

# *LSW Circuit*

## *Christmas Worship at Home*

### *2021*

Welcome to the worship at home resource for this Christmas season. This year we invite you to use the resources as and when fits most appropriately into your pattern of reflection and celebration – which may or may not be as Jo imagined as they were written! Accept what is offered as gift – it is yours to adapt, as you find ways to come close to God.

#### **Awe and Wonder:**

This was written with Christmas Eve in mind, and probably fits best into an evening time if you use it on another day.

#### **Feasting and Storytelling:**

As I wrote this, I was imagining Christmas Day worship – often ‘interactive’, engaging the playful side of us as we come to God. It could be as brief or as long as you like. If you enjoy the activities, do find a way to share words, prayers or pictures with others if you can.

#### **‘Longest Night’:**

The Christmas season can be hard. Most of us carry mixed emotions into these days. You may choose to use the whole of this service at once, or to choose one or two elements which are helpful to you. You may decide that these suggestions are not right for you at all this year. Be gentle with yourself if things are tough

#### **Dwelling and Thanksgiving:**

This year the first Sunday of Christmas is also Boxing Day. A day with a character all of its own! This act of worship may fit here...

*With thanks to Revd Rach, and to all those others whose words and reflections have inspired the worship offered here.*

*Praying ‘peace’ for each and for all this Christmas time.*

*Jo and the team*

## *Awe and Wonder*

As you come to worship, find a quiet, comfortable place to be. You will need a bible and a hymn book if you have them. If you have nativity figures or an image of the nativity you particularly appreciate, you might like to have them to hand. If you have favourite reflective Christmas music, or a favourite poem for this time of year, maybe find that too....

If you have a candle, maybe one which has accompanied you through Advent, waiting for Christmas, you may like to light it now, saying:

**Jesus, the light of the world, is born among us**

Read: Hebrews 1:1-3a

Hymn: Glory be to God on high StF 199, H&P 101

Glory be to God on high,  
and peace on earth descend:  
God comes down, he bows the sky,  
and shows himself our friend:  
God the invisible appears:  
God, the blest, the great I AM,  
sojourns in this vale of tears,  
and Jesus is his name.

Him the angels all adored,  
their Maker and their King;  
tidings of their humbled Lord  
they now to mortals bring.  
Emptied of his majesty,  
of his dazzling glories shorn,  
being's source begins to be,  
and God himself is born!

See the eternal Son of God  
a mortal son of man;  
dwelling in an earthly clod,  
whom heaven cannot contain!  
Stand amazed, ye heavens, at this!  
See the Lord of earth and skies;  
humbled to the dust he is,  
and in a manger lies.

We, earth's children, now rejoice,  
the Prince of Peace proclaim ;  
with heaven's host lift up our voice,  
and shout Immanuel's name ;  
knees and hearts to him we bow ;  
of our flesh and of our bone,  
Jesus is our brother now,  
and God is all our own.

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)  
Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition,  
number 199

Holy God, be with us as we bring our lives before you.  
Grant us honesty and clear vision.  
Help us to trust you with all that is within us.  
Amen

*We reflect in silence on those things which seem important in the past days or in the days to come...*

Loving God, let us not dwell in the past,  
Nor worry about the future.  
We cannot undo what is done,  
And we cannot foresee what will come.  
Let us instead dwell in your peace,  
Love and be loved,  
Heal and be healed.  
We give the past to you and rest in your forgiveness.  
We give the future to you and rest in your love.  
We live in your light, open our eyes that we may see.  
We live in your love, let your love flow through us,  
To the fulfilment of your kingdom.  
Amen.

Read: Isaiah 52: 7-10

Read: John 1:1-14

Hymn: Silent night, Holy night StF 217, H&P 112, MP 597

I wonder...are you a poetry person or do you prefer prose? I haven't been around in ministry long enough to test this...but I wonder whether many of us who by natural inclination would find our way to worship late at night on Christmas Eve are those who need some poetry as part of our lives and faith. Unlike Matthew and Luke who tell us the 'what, when, where, how, who' of Jesus' birth...or Mark, who simply announces that Jesus is the Son of God...John gives us a poem. A hymn to the Word who was with God, who was God, who was in the beginning,

but who became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth ... from whom we have all received grace upon grace.

The beginning of John's gospel is not something we can understand. Instead it tells us of Jesus' relationship to creation, to humanity particularly, and to God, in a way which can only be felt...known 'by heart' and not 'by head'.

