

**ORPHIR and STENNESS CHURCH,
Sunday 24th December 2023, Advent 4B
1100: Lessons and Carols
Transcript**

Welcome and Intimations:

Good morning. Wherever you come from today, whether you come regularly, or occasionally, perhaps even for the first time, you are welcome to our worship. Your presence enriches us in this time of celebration together.

Today is the Fourth Sunday in Advent, so we light the four Advent Candles:

We sing 4 verses of Advent Hymn 284

'When we speak of Advent or preparing for Christmas, we're not just talking about waiting for the little baby Jesus to be born. That already happened two thousand years ago. In fact, we're welcoming the Universal Christ, the Cosmic Christ, the Christ that is forever being born (incarnating) in the human soul and into history.'

—*Richard Rohr*

This Christmas Eve let it be our joy to celebrate the coming of our Saviour Jesus.

In our hearts and minds, let us travel to Bethlehem, where Mary waited through the dark night to give birth to a son.

The prophet said:

'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel', which means, 'God is with us. You are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' (Matt. 1:23)

Hymn 305 In the Bleak Mid Winter

Prayer: Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, born in Bethlehem,
in a world that has forgotten how to rejoice, give us joy;
in a world seeking explanations, give us a sign;
in a world of fear and failure, give us peace,
for we, and all the world, need a Saviour.

Lord Jesus, born in Bethlehem, open our eyes and our minds,
that with open eyes may we behold you, and beholding you, may we believe in you,
and in believing in you may we become like you, and becoming like you may we join you in glory.
So may we rejoice in you, not just this Christmas but always.

Alan Gaunt.

Choir: *No Room in the Inn*

Lesson 1:

Genesis 3: 8-15: *The First Sin and its Punishment*

They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?' He said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.' He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?' The man said, 'The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.' Then the Lord God said to the woman, 'What is this that you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent tricked me, and I ate.' The Lord God said to the serpent,

'Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.'

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.'

Hymn 316 Love Came Down at Christmas

Lesson 2:

Genesis 22:15-18: *Abraham and Isaac*

The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, 'By myself I have sworn, says the Lord: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.'

Choir: *Make Room in your Heart*

Lesson 3:

Isaiah 9: 2, 6-7: *The Future King*

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.

Comment:

Ever since Matthew quoted this messianic prophecy in the context of Jesus' ministry in Galilee, the Christian Church has applied it to Jesus, though many scholars think it refers not to Jesus but to a great and godly king, perhaps Ahaz or Hezekiah, who would deliver Israel from exile in Babylon. The writer looks to a better future of new beginnings. Even though Jesus was not quite what the prophecy expected, in his birth we do celebrate new beginnings, a new kingly, Godly reign, with the same hopes for peace and justice, hopes that are reflected in our next hymn:

Hymn 323 The First Noel

Lesson 4:

Micah 5: 2-5: *The Ruler from Bethlehem*

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.
Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labour has brought forth;
then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel.
And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.
And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth;
and he shall be the one of peace.

Choir: *Christmas Songs of Joy*

Lesson 5:

Luke 1: 26-38: *The Birth of Jesus Foretold*

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.' Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.

Hymn 296 While Humble Shepherds watched their flocks

Lesson 6:

Matthew 1: 18-25: *The Birth of Jesus the Messiah*

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel', which means, 'God is with us.'

When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

Hymn 303 It came upon a Midnight Clear

Lesson 7:

Luke 2: 8-20: *Shepherds and Angels*

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.

Meditation:

***Shepherds' Fields* by Tom Gordon;**

Outside the bounds of Bethlehem
The un-named shepherds roamed.
Forever on the move, they'd made
These barren hills their home.
They sheltered in the hillside caves
Where beasts and men find rest.
But God had plans for such as these:
"You shepherds will be blessed!"

For o'er the shepherds' fields they saw
A startling, glorious sight,
As angels came, released from heaven,
To offer God's new light.
Through songs of peace, with words of love,
Their God had this to say:
"The time is now! Your Christ has come!
Salvation starts today!"

And so they ran o'er rocks and sand,
Down alley-ways and lanes,
From shepherds' fields through cobbled streets
Their purpose to maintain;
The impulse of each heart their guide,
Belief a beacon clear;
'Til, at a stable, God announced:
"The Holy One is here!"

There in a humble home like theirs -
But now from heaven blessed -
They found the child, Immanuel,
The purpose of their quest.
And once again they heard the call
To share the news around,
From shepherds' fields to waiting world:
"Salvation has been found."

We too have come to Bethlehem,
Led by the angel choir,
To join with nameless shepherds here,
Our Saviour to admire.
Soon we'll be back in shepherds' fields
Our struggling flocks to tend,
But with the Good News to proclaim:
"Christ's Peace will come again!"
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Lesson 8:

Matthew 2: 1-11: *The Visit of the Wise Men*

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.' When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

"And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel."

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.' When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Choir: *Come and join the Celebration*

Lesson 9:

John 1: 1-14 *The Word Became Flesh*

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.*

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.

But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

For the word of God in scripture, for the word of God among us, for the word of God within us, thanks be to God. Amen.

Meditation:

Reminders by Tom Gordon

I remember the story I heard long ago

In innocent childhood, believing it ...

so amazingly different; as clear as a bell –

O yes, I remember it well.

I remember the story shared often since then,

Through frequent reminders, again and again;

Those great Bible stories; their meaning so clear –

O yes, I remember each year.

I remember the story - traditional words;

Familiar old carols; I never was bored

With shepherds, and angels who came from above – O yes, I remember with love.

I remember the story – the manger; the babe;

Three wise-men who travelled; the gifts that they gave;

The wonder enshrined in the Bethlehem boy –

O yes, I remember with joy.

I remember the story – but what does it mean
to me, now I'm hearing it over again?
Will it have an impact; a message, or not?
O yes, I remember – so what?

I remember the story – so now I must search
To know it's as fresh as I found it at first;
To feel the excitement, the mystery too.
O yes, I remember – it's new!

I remember the story ... So this is the deal:
Engage with its newness,
and know that it's real;
Be changed by the wonder; be moved in the 'now'.
O yes, I remember – and how!

I remember the story – but not from the past;
It's modern; still topical; with us to last.
So come now – discover a meaning that's new.
O yes, I remember... Will you?
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Prayer and Lord's Prayer

Loving Father,
help us to remember the birth of Jesus,
that we may share in the song of the angels,
the gladness of the shepherds,
and the wisdom 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 clean hearts.

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

Let us pray as Jesus taught us:
*Our Father which art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy Name,
Thy Kingdom come,
Thy Will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors and lead us
not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the Kingdom the Power and the Glory for ever. Amen.*

Hymn 306 O Come All Ye Faithful (v, 1-3)

Blessing:

May you see the face of Christ in everyone you meet.
May everyone you meet see the face of Christ in you.
And the blessing of God almighty,

the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be with you, and remain with you,
now and always. Amen.