



# The Benefice of Harden, Wilsden, Cullingworth, Denholme CHRISTMAS 2020

## Preparation

'Do I not fill Heaven and earth?'

**Now the Word is made flesh and laid in a narrow manger.**

From eternity to eternity you are God,

**and now we see you as a newborn child.**

Lord, open our lips

**and we shall praise your name.**

God in Christ has revealed his glory.

**Come let us worship.**

**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.**

## Penitence

Christ the light of the world has come to dispel the darkness of our hearts.

In his light let us examine ourselves and confess our sins.

God our Father,

you sent your Son full of grace and truth:

Forgive our failure to receive him.

Lord, have mercy: **Lord, have mercy.**

Jesus our Saviour,

you were born in poverty and laid in a manger;

Forgive our greed and rejection of your ways.

Christ, have mercy: **Christ, have mercy.**

Spirit of love,  
your servant Mary responded joyfully to your call:  
Forgive the hardness of our hearts.  
Lord, have mercy: **Lord, have mercy.**

**May the God of all healing and forgiveness draw us to himself,  
that we may behold the glory of his Son,  
the Word made flesh,  
and be cleansed from all our sins,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

### The Collect

Lord Jesus Christ,  
your birth at Bethlehem  
draws us to kneel in wonder at heaven touching earth:  
accept our heartfelt praise as we worship you,  
our Saviour and our eternal God. **Amen.**

### The Readings

#### **First Reading: Isaiah 9:2-7**

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;  
those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined.  
You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before  
you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the  
yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their  
oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the  
tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel  
for the fire.

For a child has been born for us,  
a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders;  
and he is named  
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

His authority shall grow continually,  
and there shall be endless peace  
for the throne of David and his kingdom.

He will establish and uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time onward and forevermore.  
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

This is the Word of the Lord

**Thanks be to God**

Today Christ is born: **alleluia**

Today the Saviour has come: **alleluia**

Today the angels sing on earth: **alleluia. Glory to God in the highest.**

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus

Christ according to Luke: **Glory to you, O Lord**

### **Gospel Reading: Luke 2:1-20**

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them,

“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. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!”

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So, they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

### Reflection from Richard

The Christmas story as we know it is not present in Mark or John. It only appears in Matthew and here in Luke. And even these two only seem to tell half each, one with the shepherds and one with the wise men.

Some of the details we have are only traditional and have no grounding in the Bible story at all. There is no mention of a Little Donkey, we have no idea how many Wise Men there actually were and there is even discussion as to whether it was actually a stable where Jesus came into the world.

I have heard many people question whether this birth in Bethlehem ever took place at all!

In light of this, it has been great to hear people talking about the Christmas Star which appeared in the heavens on Monday. It was so sad that we weren't able to see it because of the cloud. I've seen conjunctions of planets before and they are very bright, eye-catching in the sky. And each time they appear there are questions as to whether this was what THE star looked like.

So do I believe it? Well my answer to that is a very clear yes!

And I base my answer on three very particular pieces of evidence.

The first is that there was really no reason for the birth of Jesus to be recorded at all. If all of the Gospels had begun with Jesus' baptism when he was 30 years old, like Mark's does, then nothing would really have been lost in the story of our salvation.

There were many prophecies about the Messiah in the Old Testament which the Gospel writers are careful to point out as they tell their stories. But all of the really clear ones are to do with the life, suffering, death and resurrection of the anointed one. The birth prophecies which they squeeze in are pretty stretched to fit their story.

But that makes me feel that the story must be true. Rather than making a story to fit the prophecies, it is all the other way around. The birth happened as they recorded it and then they had to try and find things to try to explain what had happened. That makes much more sense to me.

The second bit of evidence which helps me believe it is that the most detailed account is in Luke. Luke was quite the historian. He makes careful reference to lots of events that were going on at the time, rooting his account quite firmly as a historical account, not a myth or story.

