

A Christmas Service of Five Readings and Carols

† **Song: Once in Royal David's City**

TiS 312

*Once in royal David's city
stood a lowly cattle shed
where a mother laid her baby
in a manger for his bed:
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ her little child.*

*He came down to earth from heaven
who is God and Lord of all,
and his shelter was a stable,
and his cradle was a stall;
with the poor, despised and lowly
lived on earth our Saviour holy.*

*And through all his wondrous childhood,
day by day like us he grew;
he was little, weak, and helpless,
tears and smiles like us he knew;
and he feels for all our sadness,
and he shares in all our gladness.*

*And our eyes at last shall see him,
through his own redeeming love,
for that child so dear and gentle
is our Lord in heaven above;
and he leads his children on
to the place where he is gone.*

*Not in that poor lowly stable,
with the oxen standing by,
we shall see him: but in heaven,
set at God's right hand on high,
when his children gather round
bright, like stars, with glory crowned.*

(Title: Once in Royal David's City. Author: Cecil Frances Humphreys Alexander, Henry John Gauntlett. ©
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† **Greeting: Rev. Tony Johnson**

† Call to Worship: Based on Psalm 98

O sing to God a new song,
God has done marvellous things.

O sing to God a new song,
for true justice revealed.

O sing to God a new song,
for steadfast love and faithfulness.

O sing to God a new song,
let the whole world shout.

Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises.

We shout in joy for Christ is born to save the world!

† Advent Candle Liturgy

† Prayer of Confession

What causes us to stop singing? What causes us to stop being amazed? Why must we be reminded to sing, marvel, and remember love and faithfulness? (Pause.)

Forgive us, God, for the times we easily forget Christ born amongst us.

Help us to remember Christ's peace, love, compassion, and justice born and growing to the ends of the earth, for all to see, to sing about, and to respond to in love.

Amen.

† Words of Affirmation

Let all the earth praise God. The seas roar, the hills sing together in joy, for God has come. All of you, on earth, make a joyful noise. Break forth in joy, for the God of peace has come to earth.

Amen!

† First Reading: Isaiah 9:2, 6, 7

²The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light.

They lived in a land of shadows,
but now light is shining on them ...

⁶A child is born to us!

A son is given to us!

And he will be our ruler.

He will be called, "Wonderful Counselor,"

“Mighty God,” “Eternal Father,”
“Prince of Peace.”

⁷His royal power will continue to grow;
his kingdom will always be at peace.

He will rule as King David's successor,
basing his power on right and justice,
from now until the end of time.

The Lord Almighty is determined to do all this.

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† **Song: Hark the Herald Angels Sing**

TiS 303

*Hark! the herald angels sing
glory to the new-born King,
peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled.
Joyful, all you nations, rise,
join the triumph of the skies;
with the angelic host proclaim,
‘Christ is born in Bethlehem’.*

*Hark the herald angels sing
glory to the new-born King.*

*Christ, by highest heaven adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord,
late in time behold him come,
offspring of a virgin’s womb:
veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
hail the incarnate Deity,
pleased in human flesh to dwell,
Jesus, our Immanuel.*

*Hark the herald angels sing
glory to the new-born King.*

*Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Sun of righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,
risen with healing in his wings:
mild he lays his glory by,
born that we no more need die,
born to raise us from the earth,
born to give us second birth.*

***Hark the herald angels sing
glory to the new-born King.***

(Title: Hark the Herald Angels Sing. Author: Charles Wesley, Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy , Henry John Gauntlett. © Words: Public Domain. Music: Public Domain.)

† **Second Reading: Isaiah 40:1-5**

¹“Comfort my people,” says our God. “Comfort them!

²Encourage the people of Jerusalem.

Tell them they have suffered long enough
and their sins are now forgiven.

I have punished them in full for all their sins.”

³A voice cries out,

“Prepare in the wilderness a road for the Lord!
Clear the way in the desert for our God!

⁴Fill every valley;

level every mountain.

The hills will become a plain,

and the rough country will be made smooth.

⁵Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed,
and all people will see it.

The Lord himself has promised this.”

