

Christmas 1 - Service of Morning Worship

Hymn

Introduction

Grace and peace to us from God.
May he fill us with truth and joy.

We pray together:

Loving Lord,
fill us with your life-giving, joy-giving, peace-giving presence,
that we may praise you now with our lips, in our hearts
and all day long with our lives,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer of Preparation

Before we come to confession we pray together:

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Confession

The word of God is living and active. It judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart. All is laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we give account. And so, we confess our sins in penitence and faith, thankful of the assurance of God's forgiveness.

Our God, for love of you we desire to hate and forsake all sins
by which we have ever displeased you;
and we resolve by the help of your grace
to commit them no more;
and to avoid all opportunities of sin.
Help us to do this, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

May God who loved the world so much that he sent his Son to be our Saviour
forgive us our sins and make us holy to serve him in the world, through Jesus Christ
our Lord. Amen.



Reading

Luke 2: 15-21

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."

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

On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.

John 21: 19b-end

Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?"

Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." Because of this, the rumour spread among the believers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?"

This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.



Sermon

Last Sunday of 2020 (Christmas 1 / John, Apostle and Evangelist)

Luke 2: 15-21 / John 21: 19b-end

So, here we are..... the last Sunday of 2020!!

How does that make you feel? Are you breathing a sigh of relief? 'What a year – thank goodness it's over!' Or are you thinking, 'Actually, there's no relief to be had because there's only going to be more of the same as we move into 2021?' In fact, shall we just wait till 2022 to look forward to things getting better and may be life returning more to how it used to be?

You know.....when we could sing in church; when we could see each other's faces; when we could give someone a hug; when we could openly meet with family and friends; when we could have a coffee or a meal out; when we could travel.

Today there are two choices in the Lectionary. We can either focus on the title Christmas 1 or we can focus on John, Apostle and Evangelist. I've opted for readings from both because I think that they both have something to say to us for the situation we're in.

The first reading tells us about the shepherd's response to the angel's message – 'Go the Bethlehem and see the Saviour, the Christ.' The reading certainly implies that they all went. I suppose some could have opted not to, couldn't they? Each of them could choose whether to go or not: but it seems no-one stayed behind.

They all, to a man, behaved in a completely different way to their normal routine on the hills, which was doing their job of looking after the sheep: and we know that the end result of their actions was hugely significant to them – being in the presence of the Christ-child, God himself!

In order to be in the presence of God himself, come in the flesh, the shepherds needed to travel. Unlike the shepherds, we end this year still unable to physically travel in the same way as we've always been used to doing. However, thankfully we don't need to physically travel to be in the presence of God. He is always with us wherever we are: not in the flesh as the shepherds saw him in the form of Jesus because he has ascended back into heaven: but through the power of the Holy Spirit. If we ask Jesus to come to us, he will come. While Lockdown has stopped us from seeing family and friends, it should not have been a barrier to being in the presence of Jesus, because nothing (not even Covid) can separate us from the love of God and the presence of his indwelling Holy Spirit.

Like the shepherds though, over these last months we have had to completely change our normal way of doing things – and the end result of our actions has been hugely



significant to us too. Whether we agree with the restrictions imposed upon us at the moment or not, they are there to try and stop the death rate rising. They are there to ease the pressure on our wonderful NHS. They are there to try to get control of this awful virus. They are there in an effort to keep us, and others, safe and well. If we don't adhere to the restrictions, there could be huge consequences for us: just as if the shepherds hadn't changed their behaviour on that Holy Night they would have forfeited being in the healing presence of Almighty God.

The reading to mark John the Apostle seems to be more about Peter. Peter wants to know what's going to happen to John, (remember, this event takes place after the resurrection) and so he asks Jesus to tell him. Basically, Jesus tells him to mind his own business! What the Lord has planned for John is between the two of them and Peter should focus on his own life of faith and ensure that he's always following Jesus. So, on this last Sunday in 2020, how closely have we been following Jesus during this very different year, when many things have been difficult: and church certainly hasn't been the same?

It seems to me that it's been a year of overwhelming sadness, grief and loss. People's loved ones have died, often without them being able to be with them in their last moments. Separation from loved ones and friends has caused untold pain for many. Livelihoods have been wiped out with the subsequent loss of income.....leading to enormous worry and anxiety about how to pay the bills, feed the children. And with all the difficulties created directly as a result of the pandemic many people have still had to deal with other issues – our own son being diagnosed with incurable stage 4 bone cancer is just one example. However, Jesus makes it clear to us, as he did to Peter, that our responsibility is to follow him, irrespective of whatever's going on around us to others.

Has Covid hindered that? Have we drifted away from Jesus because our focus has been on the nightmare scenarios around us and not on him? Next year I guess will begin, and continue for a while, in a similar pattern to most of this year: but, whatever the year holds, none of us are guaranteed to get an easy ride. There will always be a variety of difficulties and problems along the way. But through it all Jesus continually calls us to follow him.....which will often involve changing our normal human way of behaving into a Godly, Christ-like way.

