

Bangor & Holyhead Methodist Circuit
Sunday Worship Sheet 22nd December 2024 (4th Sunday in Advent)

Our worship for this week was written by Jean Ware. You may wish to have your Bible to hand. Please note the hymns are now at the back of the sheet for ease of printing. CCLI licence 556292.

Call to Worship: The Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child, and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel "God with us" (Isaiah 7 v14)

Hymn 180 O come, O come, Immanuel. A recording by the Chet Valley churches can be found at this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kKu0or0t8Uw>

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

God of Advent joy, we adore you for turning this world upside down! You take no notice of the powerful, the loud, or the showy. God of the humble and the ordinary, we adore you for caring about the things and people we so often overlook. We adore you for choosing the powerless and insignificant to reveal your love for all people. You chose Mary and Joseph to be the parents of your Son, and with them we praise you. With them, we celebrate your faithfulness, and your presence with us today, and every day. With them we trust in your promises and pray for the life-giving peace you offer us in Jesus, for the whole world, this Christmas and always. Amen.

When we notice only those who tell us loudly what they are doing for you, or when we shout about our own achievements in your service, forgive us. Help us to notice those who just get on with the job of working for your kingdom, and to give you thanks for their work. When you send angels to persuade us to think again about what we propose to do, and we turn a deaf ear, forgive us. Remind us of Joseph, who was prepared to listen, to change his mind, do his bit, without a fanfare.

Assurance of forgiveness

Jesus says "I am making all things new"

And to us, and to all who own up to the wrong things they have done, and resolve to live a new life he says: "You are forgiven."

Reading: Matthew 1 verses 18-25

Hymn: 219 We see the eyes of Mary shine (This hymn will probably be unfamiliar, but it can be sung to a familiar tune (e.g Truro- which is set to "Jesus shall reign where'er the sun')). A recording to the set tune can be found at the following link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgRzt5QME-g>

Reflection

Joseph, it seems to me, is perhaps the most neglected figure in the whole account of the nativity. Often, the words we say or sing in Advent candle ceremonies on this, the fourth Sunday in Advent highlight Mary's part. Even the hymns which reflect the verses from Matthew's gospel which we're thinking about today, concentrate more or less exclusively on Mary's role- with No. 219 being a rare exception.

But what about Joseph? Of course, he's there in our crib scenes, and on our Christmas cards; often pictured standing watching over Mary and the infant Jesus. Think for a moment of what Joseph took on. It's perhaps hard for us today to imagine the speculation and the

tittle-tattle, and the loss of respect in the community, which were likely to result for Joseph from Mary's pregnancy. By marrying Mary, Joseph signed up to a full and whole-hearted commitment to God's project, whatever was involved, just as Mary did. So what, I wonder, changed Joseph's mind; from simply resolving to have the marriage contract set aside as quietly as possible, to taking on the responsibility to look after Mary and her son? Matthew tells us that Joseph had a dream in which an angel told him 'not to be afraid' to take Mary as his wife. Somehow, although we almost write him out of the story, Joseph managed to see things from a different perspective.- Without Joseph things would have been so much harder for Mary, so much more precarious for the infant Jesus. In fact, you might say that God chose both Mary and Joseph as parents for Jesus.

Even so, I suspect that Joseph soon got more than he can possibly have bargained for. Before long, the angel is back, telling him to take Mary and Jesus, and flee over the border to Egypt, to get the child beyond Herod's grasp. And so, Mary, Joseph, and Jesus share an experience which is all too familiar to so many families in the world today of fleeing their home in the middle of the night. The family God chooses for his son is not cocooned from some of the worst of human experience, and it's Joseph who must take the lead in ensuring that Mary and Jesus are safe.

And then there's the role that Joseph played every day in the life of Jesus as he grew up. It was Joseph's work which put food on the table, and a roof over Jesus's head. It was Joseph who gave the Son of God his first picture of what a father was like; Joseph from whom Jesus learned of a father's love and concern; protecting him, yet trying to give him space to grow. The last time we hear of Joseph by name in the gospels is when Jesus returns to his home town of Nazareth, towards the beginning of his ministry and announces his mission in the synagogue there. We simply don't know what Joseph made of it all; he had done the job God had given him to do; nurtured and protected Jesus through his childhood until the point where Jesus is ready to announce the good news.

This Christmas as we look at our cards, or at the crib, and see the figure of Joseph standing there, what can we learn from his story?

Well, first there's Joseph's willingness to listen to what God has to say- When he learns of Mary's pregnancy, Joseph comes up with a solution which most people would have regarded as pretty generous. But he's open to listen to the suggestion that he can and should do something he'd have thought was out of the question, impossible, ridiculous. So why does Joseph do that? I think that, by listening to God, Joseph begins to see things from God's perspective, to see the need for this baby and his mother to be nurtured and provided for.

