, Lord **Let there be your light.**

**Lord's Prayer**

**Hymn** Angels from the realms of glory R&S 163

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  
*Gloria in excelsis deo*  
*Gloria in excelsis deo*

Sages, leave your contemplations  
Brighter visions beam afar  
Seek the great desire of nations  
Ye have seen His natal star  
*Gloria in excelsis deo*  
*Gloria in excelsis deo*

Shepherds, in the field abiding  
Watching o'er your flocks by night  
God with you is now residing  
Yonder shines the infant light  
*Gloria in excelsis deo*  
*Gloria in excelsis deo*

Saints, before the altar bending  
Watching long in hope and fear,  
Suddenly the Lord, descending  
In his temple shall appear  
*Gloria in excelsis deo*  
*Gloria in excelsis deo*

**Blessing**

Let us go in faith to ponder in our hearts the mystery of this special day.  
And may life and love be born within us,  
Christ Jesus be seen among us  
and joy surround us like the angels' song. **Amen**

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