



Birstall and Rothley Methodist Churches



December 20th, 2020

4th SUNDAY IN ADVENT

This service has been prepared for use at home.



Lighting the Advent Candles:

Jesus said, 'Anyone who does what my Father in heaven wants is my brother or sister or mother.'

I am the servant of the Lord.

Let it be to me according to his word.

Four red candles are lit

Jesus is the light of the world.

A light no darkness can ever put out.

We sing:

StF 185 4th verse & chorus

Kingdom of Christ, for your coming we pray ;
hasten, O Father, the dawn of the day
when this new song your creation shall sing ;
Satan is vanquished and Jesus is King :

*Come let us sing : praise to our King,
Jesus our King, Jesus our King :
this is our song, who to Jesus belong :
glory to Jesus, to Jesus our King.*

words: Charles Silvester Horne (1865-1914)

Prayers

Let us pray,
Merciful God, to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
both by what we have done
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart,
and we have not spoken the truth to one another in love.

We confess that we have trouble
believing in the redeeming power of the cross in a world of pain.
We confess that we try to justify ourselves by speaking of the faults of others.
We confess that we abuse your world for our own gratification.
We confess that we close our hearts to the suffering of our neighbour.
We confess that we are afraid to pray, "Not my will, but yours be done."

For the sake of Jesus our Lord, have mercy on us and forgive us
that we may delight in your will
and walk in your ways to the glory of your name.

We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord,
to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit,
be all honour and glory, now and forever.

Amen

Let us give thanks to God our Father for all his gifts so freely bestowed upon us.
For the beauty and wonder of your creation, in earth and sky and sea.

We thank you, Lord.

For all that is gracious in the lives of men and women, revealing the image of Christ,

We thank you, Lord.

For our daily food and drink, our homes and families, and our friends,

We thank you, Lord.

For minds to think, and hearts to love, and hands to serve,

We thank you, Lord.

For health and strength to work, and leisure to rest and play,

We thank you, Lord.

For the brave and courageous, who are patient in suffering and faithful in adversity,

We thank you, Lord.

For all valiant seekers after truth, liberty, and justice,

We thank you, Lord.

For the communion of saints, in all times and places,

We thank you, Lord.

Above all, we give you thanks for the great mercies and promises given to us in Christ
Jesus our Lord;

***To him be praise and glory,
with you, O Father, and the Holy Spirit,
now and for ever.***

Amen

Our Father, who art in heaven.....

Hymn **StF 180**

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 you, O Israel.*

O come, O come, O Lord of might,
who to your tribes, on Sinai's height,
in ancient times did give the law
in cloud, and majesty, and awe:

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.*

O come, O rod of Jesse, free
your own from Satan's tyranny;
from depths of hell your people save,
and give them victory o'er the grave.

Rejoice! Rejoice!

O come, O 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!

O come, O day-spring, come and cheer
our spirits by your Advent here,
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadows put to flight.

Rejoice! Rejoice!

*words: Latin, 18th century
translated by John Mason Neale (1811-1866)*

Reading: Romans 16: 25 - 27

Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith - to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

Reading: Luke 1: 26 -38

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her,

"Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled."
Then the angel left her.

Time to Reflect

Today we are only five days from Christmas - and we remember a very special visit that was made many years ago to a young woman in the land known as Israel - a visit that was made by an angel. Angels are to be found all throughout the Bible - and throughout the Christmas story we remember every year.

Angels are messengers from God. They do special things. And angels have names just like us.

Gabriel is the most important of all God's angels. He is known as an archangel because he, with Michael arches above all the other angels. He leads all the other angels when they go do something very special in the world. Sometimes, when he appears - he looks just like a man - but a man with wings, and a sword. Gabriel can appear very frightening until you realize that he comes from God - and that God is full of love - and so are his angels. Other times Gabriel can appear just like you and me - because angels can change how they look - and still other times it seems that they have wings and fly - the same as our Christmas tree angels look.

Anyway - many years ago the angel Gabriel - the most important of all the angels, came from God to deliver a very important message to all the world. Now - if you had a very important message to give to the whole world - where would you go to deliver it...??

