

Candlelit Carol Service - Spirit of Christmas Service 2025

GOD CREPT IN

*When the world was dark
and the city was quiet,
you came.*

You crept in beside us.

*And no one knew.
Only the few
who dared to believe
that God might do something different.*

Will you do the same this Christmas, Lord?

*Will you come into the darkness of tonight's world;
not the friendly darkness
as when sleep rescues us from tiredness,
but the fearful darkness,
in which people have stopped believing
that war will end
or that food will come
or that a government will change
or that the Church cares?*

*Will you come into that darkness
and do something different
to save your people from death and despair?*

*Will you come into the quietness of this town,
not the friendly quietness
as when lovers hold hands,
but the fearful silence when
the phone has not rung
the letter has not come,
the friendly voice no longer speaks,
the doctor's face says it all?*

*Will you come into that darkness,
and do something different,
not to distract, but to embrace your people?*

*And will you come into the dark corners
and the quiet places of our lives?*

*We ask this not because we are guilt-ridden
or want to be,
but because the fullness our lives long for
depends upon us being as open and vulnerable to you
as you were to us,
when you came,
wearing no more than swaddling,
and trusting human hands
to hold their maker.*

*Will you come into our lives,
if we open them to you
and do something different?*

*When the world was dark
and the city was quiet you came... You crept in beside us.*

We remain seated to sing

*1 O Come O Come Immanuel
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice, rejoice! Immanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

*2 O come, O come, Thou Lord of might
Who to Thy tribes on Sinai's height
In ancient times didst give the law
In cloud, and majesty, and awe.
Rejoice, rejoice! Immanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

*3. O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people save
And give them victory o'er the grave.
Rejoice, rejoice! Immanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

*4 O come, Thou Dayspring, come and
cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice, rejoice! Immanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

5 O come, Thou key of David, come
And open wide our heavenly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery.

*Rejoice, rejoice! Immanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

CCL Licence number: 5935

Invocation *(on screen)*

Light looked down and saw darkness.

"I will go there," said Light.

Peace looked down and saw war.

"I will go there," said Peace.

Love looked down and saw hatred.

"I will go there," said Love.

So
the Lord of Light
the Prince of Peace
the King of Love
came down
and crept in
beside us.

Centuries before that first Christmas the prophet Isaiah foretells of a wonderful saviour sent by God to bring suffering people from darkness to light. Isaiah sees it as a child being born, a son, who will bring peace and justice to the world.

***Those Who Saw the Star* - by Julia Esquivel**

The Word became Light,
The Word became History.
The Word became Conflict,
The Word became Indomitable Spirit,
and sowed its seeds...

and *those-of-good-will*, heard the angels sing.

Tired knees were strengthened, trembling hands were stilled, and the people who wandered in darkness saw the *light*!

Then,
The Word became flesh in a nation-pregnant-with-freedom,
The Spirit strengthened the arms which forged Hope,
The Verb became flesh in the people who perceived a new day...

The Word became the *seed-of-justice* and we conceived peace.

The Word made *justice* to rain and *peace* came forth from the furrows in the land.

Grace and Truth celebrated together in the laughter of the children rescued by *life*.

And the Word shall continue sowing futures in the furrows of Hope.

And on the *horizon* the Word made *light* invited us to relive a thousand dawns

toward the Kingdom that comes...

We remain seated to sing

1 O Come All Ye Faithful
Joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
Come and behold Him,
Born the King of angels;

*O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord!*

2 God of God,
Light of light,
Lo, He abhors not the virgin's womb;
Very God,
Begotten, not created:

3 Sing, choirs of angels,
Sing in exultation,
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above;
Glory to God
In the highest:

4 Yea, Lord, we greet Thee,
Born that happy morning,
Jesus, to Thee be glory given;
Word of the Father
Now in flesh appearing:

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We move forward in our story and hear of Mary and Joseph...

God sent an angel to a young woman called Mary, who lived in Nazareth, a town in Galilee.

She was engaged to a man named Joseph. They were an ordinary couple, enjoying the excitement of planning their future.

Seeing the shock and fear on Mary's face, the angel said "Don't be afraid Mary. My name is Gabriel and God has sent me to tell you that he is going to bless you"

Mary was badly shaken and wondered what on earth the angel could mean. But Gabriel reassured her "there's no need to worry Mary. God is going to give you a baby boy and you must call him Jesus. He will be a great man and will be known as God's Son.

