

Christmas Day The Word became flesh.

Welcome and Introduction Revd Wendy Gourlay

Welcome and Very Happy Christmas - from the Mid Loes Deanery.

Today's online reflective service for the Christmas season is the third in a series of four. As previously, our liturgy has been drawn from two Ordained clergy - David Adam and John Cox.

David was the vicar of Lindisfarne, perhaps better known as Holy Island, until retirement in 2003 and has inspired many to worship in the Celtic tradition. Then, from here in Suffolk, John Cox was Archdeacon of Sudbury, before his post of Diocesan Director of Education – retiring in 2010. He writes “it is through Jesus’ relationships and stories that we see the outworking of his teaching – and we are invited not simply to listen, but to enter into the accounts as participants.”

So, once again we will hear an imaginative story of a biblical character, for us to reflect upon. Today, we share the wonder of Jesus Christ born among us: the Word became flesh.

Opening scripture – John 1:14

The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Opening prayer

Glory to God in the highest. **Glory to God in the highest.**

Peace on earth for all people. **Glory to God in the highest.**

Today is the day of joyous news. **Glory to God in the highest.**

A Saviour is born, the Messiah, the Lord. **Glory to God in the highest.**

Carol On Christmas night

Candle-Lighting read by Jackie Clark

Today the Saviour, promised long, is come. Emmanuel,
the Lord is with us. Amen.

The Saviour comes among us and is here. Emmanuel,
the Lord is with us. Amen.

His light shines in darkness that is about us. Emmanuel,
the Lord is with us. Amen.

Confession read by Jackie Clark

Through Jesus our Saviour, born in humility, **we ask for forgiveness.**

Through Jesus our Saviour, proclaimed by the angels, **we ask for forgiveness.**

Through Jesus our Saviour, sought by the shepherds, **we ask for forgiveness.**

Through Jesus our Saviour, worshipped by magi, **we ask for forgiveness.**

May God the Father in his mercy, through his son our Saviour and in the power of the Spirit, grant us forgiveness for all our sins and the grace to live with love and peace, justice and compassion, now and always. **Amen.**

Scripture Reading – Micah 5:2-5 read by Alister Gourlay

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.

Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labour has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace.

For the Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God.

Carol Silent Night

Reflective Story – The lodging keeper. Don't blame me - by Revd John Cox
Matthew 1: 18-2;18; Luke 2:1-22

It's no use blaming me. I did the best I could for them. But the place was throbbing. It was a nightmare. All week people had been arriving from all over the place, staying a night, getting registered and moving on. Oh, I know it was okay for business but frankly I could have done without it. Everyone was grumbling. There was even talk among some of the hot heads of rioting, as a protest against the census. They said it was against the Lord to number the people. A lot of notice the Romans took of that. It wasn't going to stop them. Orders are from Rome. Anything to get more taxes out of us. Poll-tax here, property tax there. The census made sure they milked us dry. A real pain.

Anyhow, back to this couple I was telling you about. Ordinarily I wouldn't have taken much notice of them, certainly wouldn't have gone out of my way for them, seeing they were northerners. But my missus took one look at the woman and that was that. We were overflowing in the house but there was the caravan lodge and the animal cave out the back and as I told them, that was the best I could do.

The missus fussed over them and it must have been sometime the next afternoon the kid was born. Don't remember exactly when but I think the fellow had got back from registering by then. I had to let them stay - couldn't just throw them out.

It was after that that things got a bit strange. Never really did get to the bottom of it. Nothing like it had ever happened before - or since for that matter. It was later that night. I had got to bed around midnight - absolutely bushed I was - when there was this banging and calling. Well, to be honest it's never exactly quiet around here but this was out of order. I jumped out of bed, got my stuff, just in case, and went out front. Just like I thought. A crowd of shepherds. They're always making trouble when they come into town. I told them to clear off. Well, they quietened down but just stood there. One of them said something but I couldn't make sense of it. 'A baby', he shouted, 'is there a baby here?' 'No' I said, 'my boys are all grown up'. 'A newborn,' he persisted. 'Born today'. 'What's that to you?' I asked. 'We want to see him', another of them said. 'The way we've been told he should be all wrapped up in a manger of all places.'

