

ABBHEY INTERNATIONAL BAPTIST CHURCH, READING

CHRISTMAS CAROL SERVICE

10.30 AM 22ND DECEMBER 2024

LED BY JILL AND SIMON BIRD WITH MANY CONTRIBUTING

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ADVENT 4: The fourth Advent Candle reminds us of God's love so freely given to us as the greatest gift of all time – his Son Jesus.

We light this candle to remind us that God so loved the world that he gave us his son to live and die for us

So as we come nearer and nearer to Christmas day let's remind ourselves again about the Lord Jesus

He **came** as a baby 2000 years ago – fully God and fully man to bring God's love and forgiveness to us all.

He is alive and for those who invite him he **comes** every day into our lives to be with us, comfort us, guide us and above all love us.

He **will come** a second time as the mighty King of Kings to completely heal and restore our world – he asks us to look out for him and be ready for his coming

Isaiah 9 . 2, 6-7

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, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called **Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace**.
Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.

He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and for ever.

CAROL

1.O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see you lie!
Above your deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by:
yet in your dark streets shining is everlasting light;
the hopes and fears of all the years are met in you tonight.

2. O morning stars, together proclaim the holy birth,
and praises sing to God the King, and peace to all 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 Emmanuel.

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 for ever; 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.

Christmas drama

Junior church sing to us

Come, they told me, a newborn King to see,
Our finest gifts we bring, To lay before the King,
So to honour Him, When we come.
Little baby, I am a poor boy too,
I have no gift to bring, That's fit to give a King,
Shall I play for you, On my drum?
Mary nodded The ox and lamb kept time,
I played my drum for Him, I played my best for Him,
Then He smiled at me, Me and my drum

The best gift of all Family time

Luke 2 1-7

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was promised to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, in a stable, because there was no rooms available for them.

The children will leave for their own groups

Farsi song by our Iranian friends

People on Earth Jesus was born - born in a manger – a promise fulfilled –
The beauty of Jesus, his face shone for us, the one who created the world came to live with us.

The pure Lamb of God, our righteous one, the glorious King,
the one who was from the beginning, everything came from him,
By coming to earth, he created life anew, the damp and cold manger became the best place on earth,
The one born from the throne on high, Mary's delight and joy
The promise was born, his goodness ended darkness, The pure Lamb of God,
The righteous judge, the glorious King, the eternal Savior, the one who was from the beginning,
everything came from him and by coming to earth, he created eternal life for us.

Luke 2.8-18 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.' ¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.' 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.

Matthew 2. 1-2 9-11 After Jesus was born kings from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, 'Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.' The star they had seen when it rose, went ahead of them, until it stopped over the place where the child was. They were overjoyed and saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

CAROL

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

SERMON

Christmas is all about Jesus - and his birth. That last song said it all. This is what a carol service is all about. Now, as Christmas has been celebrated in Britain for 1,500 years, it is not surprising that traditions have built up around it. This can be very confusing, especially for those new to the country. The 'Life in the UK' test is quite right: simply, Christmas is on 25th December and it is to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

At Christmas we thank God for Jesus and celebrate his birth. But it is just the beginning of the story about Jesus: it points towards who Jesus was and why God sent him.

Why was this? Well, we must go back to the beginnings. There was a problem. God made a good world, in perfect harmony, but people rebelled (we say they sinned); so people are cut-off from God and do not have the close relationship they had with him in the beginning. God knew that we have no way of reaching back to him; so, because he loves us so much and wanted relationship with us, he planned a solution. He reached out to us, and came to our world and was born as baby.

God sent prophets 100s of years ahead to tell of his wonderful plan and to get people ready – to send a great king and rescuer. Christmas then is all about the birth part, the gift. This is the good news which we celebrate.