But how? Mary asked. "I'm a virgin"

Gabriel explained that God's Holy Spirit would form the baby within her and for her to believe that in God nothing is impossible.

Mary responded with faith saying she was honoured to serve God however he saw fit.

JUST A GIRL

She wasn't a woman – she was a girl, just a child herself. I don't think we really realise that – her pedestal has been built up so high it's hard for us to see her any more. It must have been so scary – what would her parents think – or her husband to be!

She only had the word of an angel – if that was what it was....maybe it was a dream, a vision, a desperate wish from a terrified girl. Upside down and inside out...that's what happened to her life – with this tiny fragile unexpected life growing inside her!

She was just a girl...and didn't do anything special...well that's not true...she said yes to God...and because she did, nothing has been the same since. She brought the light of the world into the world...but how could she know she was just a girl...

We remain seated to sing

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 in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Immanuel!

I GAVE HIM A NAME

I gave him a name – he needed a name. We all need to know who we are.

I gave him the name Jesus: the name the angel whispered in my ear. And I gave him a family – everybody needs a family, folk who love you because you're theirs. Not much is said of that and that's fine with me – I didn't do it for recognition or status. I don't really know why I did it. At the time things were so unreal – but the baby was real and so was the danger to his mother if I didn't do the right thing. I just needed to figure out what that was.

I decided at some point that the right thing was love.. the right thing was trust. The right thing was the hardest road, so we started down it together

I gave him a name – he needed a name. We all need to know who we are. I don't think we really understood who he was or that that name would echo through time – long after our journey was through. I gave him the name Jesus: the name the angel whispered in my ear – and now it whispers in your hearts as you sit there in the quiet of this night. And I gave him a family – everybody needs a family, folk who love you because your theirs. And I don't think we really understood who he would add to our family – who he would gather to himself: how he would make you all not just his family, but his body, his very soul.

It was the right thing – LOVE The right thing often leads you onto the hardest road, but it's also the most beautiful...

We stand to sing

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 man is now residing,
Yonder shines the infant-light:

3 Sages, leave your contemplations,
Brighter visions beam afar;
Seek the great desire of nations,
Ye have seen His natal star.

4 Saints, before the altar bending,
Watching long in hope and fear,
Suddenly the Lord descending
In His temple shall appear:

5 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:

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

James Montgomery, CCL Licence Number 5935

To Bethlehem

At about this time, Caesar Augustus, the Roman Emperor, ordered a census of his entire empire. This required every man to return to his place of birth to register, along with his immediate family. Joseph as a descendant of David went to Bethlehem with Mary who was heavily pregnant...That 's how Jesus came to be born in Bethlehem.

Because of the chaos there was no room to be found...except in a stable...so Mary wrapped her newborn child in swaddling and laid him down in the animal trough to sleep.

***In the Middle of the Night* by Dom Helder Camara**

Then you chose to come.
God's resplendent first-born sent to make us one.
The voices of doom protest:
"All these words about justice, love and peace—
All these naïve words will buckle beneath the weight
of a reality which is brutal and bitter, ever more bitter."
It is true, Lord, it is midnight upon the earth,
moonless night and starved of stars.

But can we forget that You, the son of God, chose to be born at just such a midnight?

We remain seated to sing

1 Silent night, holy night!
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon Virgin, Mother and Child
Holy Infant so tender and mild
Sleep in heavenly peace
Sleep in heavenly peace

2 Silent night, holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight
Glories stream from heaven afar
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia!
Christ the Saviour is born
Christ the Saviour is born

3 Silent night, holy night!
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from Thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace
Jesus Lord, at Thy birth
Jesus Lord, at Thy birth

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In the fields

In the fields around Bethlehem that night, shepherds were guarding their flocks. Without warning the darkness exploded into blazing light and an angel stood before them...bringing good news

Seems shepherds always get the worst of it...
Cold hillsides and rocky barren places...
Sheep and sheep and more sheep – and sleepless nights counting them.
No camels to ride or gifts to bear, no wisdom either – just second hand news...

Seems shepherds always get the worst of it...
Bathrobes and tea towels and the back of the stage – sharing one line
“let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing we have been told of...
No tinsel or glitter or golden wings

Seems shepherds always get the worst of it...
Minimum wage and zero hour contracts.
No pension plan or savings account – no respect either.
Just systematic injustice that keeps them in lowly places.

