

**ABBAY INTERNATIONAL BAPTIST CHURCH, READING
CHRISTMAS DAY FAMILY CELEBRATION**

10.30 AM 25TH DECEMBER 2024

LED BY REV DR JULIA BINNEY & REV DR JIM BINNEY

www.abbeybaptistchurch.org.uk.

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Happy Christmas!

Christmas Day Theme: The God of Light and Love

Lighting of the Advent candles:

Jesus, born of Mary (*light first candle*),

light up our darkness.

Jesus, proclaimed by angels (*light second candle*),

light up our darkness.

Jesus, worshipped by shepherds (*light third candle*),

light up our darkness.

Jesus, adored by wise people (*light fourth candle*),

light up our darkness.

Jesus, Immanuel, God who is with us now (*light the fifth central candle*),

light up our darkness.

Today, we celebrate Jesus Christ born, Immanuel, God is with us!

Call to Worship: *Isaiah 9:2,6*

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;

on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given.

**Jesus, is the glory of eternity shining now among us, Prince of Peace, joy of angels,
friend of all, hope for the whole world!**

Carol: https://youtu.be/Hey6l95DAdM?si=TpKX_Tik2SzJGd

Earth lies spellbound in darkness,

Sin's oppressive night;

Yet in Bethlehem hope is burning bright.
Mysteries are unfolding,
But the only sign
Is a manger bed
Where a baby cries.

*Wake up, wake up,
It's Christmas morning,
Christ's eternal day is dawning.
Angels sing in exultation,
Fill the streets with celebration.
Now to God on high be glory,
To the earth proclaim the story.
Ring the bells in jubilation,
Tell the news to every nation:
Christ has come!*

Crowding stairways of starlight,
Choirs of angels sing:
'Glory, glory to God
In the highest heaven.'
Peace is stilling the violence,
Hope is rising high,
God is watching us now
Through a baby's eyes.

Weakness shatters the powerful,
Meekness shames the proud,
Vain imaginings
Come tumbling down.
Ancient mercies remembered,
Hungry satisfied,
Lowly, humble hearts a
Are lifted high.

GRAHAM KENDRICK © 1994 MAKE WAY MUSIC

A Prayer of Praise for Christmas Day:

This is the day we have been waiting for throughout Advent,

Glory to God! We praise you for your peace and joy.

This is the day we look to Immanuel, God with us.

Glory of God! We praise you for your goodness and love.

This is the day we open our hearts to the Saviour of the World.

Glory to God! We praise you for your truth and life.

This is the day we come to worship you and celebrate your coming!

Glory to God! Jesus, the light of all the world is come.

We honour, praise and glorify your name on this special day and always. Amen.

Bible Reading 1: Luke 2:1-7

Carol MP 589: *with accompanying instruments*

See him lying on a bed of straw,
A draughty stable with an open door;
Mary cradling the babe she bore;
The Prince of Glory is His name.

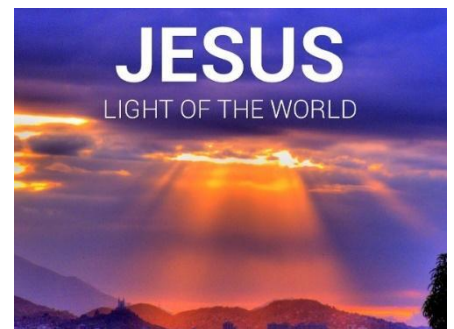
*O now carry me to Bethlehem
To see the Lord of love again:
Just as poor as was the stable then,
The Prince of Glory when He came.*

Star of silver, sweep across the skies,
Show where Jesus in the manger lies;
Shepherds, swiftly from your stupor rise
To see the Saviour of the world!

Angels, sing again the song you sang,
Sing the glory of God's gracious plan;
Sing that Bethlehem's little baby can
Be the Saviour of us all.

Mine are riches, from Your poverty,
From Your innocence, eternity;
Mine, forgiveness by Your death for me,
Child of sorrow for my joy.

