

Poole Bay Methodist Circuit worship
Sunday 21st December 2025

Are we ready? – Reverend Karen James

Hello and welcome to this time of worship as we come to the end of the advent season of waiting and preparation and into Christmas.

Whether you are rushing around getting those last-minute details sorted or spending the time more quietly God is with us.

We intentionally notice God's presence where we are, as Advent draws to a close.

In the stillness of the night,

In the movement of the day

In the rest and balm of sleep

In the activity of our waking

As Advent draws to a close and Christmas dawns

Come Jesus, be with me. Amen

As Christmas approaches, we prepare to
join in adoration of you with the humble shepherds,
the proclaiming angels and the gifting wise men.
We adore you with our all, with our everything.

Amen.

(adapted from Roots [Prayers](#))

Hymn: STF 173 - [Into The Darkness of This World](#)

1. Into the darkness of this world;
Into the shadows of the night;
Into this loveless place You came,
Lightened our burdens, eased our pain
And made these hearts Your home.
Into the darkness once again,
Oh come, Lord Jesus, come

Chorus

Come with Your love

To make us whole.

Come with Your light

To lead us on.

Driving the darkness

Far from our souls.

O come, Lord Jesus, come.

2. Into the longing of our souls;
Into these heavy hearts of stone;
Shine on us now Your piercing light,
Order our lives and souls aright
By grace and love unknown.
Until in You our hearts unite,
Oh come, Lord Jesus, come.

Chorus

3. Holy Child, Emmanuel;
Hope of the ages, God with us,
Visit again this broken place,
Till all the earth declares Your praise,
And Your great mercies own.
Now let Your love be born in us,
O come, Lord Jesus, come.

*Come in Your glory
Take Your place.
Jesus, the Name above all names.
We long to see You face to face,
O come, Lord Jesus, come.*

*Words and Music by Maggi Dawn
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Isaiah 7:10-1

New International Version

¹⁰ Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, ¹¹ “Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.”

¹² But Ahaz said, “I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test.”

¹³ Then Isaiah said, “Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you^[a] a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel (which means God with us).

Luke 2:8-20

New International Version

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. 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. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.”

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Are we ready?

Are we ready to put Christ back into Christmas?

Although this phrase has had quite a high profile in the news and media in the last few weeks, it is one that has been around for a while. A clever play on the word Christmas, to challenge an increasingly secular approach to the festivities.

But what does it actually mean- to put Christ back into Christmas.

I am sure that many of us have attended or will be attending Carol services in the lead up to Christmas day where once more we will hear the familiar stories of Mary and Joseph, angels and shepherds, wise men, their gifts and a star. Although no mention of a donkey at this point, at all, in any of the gospels.

The nativity is such a part of our yearly routine that sometimes we do not always pay attention to how incredibly disruptive and challenging this story is. God has chosen the vulnerable, the marginalised, the everyday folk and outsiders/foreigners to be the main protagonists in the re-formation of God's kingdom.

Often the opening verses of Matthew's gospel that list the genealogy of Jesus, are missed out, but amongst them are many flawed individuals and even women, Ruth who as a Moabite woman was a foreigner, Rahab described as a prostitute in Joshua 2. We cannot assume whom God will call to bring about the new earth and heaven. Suddenly the possibilities widen considerably- and so it continues – a young girl responds affirmatively to the angel's message in absolute faith whereas the mature priest, Zechariah, questions it. The Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God, though whom, John tells us in the fourth gospel, all of creation was formed, is not born into a powerful family or a palace but into the family of a carpenter, in a makeshift room with a manger for his bed.

And yet there were miraculous signs that something incredible was happening. The words of the prophets spoken so long before into their own time and place, were being reread and prompting some to recognise that God was still a dynamic presence in the world. Creation too, would respond, the wise men from lands far away nevertheless would look up in the sky and see an unusual star and would follow it, knowing that a new king was born and desiring to go and worship him, even though it was likely they came from different cultures, with different beliefs.

Putting Christ back into Christmas brings with it a certain risk- the world will never be the same again all of our expectations and assumptions will be turned upside down. Are we ready for it?

And yet even within that phrase there is a somewhat arrogant assumption that Christ needs us to put him back into Christmas. A God who can effect, creation, incarnation, resurrection and ascension does not need our help to make God's presence known in the world. But God does freely extend an invitation to all of us, in grace and love, to join in with this wonderful work. In all our diversity and quirkiness and all our gifts and flaws- in our very being we can all be involved.

Are we ready to put Christ back into Christmas- knowing that to do so will likely transform us.

In our Advent groups this week we looked at the shepherds and how their story can help us in our own preparation for the coming of Jesus. For the most part, these shepherds, up on the hills above Bethlehem would be on the margins of society, literally and figuratively. And yet it was this group who were first called to come and see Jesus, the Messiah. Their way of life and work would have made it very difficult to visit the inner parts of the Temple nevertheless, they were invited by angels to be in the presence of God, lying in a manger in a borrowed room, just as they were having rushed down from the hillside. They took

a risk, responded and went on to tell everyone about their experience, all the while praising and glorifying God.

Had it been humans deciding who would be the first greeters of Christ, I very much doubt the shepherds would have been top of the list. But for God, this group, as all the others within the nativity, would emphasise and remind us that God works within and through all kinds of people and in all kinds of ways. That our comfortable routines will be interrupted in quiet ways and in the most unexpected ways. Sometimes our circumstances will remain the same and other times we may find ourselves in very different places but in responding to God's call we will open ourselves to be transformed.

And as John the Baptist would proclaim, years later, it would be the type of fruit that we produce which would determine if that transformation had taken hold.