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† **Song: O little town of Bethlehem**

TiS 316

*O little town of Bethlehem,
how still we see you lie!
Above your deep and dreamless sleep
the silent stars go by:
yet, in your dark streets shining
the everlasting light,
the hopes and fears of all the years
are met in you tonight.*

*For Christ is born of Mary;
and, gathered all above,
while mortals sleep the angels keep
their watch of wondering love.
O morning stars, together
proclaim the holy birth,
and praises sing to God the King
and peace to all on earth.*

*How silently, how silently
the wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
the blessings of his heaven.
No ear may hear his coming;
but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive him, still
the dear Christ enters in.*

*O holy child of Bethlehem,
descend to us, we pray;
cast out our sin and enter in,
be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels
their great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us,
our Lord Immanuel.*

(Title: The Little Road to Bethlehem. Author: Margaret Phillips Brooks 1835–93 alt. © Words: Public Domain..)

† **Third Reading: Luke 1:26-36, 2.1-7**

^{1:26} In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy God sent the angel Gabriel to a town in Galilee named Nazareth. ²⁷ He had a message for a young woman promised in marriage to a man named Joseph, who was a descendant of King David. Her name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel came to her and said, “Peace be with you! The Lord is with you and has greatly blessed you!”

²⁹ Mary was deeply troubled by the angel's message, and she wondered what his words meant. ³⁰ The angel said to her, “Don't be afraid, Mary; God has been gracious to you. ³¹ You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. The Lord God will make him a king, as his ancestor David was, ³³ and he will be the king of the descendants of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end!”

³⁴ Mary said to the angel, “I am a virgin. How, then, can this be?”

³⁵ The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and God's power will rest upon you. For this reason the holy child will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ Remember your relative Elizabeth. It is said that she cannot have children, but she herself is now six months pregnant, even though she is very old. ³⁷ For there is nothing that God cannot do.” ...

^{2:1} At that time Emperor Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Roman Empire. ² When this first census took place, Quirinius was the governor of Syria. ³ Everyone, then, went to register himself, each to his own hometown.

⁴ Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to the town of Bethlehem in Judea, the birthplace of King David. Joseph went there because he was a descendant of David. ⁵ He went to register with Mary, who was promised in marriage to him. She was pregnant, ⁶ and while they were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have her baby. ⁷ She gave birth to her first son, wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger—there was no room for them to stay in the inn.

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† **Song: Away in a Manger**

TiS 318

*Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
the little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head;
the stars in the bright sky looked 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 you, Lord Jesus; look down from on high,
and stay by my side until morning is nigh.*

*Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask you to stay
close by me for ever, and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in your tender care,
and fit us for heaven to live with you there.*

(Title: Away in a Manger. Author: James Ramsey Murray, John Thomas McFarland, Martin Luther. © Words: Public Domain. Music: Public Domain.)

† **Fourth Reading: Luke 2:8-16**

⁸ There were some shepherds in that part of the country who were spending the night in the fields, taking care of their flocks. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone over them. They were terribly afraid, ¹⁰ but the angel said to them, “Don't be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. ¹¹ This very day in David's town your Savior was born—Christ the Lord! ¹² And this is what will prove it to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

¹³ Suddenly a great army of heaven's angels appeared with the angel, singing praises to God:

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and peace on earth to those with whom he is pleased!”

¹⁵ When the angels went away from them back into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us.”

¹⁶So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and saw the baby lying in the manger.

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† **Song: O God, Your Grace Has Now Appeared**
(Tune: WINCHESTER OLD 8.6.8.6
"While Shepherds Watch Their Flocks")

*O God, your grace has now appeared
In Mary's tiny boy.*

*In this, your story, may we hear
Good news of wondrous joy.*

*Your gift of peace was heard that night
And shepherds were amazed.*

*Like them, may all your church delight
In angels' songs of praise.*

*As Mary and as Joseph heard
What shepherds came to say,
May we find wonder in your word —
For still you speak today.*

*God, by your Spirit, may we find
In words we've long confessed,
Your grace that calls us to respond —
To live as we've been blessed.*

(Biblical Reference: Luke 2:1-20. Text: Copyright © 2010 by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette. All rights reserved. Email: bcgillette@comcast.net New Hymns: www.carolynshymns.com/)

† **Fifth Reading: John 1:1-14**

¹In the beginning the Word already existed; the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²From the very beginning the Word was with God. ³Through him God made all things; not one thing in all creation was made without him. ⁴The Word was the source of life, and this life brought light to people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out.

⁶God sent his messenger, a man named John, ⁷who came to tell people about the light, so that all should hear the message and believe. ⁸He himself was not the light; he came to tell about the light. ⁹This was the real light—the light that comes into the world and shines on all people.

