

Basingstoke and Reading Circuit Service – prepared by David Shaw
27th December 2020

Opening Responses

Leader: God has come down to save us

Cong: God is good. Alleluia

Leader: God has come among us

Cong: Hurray, thank you God

Leader: God was born as a baby boy

Cong: That's interesting

Leader: in a stable

Cong: Oh crikey

Leader: to a young virgin girl

Cong: you're having a laugh!

Leader: Let us worship this extraordinary God and celebrate the gift of life at Bethlehem and the gift of life we have received.

Cong: Let's worship.

Carol: Singing the Faith 208, Hymns & Psalms 109 Let earth and heaven combine

[\(1\) "Let Earth and Heaven Combine" by Charles Wesley - YouTube](#)

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|---|---|
| 1 Let earth and heaven combine,
angels and all agree,
to praise in songs divine
the incarnate Deity,
our God contracted to a span,
incomprehensibly made man. | 4 He deigns in flesh to appear,
widest extremes to join ;
to bring our vileness near,
and make us all divine :
and we the life of God shall know,
for God is manifest below. |
| 2 He laid his glory by,
he wrapped him in our clay ;
unmarked by human eye,
the latent Godhead lay ;
infant of days he here became,
and bore the mild Immanuel's name. | 5 Made perfect first in love,
and sanctified by grace,
we shall from earth remove,
and see his glorious face :
his love shall then be fully showed,
and we shall all be lost in God. |
| 3 Unsearchable the love
that has the Saviour brought ;
the grace is far above
both earth's and angels' thought :
suffice for us that God, we know,
our God, is manifest below. | Charles Wesley (1707–1788) |

Generous God, saving God, shocking God.

With Mary we ponder quietly the mystery of your coming. We reflect on the extraordinary truth of 'our God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man.' Forgive us when we rush headlong into the next thing, too easily discarding the opportunity to consider and think.

With the shepherds we rejoice and sing at least in our own homes! Full of joy at the wonder and awesome events of your birth. With them we celebrate the reality of 'God with us'.

With the Magi we kneel and adore you for you are the one who has come 'widest extremes to join'. You are the one who has come to 'make us all divine'. Even as we say these words we doubt. Forgive our lack of faith in your capacity to achieve simply because we know we can't do it.

We praise and thank for your great gift of yourself. And in amazement and gratitude we thank you for your faith in us.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen

Lord's Prayer

Readings John 13 v 1 - 17
 Matthew 2 v 1 – 12

Carol: Singing the Faith 224, Hymns & Psalms 121 As with gladness

[\(1\) As With Gladness Men of Old ~ The London Fox Singers ~ lyric video - YouTube](#)

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| 1 As with gladness men of old
did the guiding star behold,
as with joy they hailed its light,
leading onward, beaming bright,
so, most gracious Lord, may we
evermore be led to thee. | 4 Holy Jesus, every day
keep us in the narrow way ;
and, when earthly things are past,
bring our ransomed souls at last
where they need no star to guide,
where no clouds thy glory hide. |
| 2 As with joyful steps they sped,
Saviour, to thy lowly bed,
there to bend the knee before
thee, whom heaven and earth adore,
so may we with willing feet
ever seek thy mercy-seat. | 5 In the heavenly country bright
need they no created light ;
thou its light, its joy, its crown,
thou its sun which goes not down ;
there for ever may we sing
alleluias to our King. |
| 3 As they offered gifts most rare
at thy cradle rude and bare,
so may we with holy joy,
pure, and free from sin's alloy,
all our costliest treasures bring,
Christ, to thee, our heavenly King. | William Chatterton Dix (1837–1898) |

Reflection – 'Kneeling'

Happy Christmas Circuit friends.

I have a Christmas challenge for you. In 30 seconds how many reasons can you list for kneeling? If you do the challenge with others you only score a point for every reason no-one else gets. There is a bonus reason which gets 5 points. That reason is written at the end of the service. No peeping!

I have two pictures of kneeling in my head, which reflect this time of the year. One associated with Christmas and the other with the year that has just gone. The first is the picture of the manger and the kneeling that takes place around it – shepherds, Mary and Joseph and the Magi. It's particularly the Magi which are in my mind as I picture the scene. The second image is being repeated on sports fields and in protests across the globe, namely 'taking the knee'. This second picture has its modern origins in 2016 when American footballer, Colin Kaepernick, knelt during the national anthem at the start of NFL games in protest at police brutality and racial inequality in the US. He said at the time 'I am not going to stand up and show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of colour'. When George Floyd was killed in May this year the action of 'taking the knee' had even more power and symbolic meaning. George Floyd as you'll remember died with a white police officer kneeling on his neck for 8 minutes. Floyd was heard to say 'I can't breathe'. The video of this killing quickly spread around the world, horrifying everyone who saw it. His death meant 'taking the knee' became a global symbol, a global action to protest against racism and against the disregard of the lives of BAME people by people in positions of power and responsibility in our society.

