

# Christmas Day

## We sing STF 196.....Come and Join the Celebration

*Come and join the celebration,  
It's a very special day;  
come and share our jubilation,  
there's a new King born today!*

See the shepherds  
hurry down to Bethlehem;  
gaze in wonder  
at the Son of God who lay before them.  
*Come and join the celebration.....*

Wise men journey,  
led to worship by a star,  
Kneel in homage,  
bringing precious gifts from lands afar, so...  
*Come and join the celebration....*

'God is with us'  
'round the world the message bring;  
He is with us,  
'Welcome!' all the bells on earth are pealing.  
*Come and join the celebration... Valerie Collison*

Christmas Hope, Peace, Joy and Love to you all this Christmas Day. Like me, you may not be in the place that you were expecting to be. Your plans of seven days ago have been changed. That is very disappointing. However we have an unchanging God, one that is with us wherever we are today. Yes God in Christ is born today Alleluia - He is born indeed alleluia.

### Prayer

Jesus the light of the world, as we celebrate your birth may we begin to see the world in the light of the understanding you give us. As you chose the lowly, the outcasts, the poor to receive the greatest news the world had ever known, so may we worship you in meekness of heart. May we also remember our brothers and sisters less fortunate than ourselves in this time of giving. Amen **Lord's Prayer...**

### The Greatest Story of All - SCRIPTURE IN RHYME

Our story begins in Galilee just over 2000 years ago, with two lovely people called Mary and Jo. Mary an innocent young lady, Joseph a faithful young man. Both were highly favoured by God, but totally unaware of His plan!

You see; God knew Mary and Joseph and that their love was pure. God also knew they loved him as well

making them ideal for what he had in store. Because after years and years of watching His people from the heavens above God had finally decided enough was enough... ..the time had come for someone special to walk on the earth. A saviour was to be born.

So, God sent his chief Angel Gabriel to a town called Nazareth to tell our two unsuspecting heroes about a heavenly birth,

That they, Mary and Joseph, were going to proudly be the parents of God's son as promised of old: "He shall be born in Galilee".

Well, Mary and Jo were surprised and scared to say the least; "He wants us to be the parents of the one who will be called the Prince of peace?"

But Gabriel reassured them that they had nothing to fear; "Remember, God is in control and promises He will always be near".

### OFF TO BETHLEHEM

So Mary became pregnant and nine months passed problem free. Well, apart from Caesar Augustus, who decided to issue a decree... ..that demanded that everyone returned to their home town. So reluctantly.....

Destination Bethlehem was the next challenge for our expecting parents-to-be.

Day and night they travelled, only to discover on arrival that everywhere was full. There was no room in Bethlehem anywhere - well, apart from a cattle stall. "But at least it is dry" said Mary - perfect for what was to come. And so, our intrepid heroes rested and waited for the arrival of their very special son.

### VISITORS ARRIVE

So Jesus Christ, Immanuel, the Son of God was born just as the angel said, But not in a glamorous palace or guest room - in a cattle shed.

The innkeeper reassured that his special guests were warm and dry...had returned back to his guest house illuminated by the star-lit sky.

Meanwhile, while all of this was happening in Bethlehem that night, shepherds on nearby hills were suddenly awakened by a heavenly sight! An Angel appeared before them in the glory of the Lord, magnificent in splendour, but the shepherds could not find the words... .. because they were frozen to the spot by the images dressed in white... ..as a chorus of Angels joined the party illuminated by dazzling lights!

Then the chief Angel began.... "Do not be afraid, I bring you good news of great joy. Heaven and earth rejoice this day of the birth of a new baby boy. Christ the Lord, God's only son, the saviour is now here. Born in the town of Bethlehem, you have nothing to fear.

You will find him in a manger, so go and worship the Saviour's birth. Glory to God in the highest and peace to God's people on earth."

So the shepherds disappeared into the night to find this holy stranger, and on arrival they found the proud parents tucking their sleeping baby into a manger.

The shepherds stood in awe and wonder, "Could this really be... ..the promised saviour to the world? Or is it pure fantasy?" But then the shepherds remembered what the angel had said, and all who heard it were amazed but as for Mary - she treasured them in her head.