Through much of my life I have been drawn to worship late at night, and particularly late at night on Christmas Eve. I need a breathing space between the anticipation of Christmas festivities and their reality... to be present in a time when the world seems to hold its breath, anticipating the birth of the Word. From my earliest glimmerings of faith, this has been a 'thin place' for me...where the kingdom of God and the life of the world are somehow superimposed on each other and I catch just a glimpse of how things will be.

But ask me to explain what it means for 'the hopes and fears of all the years' to be met in such a place...and I am speechless. This is one of my places of 'awe and wonder'. I wonder where you most easily encounter the mystery of God?

The great good news is that God speaks to us in many and various ways God speaks in story, poetry and song...in family, friend and stranger. God speaks to us round the meal table, in solitude and in the loneliness of crowds...through prophets, through angels...through the tiniest child and those who have lived a great span of years. And most of all God speaks to us in Jesus...the Christ...the tiny child named 'God saves'. Jesus...Jeshua...the space-maker...the one who was there at the beginning of all things...light of the world...who was born, lived, was crucified and rose so that there might be space in this good creation for abundant life for all...

...and so for that abundant life for all we pray, as we make our prayers for the world.

There are many ways we might make our prayers. You may simply use the things you have around you - photographs of friends or family, Christmas cards, a newspaper or magazine, a globe or world map, or something else - to prompt a conversation with God.

You might imagine yourself pinning the names of those on your heart to the doorpost of the stable in Bethlehem.

You might have a favourite pattern of prayer you use often.

You might simply keep silence, and then say the Lord's Prayer, in whatever language and version suits you best.

Listen: If you have brought a favourite piece of reflective Christmas music into worship with you, or a poem, you may like to listen or read now. Or you may like to simply spend some time in quietness with God.

Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace to all in whom he delights.  
The peace of the Lord be always with you.

*Hear God's word of peace spoken to you, as to all people.  
You may also like to think about who needs to hear that assurance of God's  
peace spoken by you in words they can understand, or made real in an action  
you might offer...*

Hymn: And I will wait now  
(Tune: Bunnessan, the tune we use for 'Morning has broken')

And I will wait now,  
and in the waiting  
feel still more closely  
your love for me.  
For I'll be patient  
and I'll be gentle,  
touched by your steadfast  
humility.

And I will hope now,  
and in the hoping  
make every action  
a gift for you.  
For I'll seek justice  
and I'll love mercy,  
each word I speak an  
echo of you.

And I will go now,  
and in the going  
follow your Christ light  
so I will see  
how I may find you,  
holy and human,  
your arms stretched open  
waiting for me.

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## *Stories and Feasting*

This act of worship invites you, in your imagination, or in reality, to draw up a chair at the table, rich with good things... or around the hearth, fire warm and welcoming...

If you have nativity figures, you might like to have them to hand. You might also like to have a recording of Christmas music which fills you with joy ready to play, and something tasty to eat and drink....

If you have a candle, maybe one which has accompanied you through Advent, waiting for Christmas, you may like to light it now, saying:

**Jesus, the light of the world, is born among us**

Read: Isaiah 52: 7-10

Hymn: O come all ye faithful StF 212, H&P 110, MP 491

Holy God

Your table is a place of welcome.

The earth you created has place for all creatures, has habitats and environments which are life-giving in many and various ways.

Even the stable in which we imagine you this season provided safe space to animals and to people.

You do not turn anyone away.

Holy God

Your way is to invite relationship.

You draw us into communities which have the potential to be life-giving for all.

You came to dwell among us that we might know you.

You offer your love to all.

Holy God

Your breath breathes within us.

The gifts of your Spirit are given to us to build each other up.

You call us to be your people in and for the world you love.

You are with us always.

Welcoming, accompanying, inspiring...

Holy God

We come

We adore you

Amen

A handful of thanksgiving – bring to mind:

Five things you can see, or imagine in your mind's eye, which bring you joy  
Four things you can hear, or imagine the sound of, which delight you  
Three things you can touch or feel which give pleasure  
Two things you can smell, or imagine the smell of, which are lovely  
One thing you can taste, or imagine the taste of, which is delicious

### **Thank you God! Amen!**

If you have a nativity set, you may like to spend a few moments now arranging the figures in the best way for you to see them, as you listen out for the story of Jesus born among us. How would you retell the story for someone you love, or someone you long to encourage to come closer to God this Christmas...?

If you are together with others, you might choose to do this together – listening to the story come alive in your conversation...

Read: Luke 2: 1-14

Hymn:

Good news, good news to you we bring,  
alleluia!

News of great joy that angels sing,  
alleluia!

*Tender mercy he has shown us,  
joy to all the world;  
for us God sends his only Son,  
alleluia!*

Let earth's dark shadows fly away,  
alleluia!