Seems they had something in common with the baby they visited
Later, he would call himself a shepherd.
Later he would lay aside his wants for the needs of his sheep.

Later he would say “If you love me feed my lambs.”
In the face of the worst he would give his best.

So there is wisdom.

There is Glory without gold

And there is hope that there will be justice for those who always seem to get the worst of it.

We stand to sing

1 While shepherds watched their flocks by night,
All seated on the ground,
The angel of the Lord came down
And glory shone around.

2 'Fear not' said he, for mighty dread
Had seized their troubled mind;
'Glad tidings of great joy I bring
To you and all mankind.

3 'To you in David's town this day
Is born of David's line
A Saviour, who is Christ the Lord,
And this shall be the sign.

4 'The heavenly babe you there shall find
To human view displayed,
All meanly wrapped in swaddling bands,
And in a manger laid.'

5 Thus spake the seraph; and
forthwith
Appeared a shining throng
Of angels, praising God, who thus
Addressed their joyful song;

6 'All glory be to God on high
And on the earth be peace;
Goodwill henceforth from heaven to all
Begin and never cease.'

Nahum Tate.

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Wise men travel

Men of learning set off from the East and the star led them to the very place Jesus was staying. They were overjoyed when they saw Jesus and gave him lavish gifts that expressed the worship of their hearts...

We stand to sing

1 THE FIRST NOWELL the angel did say
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as
they lay;
In fields where they lay keeping their sheep,
On a cold winter's night that was so deep.
Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell,
Born is the King of Israel!

2 They lookèd up and saw a star
Shining in the east, beyond them far,
And to the earth it gave a great light,
And so it continued both day and night.
Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell,
Born is the King of Israel!

3 And by the light of that same star
Three wise man came from country far;
To seek for a King was their intent,
And to follow the star wherever it went.
*Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell,
Born is the King of Israel!*

4 This star drew nigh to the north-west;
Over Bethlehem it took its rest,
And there it did both stop and stay
Right over the place where Jesus lay.
*Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell,
Born is the King of Israel!*

5 Then entered in those wise men three
Full reverently upon their knee,
And offered there in His presence
Their gold, and myrrh, and frankincense.
*Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell,
Born is the King of Israel!*

6 Then let us all with one accord
Sing praises to our heavenly Lord,
That hath made heaven and earth of nought
And with His blood mankind hath bought.
*Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell,
Born is the King of Israel!*

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The Christmas story, a vision of what God will do to save his people; a story of how God asks a particular woman to be a part of his plan to bring salvation to the world...a story about a birth, not into riches, but poverty; witnesses who find a baby in a manger; a promise that those who knew Jesus and lived alongside him, were completely sure beyond doubt... that Jesus was God born as a human being, come to save his people and to bring us to eternal life with God, as God intended from the beginning

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness.

We stand to sing

From the squalor of a borrowed stable,
By the Spirit and a virgin's faith;
To the anguish and the shame of scandal
Came the Saviour of the human race.
But the skies were filled with the praise of heaven,
Shepherds listen as the angels tell
Of the Gift of God come down to man
At the dawning of Immanuel.

King of heaven now the Friend of sinners,
Humble servant in the Father's hands,
Filled with power and the Holy Spirit,
Filled with mercy for the broken man.
Yes, He walked my road and He felt my pain,
Joys and sorrows that I know so well;
Yet His righteous steps give me hope again –
I will follow my Immanuel.

Through the kisses of a friend's betrayal,
He was lifted on a cruel cross;
He was punished for a world's transgressions,
He was suffering to save the lost.
He fights for breath, He fights for me,
Loosing sinners from the claims of hell;
And with a shout our souls are free –
Death defeated by Immanuel.

Now He's standing in the place of honour,
Crowned with glory on the highest throne,
Interceding for His own beloved
Till His Father calls to bring them home!
Then the skies will part as the trumpet sounds
Hope of heaven or the fear of hell;
But the Bride will run to her Lover's arms,
Giving glory to Immanuel!

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We stand to sing

1 JOY TO THE WORLD! the Lord has
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!

3 He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
The wonders of His love,
The wonders of His love,
The wonders, the wonders of His love.

2 Joy to the earth! the Saviour
reigns;
Your sweetest songs employ.
While fields and streams and hills
and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy!

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