

ORPHIR and STENNESS CHURCH
Watchnight Service Friday 24th. Dec., 2021
Transcript

Welcome:

Good evening. Welcome to our Watchnight Service.
A sentimental time; a reflective time; above all a happy time.
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.

We have lit 4 Advent Candles:

Jesus said, 'I am the light of the world'.
The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has never put it out.

Greeting and Call to worship

You are welcome tonight. We meet in the presence of God, who in the beginning, made creation,
and saw that it was good.
We meet in the presence of his Son, Jesus, who comes to us as a baby,
to bring us back to the light.
We meet in the presence of the Holy Spirit, who is with us as we worship
to lead us in grace and in truth.
In the light, the grace, the truth of God, find hope in your confusion,
peace in your fears, and comfort in your sadness.
Rejoice with me, for tonight everything has been made new. Amen.

Let us Worship God:

1st Hymn: 294 On Christmas Night all Christians sing

Setting the scene:

On a night like this
in an ordinary little town, among ordinary folk,
in a land under occupation,
where threat of violence dogged the lives of the people;
as so often in the past, in blessing or in warning –
God touched the earth.
But this time God stayed,
seeking among humankind those who would grow
with and through this beloved child,
to become partners with God
in establishing the Kingdom that is to come.
Glory to God in highest heaven,
and peace on earth to all God's people.

Let us pray:

Loving God,
thank you for this night and for all it represents.
Thank you for the hope you bestow, the peace you bring,
the love you pour out, and the joy you give.
We praise you most of all for Jesus, your Word made flesh.
May he light our way as the holy star lit the way for the wise men. Amen. *(Rev. Richard J. Fairchild)*

Choir 1: Make Room

Reading: Isaiah 9: 2 and 6 – 7 (Olivia)

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.

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 onwards and for evermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.
Amen.

Choir 2: Sing we Now of Christmas

Prayer: *Let us Pray:*

God beyond naming,
God beyond defining,
God for whom we yearn,
God whom we want to trust,
hear our prayer.
We are not many wise, not many great, not many powerful,
but we dare to ask for a word from you this night.

In many ways and many places,
in good times and in desperate trouble,
in joy and in deep despair, or when all else fails,
we have looked for you to come in might and power.

Tonight, we would look for you
in a different way, and in a different place:
as individuals and as families,
in tenderness and in pain, in quietness and in secret,
in human need and parents' love, in joy, but also in suffering.
Show us yourself in the baby of Bethlehem
and help us to see you as you really are. *Amen.*

Reading: Luke 2: 1-20 NRSV (Shona)

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. (2:40)

2nd Congregational Hymn: 316 Love came down at Christmas

Reading: John 1:1-14: (Martin). *(From William Barclay, Daily Study Bible; before gender-inclusive language)*

THE WORD:

When the world had its beginning, the Word was already there; and the Word was with God; and the Word was God.

This Word was in the beginning with God. He was the agent through whom all things were made; and there is not a single thing which exists in this world which came into being without him. In him was life and the life was the light of men; and the light shines in the darkness, because the darkness has never been able to conquer it.

There emerged a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, in order to bear witness to the light, that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; his function was to bear witness to the light. He was the real light, who, in his coming into the world, gives light to every man. He was in the world, and, although the world was made by him, the world did not recognize him. It was into his own home that he came, and yet his own people did not receive him. To all those who did receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the right to become the children of God. These were born, not of blood, nor of any human impulse, nor of any man's will, but their birth was of God. So the Word became a person, and took up his abode in our being, full of grace and truth; and we beheld his glory, glory such as an only son receives from his father.

Amen; thanks be to God.

Meditation:

Christmas Eve; Christmas very near.

No theological lecture tonight: just a very simple re-statement of what it is all about.

God came from heaven to take on our human form to show us just how much God loves us.

That's it in a nutshell.

OK, there's more. When God looked at men and women and saw all the painful things we do to each other, he decided to get involved - personally, intimately involved - with his fallen creation.

Notice this: God didn't come to punish, or frighten, or threaten, or any of the other things often attributed to him. No! God came to tell us that we are loved deeply, truly, and forever.

To make sure we got the point, God, made flesh in Jesus, brought that message first to people that the world saw as completely unimportant, unloved.

Unimportant "humble shepherds"; an unmarried, teenage mum; astrologers practising a completely different religion. All to show that God wasn't going to leave anyone behind; that God's message of love was for all, for everybody, whether the world thought – thinks – we are important or loveable or not.

That's still the way it is. God loves all of us, but he especially wants those who don't feel loved or lovable; who always feel they're on the outside looking in, those who feel forgotten; those who wonder what the point of life is - he wants us all to hear the "*good news of great joy*" that God loves all of us.

That's the simple message. In all the hassle of preparing for Christmas amid all the stress of Covid restrictions, trying to make ends meet, cope with family problems, we need this short, simple, peaceful message: *we are of infinite value and worth to God.*

The angels say, "Jesus is born *for you.*" And the "good news," is "*good news of great joy for you and all people.*" The Gospel reminds every one of us that God believes we are worthy of honour and dignity and, above all else, *love*. His love.

A blessed Christmas to you and yours. Amen.

CHOIR: 309 Still the night

1200: It is Christmas ! Christ is Born!

Light the Christ Candle

Christmas Greetings and Sharing the Peace

As far as you can, with all precautions, I invite you to share the peace of God and wish one another a Happy Christmas.

Let us Pray:

Loving Father,

Help us remember the birth of Jesus,

that we may share in the song of the angels,

the gladness of the shepherds, and the worship of the wise men.

Close the door of hate and open the door of love all over the world. Let kindness come with every gift and good desires with every greeting. Deliver us from evil by the blessing which Christ brings, and teach us to be merry with clear hearts.

"May the Christmas morning make us happy to be thy children, and Christmas evening bring us to our beds with grateful thoughts, forgiving and forgiven, for Jesus' sake. Amen." (Robert Louis Stevenson).

Now we will sing the **first three verses of Hy 306** (O come, all ye faithful),

then we have the Benediction, and sing the last verse. After that the Choir will sing **Holly Jolly** for a bit of fun as folk have a look at the window decorations.

Hymn 306 O come, all ye faithful (**v.1-3**)

SENDING OUT and BENEDICTION

May the Lord who lifts the lowly from the dust
fill you with wonder this night.
May you return to your homes glorifying God and praising him.
May all who meet you this Christmas Day
be amazed at what Christ has done in you, and through you.
And may the blessing of God Almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
be with you all, this night and always. Amen.

Hymn 306 O come, all ye faithful **(last verse)**

Choir: *Holly Jolly*