The biblical story itself has different elements: a young couple having a baby, angels, shepherds, and a star. Some miraculous, some quite ordinary. There was the miracle of how Jesus was conceived; God chose an ordinary, poor, but godly pair to bring up his Son. There were difficulties for them: the apparent disgrace of the pregnancy, a long journey, no clean place for the baby to be born. This shows God knows about and has experienced all life's circumstances. Angels lit up the sky, but this was not a display for the town folk or the country's rulers; it was for shepherds who, at that time, were despised outcasts in society. This shows God reaches out to all kinds. By contrast he puts a star in the sky to bring another group: educated, rich nobles from a far country. This shows that God can be found by those who are looking. Jesus went on to teach, to heal and perform miracles, which shows who he was and the reasons for believing that he was who he said he was – the Son of God. But his life led towards being executed - dying on the cross. This was not a mistake, but was God's way of dealing with our wrong doing (or sins): to restore our relationship with him. This was followed by him rising from the dead, to show it was effective. And there is the promise that he will return, not as a baby, but as king, to fully restore the earth – from our first reading, he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Jesus came as a baby, he will return as the King, and he comes today to those who believe who he is and will accept his forgiveness through his death on the cross.

CAROL

You did leave your throne and your kingly crown, when you came to earth for me;
But in Bethlehem's home was there found no room, for your holy nativity:

Oh, come to my heart, Lord Jesus, There is room in my heart for you
Oh, come to my heart, Lord Jesus, There is room in my heart for you

Heaven's arches rang when the angels sang, proclaiming your royal decree;
But of lowly birth, Lord, you came on earth, and in great humility:

You came, O Lord, with the living Word, that should set your people free;
But with mocking scorn, and with crown of thorn, they bore you to Calvary:

When heaven's arches shall ring, and her choirs shall sing at your coming to victory,
Let your voice call me up, saying, "Yet there is room, there is room at My side for you!"

Cantonese song by our Hong Kong friends

Our redeemer has come from heaven. Let's celebrate him as king!
The whole earth rejoices on this great day!
God's grace has come like a wave! We are waiting with joy.
The whole earth gives praise as we honour the coming King
Even the stars in the universe sing praises and there is peace in the world!

The whole world celebrates and welcomes redemption together!
We praise his glorious almighty name together!
The mountains and rivers sing praise! God's grace is full of glory!
The whole earth gives praise together.
All those in God's kingdom sing praises and celebrate together!
For endless days we will speak of his glory and joy will abound.

Prayers John Chilvers

Father God, we come to You with our prayers for the world.

A few weeks ago, we sang these words:

Great is the darkness that covers the earth

Oppression, injustice and pain. Nations are slipping in hopeless despair

We can despair at the oppression, the injustice and the pain we see in the world around us and the situations can seem hopeless. We look at the war dragging on between Russia and Ukraine, with tens of thousands killed in battle. We see the power struggles in the Middle East and the political uncertainties elsewhere, in South Korea, the United States and closer to home, in France and Germany.

Lord, where are You in all this?

Last week, we heard the message that You are a God of Grace. You chose a young woman, a nobody in her society, who declared that You have brought down rulers from their thrones and have lifted up the humble. We have seen that happen last week in Syria. We pray for that country, that its people will work together for justice and peace.

The song *Great is the darkness* starts with the gloom, but it goes on to say that the darkness will vanish when the Lord Jesus returns. All sorrow will end, and rulers will bow before His throne.

So come, Lord Jesus, come pour out your Spirit we pray.

May we declare, like Mary: "My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour".

So we say again together: **Come, Lord Jesus, come pour out your Spirit we pray. Amen.**

Rev 21 and 22 Then I saw 'a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling-place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death" or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'

The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

Jesus says 'Look, I am coming soon! And let the one who hears say, 'Come!' Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life. Jesus says 'Yes, I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

CAROL Chris and Pauline will sing the first two verses to us in their Malawi language

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

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation
Sing all you citizens of heaven above
Glory to God, in the highest

Yea Lord we greet Thee, born this happy morning
Jesus to thee be glory given

Word of the Father now in flesh appearing

BLESSING

Jesus you came Thank you Father for loving us so much that you gave your son to the world that first Christmas to give us forgiveness and new life– we love you Lord Jesus **Jesus you will come again** in glory. We long for you to return and make all things right again

And Jesus you come Jesus thank you that you also come new to us each day of our lives. We welcome you and say yes come Lord Jesus be born in me again today.

THE GRACE:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.

Dates for your diary.

Dec25th Christmas day service 10.30 followed by family lunch and fun.



Jan 12th Church meeting after the morning service

Baptismal Service: Another baptismal service is being planned for January. If you would like to be baptised and/or become a Church Member please speak to the Minister or one of the Deacons.

If you would like to contribute financially to Abbey International Baptist Church electronically, please use the card reader at the back of the church or scan the QR code to pay:

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