In Christ has dawned an endless day,  
alleluia!

Now God with us on earth resides,  
alleluia!

And heaven's door is open wide,  
alleluia!

Graham Kendrick (*b.* 1950)

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Can you think of three words which say something about how the love of God is good news for you this Christmas?

Would you use different words to describe how the love of God is good news for your community this Christmas?

You might like to write an acrostic prayer using the word 'Alleluia' from the hymn...

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Or draw a 'good news' picture...

As you're storytelling, writing or doodling, enjoy your festive snack, and maybe some music.

As we draw our worship to a close, we turn our attention to the world beyond the imagined circle of our firelight...

We pray for a person or situation which is making the news headlines at the moment...

Loving God  
**to you we trust our prayer**

We pray for a situation which concerns us in our local community...

Loving God  
**to you we trust our prayer**

We pray for a person for whom we know this Christmas will be hard...

Loving God  
**to you we trust our prayer**

We pray for those who have no one to love them but God...

Loving God  
**to you we trust our prayer**

We pray for ourselves...

Loving God  
**to you we trust our prayer**

and as Jesus taught his friends, we pray...Our Father...

Hymn: Hark! The herald-angels sing StF 202, H&P 106, MP 211

May the blessing of God be with us.  
The blessing of God the Father,  
who loved the world so much he sent us his son;  
the blessing of the baby Jesus,  
who came among us for love of us;  
the blessing of the Holy Spirit,  
who meets us and welcomes us,  
be with us now and always.

Go in the peace and light of Christ.  
Go joyfully to celebrate this day.  
Love, laugh, and live life to the full.  
Share the one love that comes from God,  
born among us;  
he is the unseen guest in all our homes.  
Thanks be to God.

# *Longest Night*

As part of this act of worship, you might like to have a little dish of salt, and one of water, a saucer with a little olive oil and a tissue, candles to light as part of our prayers, and an image which helps you think of the whole creation. If you like to listen to music as you relax, choose something which you find calming or restful.

Though we call this worship for the 'longest night', it might simply be for the longest or saddest day. Sometimes we need to spend quiet time with God, drawing breath amid the myriad responsibilities which might threaten to engulf us. For some of us we also need an opportunity to reflect on those things which make this time of year hard for us...to bring to God our pain, sadness, mourning, fear, despair...trusting that God will embrace all that we bring...trusting that just as so many watch and wait for Jesus' birth, Jesus watches and waits with us in our dark places for the birth of new hope within us...

If you have a candle, maybe one which has accompanied you through Advent, waiting for Christmas, you may like to light it now, saying:

**Jesus, the light of the world, dwells with us**

Wherever we have been,  
you were with us,  
Architect of the Universe;  
wherever we are,  
you are constantly at our side,  
Shelter of our hearts;  
wherever we are going,  
you are there waiting for us,  
Builder of our future.

Above the din of violence and war,  
you whisper to us of reconciliation:  
Prince of Peace.  
Into lives which are barren  
and filled with the ashes of disappointment,  
you come singing of newness:  
Hope of Heaven.

Where the oppressed are captive to our greed  
and the poor have nothing to eat,  
you come to set all of us free  
and to feed everyone at your Table,  
Servant of the lost.

When we are afraid of tomorrow,  
push us into God's Advent:  
Spirit-with-us;

when we believe no one loves us,  
sing Bethlehem's lullaby to our souls;  
when we doubt our ability  
to be the children of God,  
infuse us with your gifts.

God in Community, Holy in One,  
remind us that there is nothing you cannot do,  
even as we pray as Jesus has taught us, saying,  
Our Father, who art in heaven...

(© Thom Shuman. Permission given for use in worship)

Hymn: Born in the night StF 193, H&P 95, MP 62

Read: Isaiah 61: 1-4

Read: John 1:1-5, 14

At the heart of prayer is attention...attention to God and to ourselves in  
relationship with God and with the world

This is a time of prayer...

“For God alone my soul waits in silence;  
from God comes my salvation” Psalm 61:1

Hidden in the word ‘salvation’ are root words connected to both ‘salt’ and  
‘healing’...

You may choose to add a pinch of salt to the dish of water...thinking about the  
tears which are shed, by us and by others. Each of us is touched in some way by  
pain and sadness. You may choose to taste the salt water, or dip your finger in  
and sign a cross on your hand...marking your willingness to remember sorrow as  
well as joy...

Oil has long been used for healing and for setting apart for a particular task or  
way of life.