So the shepherds returned back to their flocks - and picked up where they were before but this time singing praises to God until their throats were sore

### Hymn HP 118 See him lying on a bed of straw

See Him lying on a bed of straw  
A draughty stable with an open door  
Mary cradling the babe she bore  
The Prince of Glory is His name

*Oh now carry me to Bethlehem  
To see the Lord appear to men  
Just as poor as was the stable then  
The Prince of Glory when He came*

Star of glory sweep across the skies  
Show where Jesus in the manger lies  
Shepherds swiftly from your stupor rise  
To see the Saviour of the world

*Oh now carry me to Bethlehem*

Angels sing the song that you began  
Bring God's glory to the heart of man  
Sing that Bethl'em's little baby can  
Be salvation to the soul  
*Oh now carry me to Bethlehem*

Mine are riches from Your poverty  
From Your innocence eternity  
Mine forgiveness by Your death for me  
Child of sorrow for my joy  
*Oh now carry me to Bethlehem* Michael Perry

### EVEN MORE VISITORS!

In a distant land far, far away, wise men from the east  
Were studying the stars at night when suddenly above the trees.

A big bright beaming star appeared before their very eyes

And, as it glistened the star of wonder began to move slowly across the skies.

"What star is this?' They said in shock as they looked through their telescope.

"Well, it says in the book this one's a special star, one that brings a message of hope."

So the wise men decided "Let's go follow it and see where it will lead us."

But little did they know that it would take them to Baby Jesus.

Across the desert land they went, following the star across the sky, to Jerusalem, the land of King Herod, but they were unsure why....

Because they knew that they were looking for a baby, king of the Jews, but Herod seemed surprised by this and a little confused.

"But I'm the King," he said angrily and called a special meeting. "I'm the natural heir to the throne - is somebody out there cheating?"

"But the messiah will be born in Bethlehem, my Lord. That's what the prophet said"

"What a load of rubbish," Herod shouted "You can get that out of your head!" So he told the wise men cunningly, "Find the child and let me know. For this king is to be worshipped - tell me so that I may also go."

So they left and the star went ahead of them leading them to the place... ..where Baby Jesus was lying asleep with a peaceful smile upon his face.

"We have come to worship the new-born king" the magi said in a quiet voice. So Mary took them over to Jesus and the three wise men rejoiced.

They worshipped him and gave him gifts of Incense, Gold and Myrrh, but what about Baby Jesus? Well, he didn't even stir.

Then, early the next morning, the wise men were on their way... ..to tell King Herod where the new king was, but fortunately that day, during a quick snooze, an angel appeared in a dream and warned them of Herod's evil plan. So they quickly chose another route to return back to their homeland.

So there we have it, the story of the greatest gift of all. The birth of baby Jesus, which I know you've heard many times before. But as you're opening your presents around the Christmas tree Don't forget the gift of Jesus, because he's God's gift to everyone - including you and me.

### HYMN STF 191 Away in a Manger

Away in a manger, no crib for His bed  
The little Lord Jesus, lay down His sweet head  
The stars in the sky, look down where He lay  
The little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay

The cattle are lowing, the Baby awakes  
But little Lord Jesus, no crying He makes  
I love Thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky  
And stay by my side, 'til morning is nigh

Be near me, Lord Jesus I ask Thee to stay  
Close by me forever and love me, I pray  
Bless all the dear children In Thy tender care  
And fit us for Heaven to live with Thee there. *Anon*

### Reflection

Yesterday in a service for Christmas Eve, I focused on Bethlehem, the place of potential, providence and privilege - the shepherds exclaimed that they must go there - and I would like to build on that today, reflecting on the shepherds' enthusiasm.

"Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place" *Luke 2:15*

The story of the shepherds is a story filled with verbs ('doing words' as we used to say at school) words describing what the shepherds did. If we look at the words, "living", "go", "found" and "returned", they help us to think about the shepherds' response to the Good News and they help us to think about our own response.

Luke Chapter 2 Verse 8 tells us that, "In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night." Living in the fields meant not only were they on the edge of things physically, but they were also on the edge of society. Living rough lives, they simply would have been unable to observe the rigour of the Jewish ritual and dietary laws. The hundreds of laws that governed every aspect of daily life were impractical to men who lived in the harsh environment of the shepherd. Shepherds were coarse; they were unclean; they would have been shunned by the respectable religious leadership. Living in the fields, the shepherds would have felt themselves beyond religion, and that they were far from God.