¹⁰The Word was in the world, and though God made the world through him, yet the world did not recognize him. ¹¹He came to his own country, but his own people did not receive him. ¹²Some, however, did receive him and believed in him; so he gave them the right to become God's children. ¹³They did not become God's children by natural means, that is, by being born as the children of a

human father; God himself was their Father.

¹⁴The Word became a human being and, full of grace and truth, lived among us. We saw his glory, the glory which he received as the Father's only Son.

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† **Song: O Come All Ye Faithful (vss. 1-3, 6-7)**

TiS 304

*O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,
come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
come and behold him born the king of angels:*

*O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!*

*True God of true God, Light of light eternal,
lo, he abhors not the Virgin's womb;
Son of the Father, begotten, not created:*

*O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!*

*See how the shepherds summoned to his cradle,
leaving their flocks, draw nigh with holy fear;
we too will thither bend our joyful footsteps:*

*O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!*

*Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,
sing all ye citizens of heaven above,
'Glory to God, glory in the highest':*

*O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, 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,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!*

† **Response to the Word of God Received:
'God Became Vulnerable'**

Please stand with me as you are able and join with me in a responsive affirmation of our Christmas faith.

In a world that had lost its way,
God was born.

In a world that yearned for wholeness,
God was born.

In a world that longed for healing,
God was born.

To a world that cried out in hope,
God cried out in birth.

To a world that called out for justice,
God revealed injustice.

To a world that searched for peace,
God cried out: 'Peace'.

For those who were lost, lonely and vulnerable,
*God became vulnerable,
taking human form,
risking birth,
facing death,*

So that all might know
*a God who shares their longings,
their griefs, their hopes and their joys.*

In a world full of suffering and despair,
full of laughter and delight,
God is born — so that we might be reborn. Amen.

† **Poetry: Select verses of "Understanding Christmas" by Dick Williams,
read by Alf Swan**

† **Passing of the Peace**

We share the peace as a visible sign of our reconciliation to each another through Christ. And so I invite you to greet one another with,
"the peace of Christ be with you"
and reply,
"also with you."

† **Poetry: Select verses from, “Christmas”
by Sir John Betjeman, read by Alf Swan**

† **Prayers of the People: Tony Johnson**

“How beautiful upon the mountain, are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’”

We praise you for beauty, for peace, and for good news.

Help us to be messengers of peace and bearers of good news.

You ask us to break forth into acts of compassion and justice.

We pray for those who feel vulnerable today.

Help us to break forth from the bonds of oppression and of grief.

We pray especially for those whose hearts and needs are in our thoughts and we do so in the stillness of this moment.

We understand there are so many inexplicable sufferings that hold us back from the celebration of this day.

Help us to accept ourselves where we are but also to accept when love breaks forth in moments and in gestures.

We pray for all those who still need the promise of love breaking in.

Break forth, Jesus Christ, with your hope and your love that is stronger than death. Amen.

† **Offering Our Gifts to God**

† **Prayer Over the Gifts**

Loving God, in the birth of Jesus, you show your preference for all that are humble and poor. May this mystery save us from illusions of grandeur and power, and lead us to love simplicity of heart, through Christ.

Amen.

† **Prayer**

Mysterious God, confounding our expectations meeting us where we least expect to find you.

Stay with us now.

Child of the manger, healing our pain, sharing our weakness.

Stay with us now.

Source of life, birth of God within our own experience.

Stay with us now.

Stay with us in our frailty stay with us on our journey.

*Walk beside us,
live within us,
lead us to glory,
lead us home.*

† **Blessing**

Let us cheerfully lift our hearts to receive
God's blessing:

And may the God of Christmas fill your hearts
with all joy and peace in believing!

May it be so!

The blessing of the manger,
God's creation all around.
The blessing of the shepherds,
God's people with feet on the ground.
The blessing of the angels,
good news for all,
and peace for the world.
Be with you all now and for ever.

May it be so! Amen.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord and your neighbour!

May we be bearers of hope, peace, joy and love.

In the name of Christ we go, Amen!

† **Song: Joy to the World**

TiS 268

*Joy to the world! The Lord is come;
let earth receive its king;
let every heart prepare him room,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.*

*Joy to the earth! The Saviour reigns;
let us our songs employ;
while fields and streams, rocks, hills and plains
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.*

*He rules the world with truth and grace,
and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness
and wonders of his love,
and wonders of his love,
and wonders, wonders of his love.*

(Isaac Watts 1674–1748 alt. based on Psalm 98. Reproduced with permission.)