You might choose to sign a cross on your other hand or on your forehead with  
the oil, maybe praying as you do so...

“The grace of Christ bring me wholeness and give me peace”.  
“Loving God, may I serve you with courage and with grace”

The lighting of a candle has been a sign of prayer for many Christians down the  
centuries.

You may choose to light a candle now as you hold in mind and pray for someone  
particular, or as you treasure the memory of someone who has died.

Now might be the time to pray with your image which reminds you of the whole of God's creation. Where in the world will you hold before God this night?

Listen: If you have brought a piece of music into worship with you may like to listen now. Or you may like to simply spend some more time in quietness with God.

This Christmas time we celebrate the coming of the One who promises us no more suffering, no more tears, who promises a new heaven and a new earth ...the One who promises us light.

"Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.

Amen. Come Lord Jesus.

Hymn: O little town of Bethlehem StF 213, H&P 113, MP 503

The Lord bless you and keep you;  
the Lord make his face to shine upon you,  
and be gracious to you;  
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you,  
and give you peace.

# *Dwelling and Thanksgiving*

This act of worship might be for several different kinds of days. It might suit you on a day which in our household would be called a 'pyjama day' – the kind of day when breakfast might be at lunchtime, and involves cold turkey or chocolate, the television is on at unexpected times, and someone is found curled under the duvet with a book almost all day. It might suit you on a day filled with a brisk walk, conversation with friends, and purposeful craft work. It might be important to find space for worship even if you are unwell, or struggling in some other way. The key thing here is a sense of being 'at home'...at home with who God is continually creating and re-creating us...

So where will you settle for worship where you can feel really 'at home'? Will you choose to be indoors, or is your natural inclination (weather permitting) to find an outdoor place to be?

Are there things which will help you settle into some time with God? A soft blanket or a comfortable cushion? Scarf, hat and walking poles...?

If you have a candle, maybe one which has accompanied you through Advent, waiting for Christmas (and you are in the right kind of place) you may like to light it now, saying:

**Jesus, the light of the world, is born among us**

Hymn: Love came down at Christmas StF 210, H&P 105, MP 451

Read: Colossians 3:12-17

How might Paul's words help to shape this day?

Where might forgiveness need to be offered or received?

How is gratitude, thanksgiving, best expressed for you today?

What does it mean for you for the 'word of Christ [to] dwell in you richly'?

Read: Luke 2: 1-20

Sometimes we humans are very slow on the uptake...

When I began to draw together this series of acts of worship for over the Christmas weekend this year, I needed words to sum up the theme of each...and this reflection, the one which I thought might sit on Boxing Day for many of us... became abiding or dwelling, and thanksgiving or gratitude. It seemed to me to be all about being 'at home', at home with God.

Late at night, hoping to be able to shape another service altogether, came the blinding flash of insight. Of course. Incarnation. Though God does invite us to dwell with God, to be our real selves without pretence, shoes kicked off and holey socks showing, Christmas is firstly and most of all about God's choice to dwell with us.

We may rest at home with God, because God first risked 'moving into the neighbourhood' with us. Without that eternal first move, without the initiative from God to make God's home with us, how could we ever have found our home with God?

"...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.'"

Do not be afraid! Good news, great joy – to you is born - the Messiah among us!

As you take time to read Luke's account again today, what strikes you as most important? What might God say to you through an angel standing before you as you go about your daily business?

Of all that you have seen and heard this Christmas, what is your gift from God to make known to others? And what will you treasure, what will you ponder in your heart?

Hymn: May the mind of Christ my saviour StF 504, H&P 739, MP 463 OR Angels from the realms of glory StF 190, H&P 92, MP 35

As we reflect on what it means to dwell with God, and for God to dwell with us, we pray...

We pray first for those who are without shelter this night...literally home-less... And for those for whom the home they have is not a safe place, physically or emotionally...

We pray for those whose work allows them little time to rest, to be at home...

We pray for those whose home is threatened by climate change, or by natural disaster...

We pray for those with whom we now share a home, or have shared a home in the past...

We recognise with God any sadness associated with those prayers, as well as our joy and thanksgiving.

We give thanks for those people, places and things which help us to feel 'at home'...

We say the words of the Lord's Prayer...

As our worship comes to a close you might like to wonder if there is someone you could invite into your home in the next week or so, or someone who might value the gift of your presence in theirs.

If there is not already something in your home which helps you with this, you might also like to wonder if there is something you could make or obtain which would remind you often of God's promise to dwell with us...

Hymn: Let earth and heaven combine StF 208, H&P 109

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways.  
The Lord be with all of you.  
(2 Thess 3:16)