MICHAEL PERRY (1942-1996) © MRS B PERRY/ADM. BY THE JUBILATE GROUP



Bible Reading 2: Luke 2:8-20

Clip: The Story of Christmas (Jesus and the Shepherds)

TALK 1: THE GOD OF LIGHT (1 JOHN 1:5)

Winter is a difficult time for many of us because it is so cold and dark. Yesterday was the shortest day of the year and last night the longest night. There is a lot about Christmas that is about light. There are lots of Christmas lights and decorations like tinsel that reflect light and trees with fairy lights that sparkle in the darkness. Christmas trees are a tradition from northern Europe put up on the shortest day of the year to remind people that Spring is on the way! The days get longer from now on!

Over 700 years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem's manger, the prophet Isaiah promised that a light would come into this dark world through the birth of a special baby: 'The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned... For to us a child is born, to us a son is given' (Isaiah 9:2,6a). When he grew up and was about his ministry in this world, on several occasions Jesus declared, 'I am the light of the world' (John 8:12, 9:5). In other words, he is saying, 'you know, that light that was promised all those years ago coming to shine into the darkness of this world? It's me! I'm here!'

Christmas is about light because Jesus is the light that shines in the darkness. In what way is Jesus the light of the world? Let's think about the ways light helps us...

Without light we wouldn't be able to see anything but light itself is invisible. We only know that light is there when dust and mists in the atmosphere bounce off it. God is invisible. We can only know him through the medium of light that is Jesus. Like light, Jesus reveals God to us. When Jesus said, 'I am the light of the world,' he is saying that he is the light of God himself; the light of all people that shines into the darkness of our spiritual blindness.

It was a long dark night and the shepherds were looking after their sheep. Into the darkness an angel appears shining with the glory of God proclaiming a message of good news of great joy and a whole choir of angels lights up the night sky singing praises to God: 'Glory to God in the heavenly heights, and peace to all people on earth who please him' (Luke 2:14). But instead of welcoming this glorious sight the shepherds were terrified...

Into the darkness of our world, God shines his light into our darkness, the darkness of danger, confusion and spiritual ignorance. Jesus is the light of the world that dispels this darkness and brings us peace in place of conflict, hope in place of fear, joy in place of sorrow, love in place of hate. We see God in the person of Jesus: 'For God who said, 'let light shine out of darkness, made his light shine in our hearts to give us the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ' (2 Corinthians 4:6).

At the birth of creation, God said, 'let there be light.' God has lightened up the world in Jesus spiritually speaking and fills our hearts with this light. Let us share this light with others and take the message of the angels out to our needy world.

Carol: *(sung in a round)*

Angels singing, angels singing
Alleluia, alleluia,
Christ is born, Christ is born,
Come and worship,
Come and worship.

Clip: Christian Aid Christmas Appeal 2024

Prayers for the World including a prayer from Christian Aid:

We pray together for those displaced by conflict, climate and poverty.
God of peace-making, peace-building, peace-restoring.
Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

As we remember those for whom peace is a far-off memory, whose daily bread is conflict, uncertainty and fear, grant that we who have safe beds and secure homes would also have the courage not just to speak peace but to keep peace and to build peace, wherever we are. God of peace, strengthen our hearts to act in service of those living through violence and conflict.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who live in darkness and fear mentally and spiritually as well as physically. May your peace and light comfort and inspire them. Lord, make us an encouragement and help to all who are troubled and anxious that they may see the light of Christ and turn to him in faith.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for families this Christmas for your joy, hope and love to be shared and enjoyed. And we pray especially for families where there is conflict and broken relationships and for those whose loved ones are far away. We pray for the lonely, the isolated and the hopeless, May the message of peace and goodwill to all people be heard and received and may your healing grace and love reach out to all in need.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

In Jesus name. **Amen.**

Carol BP&W 157:

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
The little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head;
The stars in the bright sky looked down where He lay;
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,
But little Lord Jesus, no crying He makes:
I love you, Lord Jesus! Look down from the sky,
And stay by my side until morning is nigh.