In many ways, it wasn't an easy or a pleasant job God had for Joseph; he stood to lose his reputation, or be made a laughing stock; and that was without the threat from Herod. The job which Joseph took on puts me in mind of the Methodist Covenant Service, which reminds us very starkly that, as Joseph found, seeing things from God's perspective, can be very challenging:

"Christ has many services to be done:
Some are easy, others are difficult;
Some bring honour, others bring reproach"

Joseph took on a job which was likely to bring reproach, and we may be called on to do the same. Angels come in many shapes and sizes; for one person it may be a friend, who helps us see things from a different point of view. For another, seeing a need and realising that it may be our job to try and meet it. For another, thankfulness for our own good fortune, and a desire to share it.

Then there is Joseph's whole-hearted commitment. He takes on the job, and he sees it through. For Joseph, marrying Mary meant a lifetime of (usually) unspectacular commitment to service in God's work. God calls us, too, to unspectacular commitment. Many of the jobs we are called to do, bring neither honour, nor reproach, often are they not even noticed. Both in the church, and in the wider community, most of the things that need doing are mundane, but they still need us to do them faithfully as the job God has given us to do for his kingdom.

Most of all, Joseph nurtures and protects God's incarnate word, to the point where he is to be revealed, spoken aloud for all to hear and see. Part of the miracle of Christmas is that God entrusted the task of caring for his Son to an ordinary man and woman; that in this baby, who started life in pretty doubtful circumstances, God became one of us, so that we could become one with him. God still trusts ordinary people- us- with the task of nurturing God's word, so that it shines out from our lives, in acts of love and service.

This Christmas, or any day, if an angel taps us on the shoulder and asks us to try seeing things from a different perspective, we could do worse than follow Joseph's example.

Pause for reflection

Prayers for others and ourselves

We focus our prayers this week on those who nurture children

We pray for those with power to make decisions which affect the lives of parents and children; for governments; for teachers and social workers, judges in family courts. Give them wisdom and compassion as they face difficult decisions.

God, who surprised Mary and Joseph by choosing them as parents for your Son, we pray for those struggling with an unexpected pregnancy this Christmas. Show us how we can support them, as they come to terms with what has happened. We pray, too, for those who are delighted by finding that they are expecting a child, help us share their joy. We ask that women in Afghanistan may know your presence as they grapple with the Taliban's decision to forbid them to train as midwives. We pray for parents struggling to look after their children amidst war and destruction, or as refugees. We bring before you people whose hearts ache with longing for a child, help us to support and comfort them. We give thanks for foster and adoptive parents, may they know your blessing. Help us and all people to see your image in every child, every individual, and to recognise their infinite worth. As we celebrate Jesus' birth this Christmas, help us to live as one family, your family. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.

The Lord's Prayer.

Hymn 171 Hark the glad sound! The Saviour comes

Benediction: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and for evermore. Amen

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Hymn 180

- 1 O come, O come, Immanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear :
*Rejoice ! Rejoice ! Immanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.*
- 2 O come, O come, O Lord of might
who to your tribes, on Sinai's height,
in ancient times did give the law
in cloud, and majesty, and awe :
- 3 O come, O Rod of Jesse, free
your own from Satan's tyranny ;
from depths of hell your people save,
and give them victory o'er the grave :
- 4 O come, O Key of David, come,
and open wide our heavenly home ;
make safe the way that leads on high,
and close the path to misery :
- 5 O come, O Day-spring, come and cheer
our spirits by your advent here ;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadows put to flight :

Latin, 18th century, based on the ancient *Advent Antiphons*

translated by John Mason Neale (1811–1866)

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Hymn 219

- 1 We see the eyes of Mary shine,
for all the pain of birth is past.
She cradles Jesus in her arms,
her time of joy is here at last.
- 2 We look on Joseph's roughened hands,
his eyes are filled with tender joy.
He gently reaches for the child,
this little scrap, this baby boy.
- 3 And can they know ? And could they guess
at love's responsibility,
that hurt would mingle with the joy
of human possibility ?
- 4 But on this night a single star
is just enough to signal grace :
a child is born in Bethlehem
and offered for the human race.

Andrew Pratt (*b.* 1948)

Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number **219**

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Hymn 171

- 1 Hark the glad sound ! The Saviour comes,
the Saviour promised long ;
let every heart prepare a throne,
and every voice a song.
- 2 He comes the prisoners to release,
in Satan's bondage held ;
the gates of brass before him burst,
the iron fetters yield.
- 3 He comes the broken heart to bind,
the bleeding soul to cure,
and with the treasures of his grace
to enrich the humble poor.
- 4 Our glad hosannas, Prince of Peace,
your welcome shall proclaim,
and heaven's eternal arches ring
with your beloved name.

Philip Doddridge (1702–1751)

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