Gabriel came not to the Emperor of Rome - who ruled the whole world in those days - nor even to the King of Israel - who ruled over God's people. He didn't even go to the biggest city to deliver his message - but instead he went to a tiny village and to a very young woman that no one had ever heard of. Her name was Mary. Most people would have thought of her as being very unimportant.

But God thought she was important. And God sent Gabriel to her. God told Mary, through the angel Gabriel, that she was to give birth to the Saviour of the whole world - that she would be the mother of Jesus. Gabriel told Mary that through her and her child the whole world would be changed. And it was. Things have never been the same since.

One thing I think this story tells us is that every person is precious to God. God could have chosen anyone to give birth to Jesus - but God chooses a person that everyone else thought not important - and through her did some very important things. And that is the way it is with us too. God chooses us - not always with an angel's visit - but God still chooses us - to bring the good news of Jesus and his love to the whole world. That is part of what Christmas is all about - telling the whole world about the special things that God has done - and is still doing - through the one who was born of Mary and of God's own Spirit.

Take a time to sit quietly

Prayers of Intercession

Loving God - as we approach the day of Christ's birth,
help us to throw wide the doors of our hearts in preparation.
Help us to sense the importance of what happened so long ago
when Mary was visited by the angel Gabriel;
to remember the words of the angels and the prophets and the teachers of old,
and to celebrate all the promises that you made through them.
Help us to take firm hold of the meaning of all these things
and to know in the depths of our being
that even now you are seeking to work in us
and through us to fulfil the promises you have made....

Lord - may this Christmas season be for us and for those around us
a season of healing,
may it be a season of hope and of love and of joy,
may it be a time of true sharing and of rejoicing in all the earth....

We pray for the Church of Jesus Christ;
that, begun, maintained and promoted by the Holy Spirit,
it may be true, engaging, glad, and active, doing your will.
Let Your church be always faithful, O God,
and ready to promote the cause of compassionate love and peace...

We pray that as Christian disciples we may be a faithful witness
in word and deed to the Good News of Christ's Love....

We pray for all who govern and hold authority in the nations of the world.
We pray that everywhere upon this earth there may be justice and peace...

We pray for all people in their daily life and work -
for our families, friends, and neighbours,
and for those who are alone.

We pray for those who are homeless
and those who are hungry this day

We pray for individuals and families experiencing personal hardship
or facing an uncertain future,
those who are separated from loved ones,
those who grieve
and those who are sick in hospital or ill at home.

Help us each day, O God,
to rely upon your promises and to put our trust in you anew.
Grant us wisdom and discernment, your love, your hope, your peace, and your joy -
help us to pass on these gifts in deeds of caring and sharing,
make us your instruments - your vessels.

Giver of the greatest gift -
move in our hearts, and make us a people worthy of the name of Jesus -
raise up that which is has been brought low
and bring down that which has been lifted up.

Prepare in us and through us the way of your Son Jesus Christ - we ask it in his name.

Lord in Your love, hear all our prayers - both the spoken and unsaid.
May our prayers further Your purposes for us all,
and bring us to that place
where we may experience the joy that has been given to your faithful
down through the ages - a joy everlasting.

Amen

Hymn

StF 187

The angel Gabriel from heaven came,
with wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame;
"All hail," said he, "thou lowly maiden Mary,
most highly favoured lady."

Gloria!

"For known a blessed mother thou shalt be
all generations laud and honour thee,
thy son shall be Emmanuel, by seers foretold;
Most highly favoured lady."

Gloria!

Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head,
"To me be as it pleaseth God," she said,
"My soul shall laud and magnify his holy name."
Most highly favoured lady.

Gloria!

Of her, Emmanuel, the Christ, was born
in Bethlehem, all on a Christmas morn,
and Christian folk throughout the world will ever say,
"Most highly favoured lady."

Gloria!

Words: Sabine Baring-Gould (1834-1924)

Blessing

Dearest God, thank you so much for visiting Mary,
and thank you for the child she bore.
We thank you too, O God, for how you love everyone
even those who seem unimportant,
and for how you call us to do the same
through Christ Jesus your Son – the Son of Mary.

Go in peace;
love and care for one another in the name of Christ;
and may God bless you and keep you both now and forevermore.

Amen