Be near me, Lord Jesus: I ask you to stay
Close by me forever and love me, I pray;
Bless all the dear children in your tender care,
And fit us for heaven to live with you there.

TALK 2: THE GOD OF LOVE (1 JOHN 4:16)

We all like receiving presents (and hopefully giving them as well) at Christmas. In our family we have a tradition of leaving our Christmas gifts to one another under the Christmas tree until Christmas afternoon when they are distributed by the youngest member of the family present. Usually, come Boxing Day, all the gifts have been taken and all that is left (somewhere out of the way) is a large black rubbish bag full of hastily torn off wrapping paper. I do remember, however, one year when a solitary gift – minus a name tag of course – was left unclaimed until Boxing Day. It was actually for the dog, I recall, so he could be excused.

Vaughn Shoemaker was a two-time Pulitzer Prize editorial cartoonist
prayed before creating each of his 14,000 cartoons. Among many of his memorable cartoon figures Shoemaker is most remembered for a cartoon that appeared on Christmas Day on the front page of the Chicago Daily News for many years. Shoemaker's cartoon showed a beautifully decorated Christmas tree with one unwrapped gift under the tree. On the unwrapped gift were the words: 'Eternal Life'. Underneath the cartoon were the words of John 3:16: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life'. The title of the cartoon was 'The Untaken Gift'.



The Untaken Gift

When Shoemaker first showed a sketch for this cartoon to his editors, they liked it, but expressed concern that it might offend some readers. Shoemaker stood his ground. The cartoon was then shown to the newspaper's publisher, Frank Knox. Knox gave it one quick glance and said, 'Let's be sensible. If it weren't for John 3:16 there wouldn't be any Christmas! Run it!' And run it they did.

Knox was right! '*God is love*' (1 John 4:16). We would not be celebrating Christmas today if God had not so loved the world that he gave us his only Son. It's God's gift of eternal life and joy for anyone who will believe and receive God's only Son. It's all there in the Bible: '*But to all who received Jesus, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God*' (John 1:12). This is good news for everyone! It is just as the angel announced to lowly shepherds on that first Christmas night: '*Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord*' (Luke 2:10).

So, are you quite sure that you have collected all your presents this year? Is there another gift still under the tree that you have forgotten? As the late A W Tozer once said: 'Jesus Christ came not to condemn you but to save you, knowing your name, knowing all about you, knowing your weight right now, knowing your age, knowing what you do, knowing where you live, knowing what you ate for supper and what you will eat for breakfast, where you will sleep tonight, how much your clothing cost, who your parents were. He knows you individually as though there were not another person in the entire world. He died for you as certainly as if you had been the only lost one. He knows the worst about you and is the One who loves you the most. If you are out of the fold and away from God, put your name in the words of John 3:16 and say, "Lord, it is I. I'm the cause and reason why You came to die." That kind of positive, personal faith and a personal Redeemer is what saves you. If you will just rush in there, you do not have to know all the theology and all the right words. You can say, "I am the one He came to die for." Write it down in your heart and say, "Jesus, this is me – Tou and me," as though there were no others. Have that kind of personalised belief in a personal Lord and Saviour.'

Carol BP&W 165:

Hark the herald angels sing'
Glory to the new-born King!
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!
Joyful, all you nations rise,
Join the triumph of the skies;
With the 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 the incarnate Deity!
Pleased as man with us to dwell,

Jesus, our Immanuel.

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 we no more may die;

Born to raise us from the earth;

Born to give us second birth.

CHARLES WESLEY (1707-88) BASED ON LUKE 2:1-20

Christmas Blessing:

Go on your way this Christmas Day

following the light of the world.

Do not walk in darkness, but in the light of life,

sharing the hope, peace, joy, love and light of Christmas with all you meet.

And may the blessing of God go with you.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Christmas Song:

We wish you a merry Christmas,

We wish you a merry Christmas

And a happy new year!

Good tidings we bring

Of Jesus our King;

We wish you a merry Christmas

And a happy new year!