The picture below is one from the Methodist Modern Art Collection, [Sadao Watanabe - People visit the stable - The Methodist Church](#)



*Sadao Watanabe/People visit the stable, from the Methodist Modern Art Collection
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www.methodist.org.uk/artcollection*

This piece depicts ordinary people coming to visit Jesus, they could be shepherds or anyone. However Sadao Watanabe, who was born, lived and died in Tokyo determined to share the Christian message through Japanese settings and mediums, bypassing the influence of European culture and colonialism. Expressing the idea that this story is for everyone. The technique is known as mingei- "art for the people and by the people". (Methodist website-see link above).

What has struck me about this image and some of its history, is that openness to all that is shared time and time again within the Nativity story but also throughout the bible. Christ was born for every single person throughout the whole of history and beyond. We cannot 'put' Christ back into Christmas or at least we cannot limit Christ to just one type of Christmas, be it religious, political or cultural in theme. And though we may try and with all good intentions, we as the church cannot gatekeep Christmas. Because God works and moves in ways that disrupt our expectations and assumptions. What we can do and should do is model a willingness to be open to God's call and to respond

in faith and in hope and to be willing to be transformed into people who strive for the peace and justice of God's kingdom in our world today. People who produce good fruit and who are known for their love for one another- just as God loves us.

Are we ready for Christ to be put back into Christmas? Only by, and through the grace of God

Amen

Hymn: STF 203 - [Love Shone Down](#)

1. I had a dream that I was standing on a hill side
on a Christmas night so very long ago.
When up in the air beautiful voices
sing a new song let everyone know

Chorus:

*Oh and love shone down over the hills and over the valleys oh and love shone
down over the world*

2. When he spoke to me I knew it was an angel
he said I think there's something that you ought to know.
Then he just smiled said, "don't be afraid now."
Sing a new song let everyone know.
Oh and love shone...

3. And then he told me all about the baby Jesus
where to find him, where exactly I should go.
Then he was joined by millions of others.
Sing a new song let everyone know
Oh and love shone...

4. Was that a dream or was I really on that hillside
on that Christmas night so very long ago.
When he was born Jesus our saviour.
Sing a new song let everyone know

*Oh and love shone down over the hills and over the valleys
oh and love shone down over the world (x2)*

Andy Piercy and C.S. de Whalley

We praise you, Almighty God, for walking with us through Advent.

We praise and thank you:

that you have guided us and shown us the way;

that you have revealed yourself in the expected and unexpected;

that you have been balm to our pain and companion in our joy;

that we have seen prophecies fulfilled, promises upheld;

that we have glimpsed hope in the desperate times;

that in death there is life, where there is loss there is gain;

that tears of sadness can be transformed to tears of joy.

We praise you for the greatness of your transforming power.

And, as we wait for Christmas Day, we shout:

Come, Jesus, be with us.

Amen.

Roots [Prayers](#)

We prepare to celebrate and remember your coming to earth and living amongst us, as human as us and yet, still God

We wait in joyful expectation- for your arrival again in all glory and power.

And as we do we lift all of your creation in prayer- so much of it -good and very good, but we are aware where our care for this world has been warped by greed and self- interest, and we have failed to heed the consequences of our decisions have on others and on our surroundings, far and near.

We pray to be better stewards, for all in authority to take seriously the needs of all creation and to pay attention to those voices who are often ignored,

The angels sang, Peace on the earth, good will to all and so we pray for peace and for justice.

The conflicts and wars that have flared up in recent years- where we are now marking the time of fighting in years-

But also the places where violence and unrest come unexpectedly- in everyday disguise- even here.

We pray for justice and for peace- that the voices that cry violence will cease.

We pray for the church universal, whose role is as the body of Christ on earth, each one of us an essential part.

We acknowledge that as institutions there are serious failings and yet there are also good and Christ reflecting communities and individuals.

May we strive to encourage and enable the voices that have been squashed and deflected to be heard clearly and listen intentionally and well to what is being said- even when it is uncomfortable.

Help us to adapt our 'it should be' done this way to it' could be' done this way so that we are open to hearing and responding to different perspectives and ideas.

God came to earth as a vulnerable baby and turned everyone's expectations right around- help us continue to reveal God's kingdom on earth- not ours.

In a moment of stillness we bring before God the concerns that we have on our hearts and for those who grieve, who have their own struggles.

That the message of love and peace sung by the angels is present to all.

We pray these prayers, spoken and unspoken, in Jesus' name,

Emmanuel- God with Us **Amen**

Hymn: STF 202 - [Hark, the Herald Angels Sing](#)

Hark! the herald angels sing,
 "Glory to the new born King,
 peace on earth, and mercy mild,
 God and sinners reconciled!"
 Joyful, all ye nations rise,
 join the triumph of the skies;
 with th' angelic host proclaim,
 "Christ is born in Bethlehem!"
 Hark! the herald angels sing,
 "Glory to the new born King!"

Christ, by highest heaven adored;
 Christ, the everlasting Lord;

late in time behold him come,
offspring of a virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
hail th' incarnate Deity,
pleased as man with man to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel.
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new born King!"

Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,
risen with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by,
born that man no more may die,
born to raise the sons of earth,
born to give us second birth.
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new born King!"

Charles Wesley

Blessing

St Patrick's Breastplate – for life's journey

Christ be with us Christ within us
Christ behind us Christ before us
Christ beside us Christ to win us
Christ to comfort and restore us
Christ beneath us Christ above us

Christ in quiet Christ in danger
Christ in the hearts of all that love us
Christ in the mouth of friend and stranger.

And in the close of Advent and the dawn of Christmas, may the blessing of God the Creator, Saviour and Sustainer remain with us always. **Amen**