So I took them out back and there it was just as they said. They just stood around like they were dumbfounded. 'It was the angels', one of them said to me. 'They told us about him. It was amazing. Lots of lights and things. He's going to be a great leader and save us from the Romans. Honest.' Well, that's a laugh for a start - an honest shepherd! I thought it was the drink. But they didn't cause any trouble and after a while they left. I don't know what the man and woman made of it. Just talked a bit and seemed to treat it as though it was normal. I went back to bed.

I don't suppose I would have thought anything more about it - stranger things do happen. And they did. That was what made it so weird. The crowds in town had thinned out a bit and after a couple of days we had a spare room. The missus insisted we let the couple have it - after all they weren't poor, they could afford it and you couldn't just leave them outside.

Anyhow they said they would be grateful if they could have it for a week before making the journey back home. 'No more shepherds', I said, joking. 'No', they said. But then there were the travellers! We get a lot of them of course. Caravans from the east, stopping by for the night before going into Jerusalem with their goods. But these were different. They were from the east right enough, but not business-people, not your usual traders. Strange they were - astrologers, magicians, something like that. Very classy. They'd been to the palace apparently, looking for a newborn prince but had been turned away, directed this way. They said something about stars, as far as I could make out. Didn't make any sense to me. I told them straight - we are not exactly the sort of place you'd find a prince in. But they just insisted. And there it was - that couple from up north again and their new baby. Well, you should have seen the travellers. Down on their knees they went and showered him with gifts. I don't understand these foreigners.

They've got some very strange ways. They stayed just the night and then left. It wasn't long after that the couple went - all in a bit of a hurry it was, very early one morning. And that was the last I saw of them.

We had one hell of a time just after that. Terrible it was. Soldiers came, raiding the houses, assaulting people, killing children. Terrible. No reason for it. No wonder we hate them.

I sometimes get to thinking about that couple and their baby. All that fuss. What was so special about him? Couldn't see it myself. I wonder what became of him?

I invite you to a short period of reflection. A visual slideshow will be accompanied by the tune "Dawning" © 2015 Wendy Gourlay

Intercessions Led by Carol Cooke

In the power of the Spirit and in union with Christ let us pray to the Father.

We give thanks for the angel's message of peace:

we pray for the peace of our world,
for the leaders of the nations,
for peace-keepers and peace makers,
remembering all his lives are torn by war and violence.

We give thanks for the angel's message of the Saviour's birth:

we pray for all who have never heard the Good News,
for all who seek to share the good news with others,
for missionary societies and those who translate the Scriptures,
remembering our responsibility to live the Gospel life.

We give thanks for the love of Mary and Joseph:

we pray for all parents and carers,
for those who bring up children on their own,
for those couples who cannot have children,
remembering all children and young people who
are abused and neglected.

We give thanks for the welcome of the shepherds and the gifts of the wise men:

we pray for all asylum seekers and refugees,
for all who lack a sense of true worth,
for all who have nowhere they can call home,
remembering all who are strangers in a strange land.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayers and let our cry come unto you. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us so we pray

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come, thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen**

Carol See amid the winter's snow.

Special intention – in the light of God read by Jackie Clark

May we make room with the innkeeper and know the joy of the shepherds, the message of the angels, the seeking of the wise men, the bliss of Mary, the presence of the Christ-child; and may we rejoice in the Word made flesh dwelling among us. Amen.

Closing Prayers led by Revd Wendy Gourlay

**O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray,
cast out our sin and enter in; be born in us today.**

Blessing

May the humility of the shepherds,
the perseverance of the wise men,
the joy of the angels,
and the peace of the Christ child, be God's gift to you.
And the blessing of God almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit be upon you
and remain with you, now and always. **Amen**

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