The first image, the one we associate with Christmas, is of kneeling in the stable in the presence of the baby Jesus. The Magi are traditionally understood to be men of status, men of learning and authority, men of wealth and power. They will have knelt before in the presence of others with more power, more status, more authority than they. I wonder if they knelt before Herod in Jerusalem? But in the stable they kneel

facing an ox's feeding stall, looking at a child born to a peasant woman. Their kneeling is respect, is honour, is worship, is homage. Extraordinary!

Both these images are powerful ones. I have tried to bring them together in my thinking, but have failed. They remain distinct, but nonetheless should be held together. They are after all components of Christian discipleship – worship of our Lord & challenging injustice. They are aspects of 2020 that carry into 2021.

In the first image it is easy to see Jesus. Jesus is the one in the manger. Where is Jesus is the second? I think if you look carefully along the line of sportsmen and women you will see Jesus down on one knee. If you look even closer you'll see he's beckoning you to join him.

Carol: Singing the Faith 249 Hymns & Psalms 145 Jesu, Jesu

[\(1\) Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love \(CHEREPONI\) - YouTube](#)

*Jesu, Jesu,
fill us with your love,
show us how to serve
the neighbours we have from you.*

- 1 Kneels at the feet of his friends,
silently washes their feet,
master who acts as a slave to them.
- 2 Neighbours are rich folk and poor,
neighbours are black folk and white,
neighbours are nearby and far away.

3 These are the ones we should serve,
these are the ones we should love.
All these are neighbours to us and you.

4 Kneel at the feet of our friends,
silently washing their feet,
this is the way we should live with you.

North Ghanaian song
adapted by Tom Colvin (1925–2000)

Prayers

Forgive us Lord when in our adoration and worship we lose sight of you at work in your world. Forgive us Lord when in our active involvement with you in your world, we forget to stop and adore you. Help us by your grace to see you

as we kneel,

as you kneel at our feet

kneeling in active identification with the poor, and the unjustly treated.

Hear us now as we pray for the world you came to save:

Lord we pray with sorrow, regret and frustration at matters of racial injustice. Either deliberately or with unconscious bias brothers and sisters from BAME community suffer discrimination, stereotyping, abuse and violence. This reality causes us all pain. We pray for a commitment from the whole church to address this sin. We ask you to bring greater understanding and a greater resolve to tackle this injustice. Lord do not take away the sense of injustice until this wrong is righted.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Lord, we give thanks for the NHS. We praise you for their care and dedication to the people with whom they come into contact. We thank you for their skills and their desire to give of their best for the benefit of others. We pray for strength for them in the weeks ahead. We pray for the inner resources they will need in the face of the challenges present and to come. Be with their families in their anxiety and in the demands which consequently face them too.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Lord, we pray for patience and resilience for the peoples of the world as we face the continued disruption, fear and realities of Covid 19. Lord, it is wearing us down. It is draining us at a time when winter often dampens our spirits and energy levels. Grant to us your peace and the eyes of faith to see you at work in our community and across the world.

Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer

Generous God, saving God, shocking God, we thank you that you hear our prayers. We know with deep gratitude that you hear the prayers not just of our lips but of our hearts and minds too.
In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen

Carol: Singing the Faith 213, Hymns & Psalms 113 O Little town of Bethlehem

[\(1\) O Little Town Of Bethlehem - YouTube](#)

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| <p>1 O little town of Bethlehem,
how still we see thee lie !
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
the silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
the everlasting light ;
the hopes and fears of all the years
are met in thee tonight.</p> <p>2 O morning stars, together
proclaim the holy birth,
and praises sing to God the King,
and peace to all the earth !
For Christ is born of Mary ;
and, gathered all above,
while mortals sleep, the angels keep
their watch of wondering love.</p> | <p>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.</p> <p>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 Immanuel !</p> |
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Phillips Brooks (1835–1893)

Blessing

This Christmas may you be blessed with the spirit of the season, which is peace,
The gladness of the season, which is hope,
And the heart of the season which is love

‘5 point’ reason for kneeling – a cricket fielder kneels down when the ball is hit hard at them to provide a second barrier if the ball should go through the hands!!