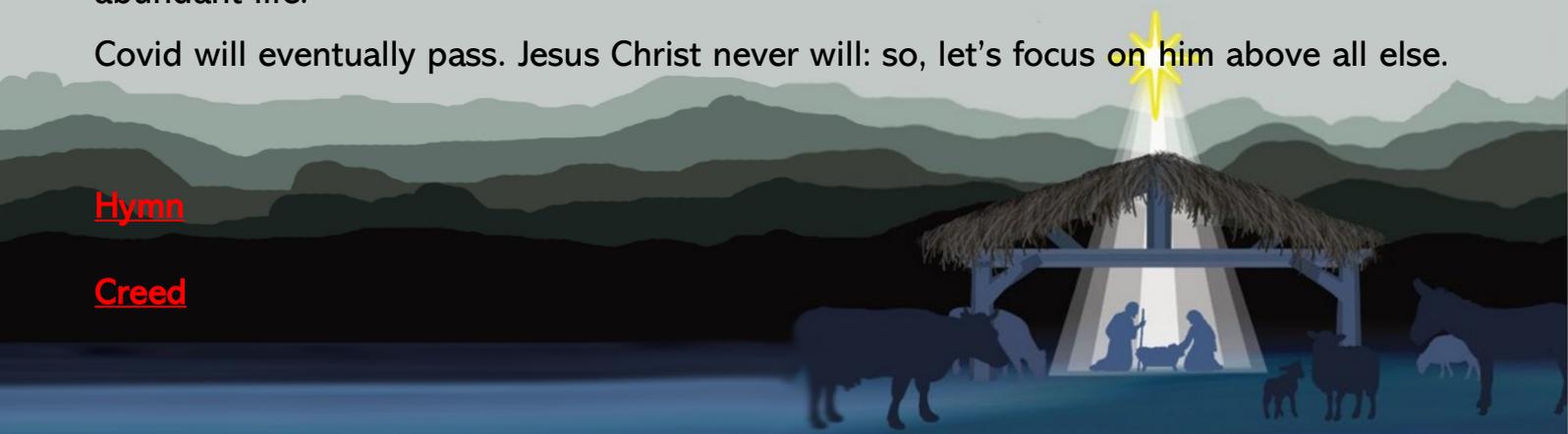
The coming of Covid has had a massive impact on the world producing untold suffering, heartache and death.

The coming of Jesus Christ also had, and is still having, a massive impact on the world: but he brought, and is still bringing every day, salvation, hope, freedom, healing and abundant life.

Covid will eventually pass. Jesus Christ never will: so, let's focus on him above all else.

[Hymn](#)

[Creed](#)



Let us declare our faith in God:

We believe in God the Father, from whom every family in heaven and earth is named.

We believe in God the Son, who lives in our hearts through faith, and fills us with his love.

We believe in God the Holy Spirit, who strengthens us with power from on high.

**We believe in one God;
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Intercessions

Christmas 1 (2020)

Lord Jesus, your coming to earth in the flesh birthed the Church. While we know that as a world-wide community of all sorts of different denominations and styles of worship, we are definitely not perfect by a long way, we ask you to persevere with us in the work of making us holy.

Bring us frequently to our knees in repentance and lift us up to glorify you continually in our lives.

Whatever we're feeling like and whatever outside circumstances assail us, we pray that we will always have the courage and fortitude to follow you wherever you lead us and may our witness in all things draw others to lifelong faith in you.

Lord Jesus, within the imperfect governances of the world we ask you to raise up prophetic voices to challenge and inspire righteousness and peace.

May there be a move away from corruption and greed towards a concern for the poor and marginalised in societies, so that everyone will receive at least the basic, if not more, of requirements necessary for healthy living.

May leaders everywhere set a Godly example to motivate us all to care for our neighbours, whoever they are.

Lord Jesus, as the school holidays continue, we pray for the homes in our parish and ask that you will protect those who suffer abuse within the very place which should be a safe haven.



We pray that you will supernaturally enter these homes and pour down your blessing of peace and harmony, particularly upon those who are full of anger, frustration and hate: those who have never been shown how to live appropriately within a family setting and just perpetuate the bad behaviour they learnt when young themselves. Thank you for all organisations who specifically work with these families to ease tensions and teach a better way.

Lord Jesus, we ask you to be with all those who are enduring suffering or anxiety: those who are full of pain, desperation, or depression: those with no hope: those who know their lives are nearly at an end. We silently bring them to you now.....Give to all troubled hearts your healing and the light of your presence.

Let us now continue in prayer using the words our Saviour taught us:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.

Hymn

Blessing

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord
In the name of Christ. Amen.