However having said that, these particular shepherds might well have been the ones that looked after the sheep that would later become the sacrificial offerings at the Temple. They had an amazingly important job, **yet** they would **still** have been looked down upon and so often despised.

Perhaps many of us feel like the shepherds, that we are at times, far from God, or that God is far from us, but the Christmas story tells us that it is the people who are out on the edge, the people who feel they are far from religious, to whom God comes. If God comes to the shepherds living in the fields, God is also present in our lives - if we want to see him there.

The second verb is "go." The angel brings the shepherds news of the birth of Jesus and they are astonished and terrified, but the encounter with the heavenly host makes them determined to respond. In Verse 15, we read, "the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place.'" The shepherds have been living in the fields in order to watch over their flocks, but they are prepared to leave their flocks on the hillside in order to go to Bethlehem. They have been out on the edge, they have not been

counted, they have been people no-one would have welcomed, but they straightaway respond to the Good News, they go. If we are like the shepherds, if we feel that we have been far away from God, then how do we respond to the Good News? If God speaks to us, as the angels spoke to the shepherds, then would we be like the shepherds? Would we be prepared to leave where we are so as to go where God wants us to go?

"Living", "go": the third verb is "found." Luke Chapter 2 Verse 16 says, "So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger." We don't know what the shepherds expected to find, perhaps they thought they were going to find something very different from the child of poor parents lying in a manger. Or did they know something that the more respectable people had missed???

Whatever the case may be, I am sure they were pleased at what they found, pleased that God had come as someone like themselves, pleased that God had come as someone who would understand them and their lives. Had we been the shepherds, how would we have felt? Would we have expected to find God in such a place? If we were looking for God, where would we look? If we found God present in an unlikely place, would we recognize him?

The final verb is "returned". Verse 20 tells us, "The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them." Returning was the real challenge for the shepherds. Imagine being in their place, imagine being on the hillside when these extraordinary events took place. Imagine having the determination to leave the flocks behind and to go to Bethlehem. Imagine the sense of wonder at finding the child in the manger, the wonder at the feeling of being in the presence of God. How easy would it have been for the shepherds to return to their lives watching the flocks? Wouldn't there have been a sense of disappointment? The shepherds are not disappointed, they glorify and praise God.

How good are we at being Christians who go back into our ordinary lives filled with inspiration and enthusiasm? This year has been particularly difficult. And Christmas is certainly not as we would have anticipated it to be. When life returns to humdrum, when January comes round how good are

we at returning? Will we take the Good News of Jesus into our hum drum lives? Let's pray for a huge dose of God's Holy Spirit to strengthen us to do just that.

*Living, go, found and returned:* the shepherds set a pattern for us. A great one to repeat.

### **Prayers of intercession**

Glory to you, Generous Creator, who so loved your world, that you sent your Son to be born as Messiah to us, to bring us peace. This Christmas Day we humbly ask for your special gifts to the world. Justice.... sufficient resources for all, for freedom, for peace.

Glory to you humble Saviour, who so loved humankind that you gave yourself to us, to be born as one of us, to bring us salvation. This Christmas Day, we humbly ask for your special gifts for humankind, for forgiveness, for healing, for life in all its fullness.

Glory to you life-giving Spirit, who so loves us that you choose to lavish yourself upon us, to live in our hearts, to bring us love. This Christmas Day we humbly ask for your special gifts, for faith, for comfort for fellowship and for joy.

Glory to you our God, Creator, Saviour Spirit, for you give yourself as the answer to our prayers.

Amen

### **Hymn - O come all ye faithful**

O come all ye faithful Joyful and triumphant,  
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;  
Come and behold him born the King of Angels;  
*O come let us adore him, (Repeat x 3) Christ the Lord.*

God of God, Light of light,  
Lo! he abhors not the Virgin's womb;  
Very God, Begotten not created,  
*O come let us adore him, (Repeat x 3) Christ the Lord.*

Child for us sinners Poor and in the Manger  
Fain we embrace thee with awe and love  
Who would not love Thee Loving us so dearly  
*O come let us adore him, (Repeat x 3) Christ the Lord*

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation!  
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above,  
'Glory to God in the highest!'  
*O come let us adore him, (Repeat x 3) Christ the Lord.*

Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning;  
Jesus, to thee be glory given!  
Word of the Father now in flesh appearing.  
*O come let us adore him, (Repeat x 3) John Francis Wade and others*  
*Christ the Lord. The CCLI number 176885*