It is not difficult to see him talking to people who had been there about what had happened and gathering evidence for his Gospel account. Like the other

writers, Luke had to put in things that were true, but which I am sure he wished had been different. I'm certain, for example, that he would rather have been able to write that the men found the empty tomb, rather than the women. Perhaps he would rather have not had to include the Christmas details of virgin birth and angels visiting shepherds and I am sure that he checked them all out before he included them, it would just have been easier to leave them out unless they really happened!

And then that final piece of evidence is the heart of the story itself. That God should come among us as Jesus, the tiny vulnerable baby born into poverty, born in a stable, on the run for his early years, growing up and exploring the world as a Jewish boy.

It fits so clearly with the depth of God's love that he comes right into the heart of the world's troubles. It fits that he reveals himself in flesh and blood at the beginning of his incarnation, in the same way that he will create a commemoration of his flesh and blood at the last supper when his time on earth comes to an end.

So rejoice in the story of this day! Wonder and be amazed by the glory and the meaning of it. It is a story that really wouldn't be there unless it really happened. I believe it. Do you? And if you do, if it really happened, then God came among us at Christmas!

### Affirmation of Faith

We declare our faith:

**Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures;  
he was buried, he was raised to life on the third day  
in accordance with the Scriptures;  
afterwards he appeared to his followers,  
and to all the apostles:  
this we have received, and this we believe. Amen.**

Father we rejoice and sing, for you love us with a great love. We give thanks to you for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ into our world and into our lives. Let us enjoy your presence with us and the love you offer to us in Jesus our Lord. We give thanks for all who celebrate Christmas, all who are worshipping in churches and all those in their homes, using new and old technologies, and all who acknowledge Jesus in their midst. Bless the outreach and mission of your Church. Give all your people the courage to tell the Gospel story and proclaim your presence and love. We remember all whose lives are darkened by fear, those who have no faith, those who doubt God and themselves.

Jesus, Light of the World: **Come scatter the darkness.**

We ask for peace on the earth and good will among all peoples, that we may learn to accept your peace, share your peace and live your peace. We remember before you all who suffer from war or violence at this time.

Jesus, Light of the World: **Come scatter the darkness**

We give thanks for our homes and the friends that will be celebrating this Christmas, albeit it a lot different this year for lots of families. We remember and give thanks for absent friends and loved ones and those who cannot visit us this year. We remember all who are lonely or feel rejected at this time.

Jesus, Light of the World: **Come scatter the darkness**

We remember in your presence all who are ill at home or in hospital, all those who have been affected by the coronavirus pandemic, and all who are struggling in any way. We pray for doctors and nurses and everyone who will have to be at work today.

Jesus, Light of the World: **Come scatter the darkness**

We give thanks that Jesus came down to lift us up, that he lived that we might not die. We remember loved ones departed in the fullness of your kingdom and all those people mentioned on our white ribbons.

Let us pray for ourselves and for the blessings of Christmas. Open our hearts to your presence, that we may be transformed by the new birth of this holy day. Lord, we ask you to grant us peace. Peace in our homes, peace in our churches and peace in our hearts, especially when it feels like the world all around us spins out of control. Help us stay focused on you, this Christmas time and always. Thank You for loving the whole world enough to send the greatest gift, Your Son, so we might truly have a very merry Christmas, even in a not-so-merry kind of world, In Jesus' Name.

Merciful Father: **Accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

*And we draw all of our prayers together in the words of the Lord's Prayer.*

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 forever. Amen.

The Peace

Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given,  
and his name shall be called the Prince of Peace.

The Peace of the Lord be always with you  
**and also with you.**

The Dismissal

God our Father,  
whose Word has come among us  
in the Holy Child of Bethlehem;  
may the light of faith illuminate our hearts  
and shine in our words and deeds;  
through him who is Christ the Lord. **Amen.**

And may the blessing of God Almighty,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
strengthen and sustain us, and all those whom  
we love, now and forever. **Amen**