

**Minster Bethel Congregational Church
(MBCC)**

25/12/2020 – The Birth of Christ

Christmas



HAPPY CHRISTMAS

All lockdown services can be found at: www.mbccs.co.uk

Christmas Blessings

"But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.."

Matthew 2:6

Good morning and welcome to our Christmas Day Service

We are nearing the end of our Christmas journey.

Our first Carol this morning is "O Come All Ye Faithful"

[O come all ye faithful - YouTube](#)

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;

True God of true God, Light of Light eternal;
Lo, he abhors not the Virgin's womb:
Very God, Begotten, not created;

Sing, choirs of angels;
Sing in exultation,
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above;
Glory to God in the highest;

Yea, Lord, we greet thee,
Born this happy morning:
Jesus, to thee be glory given;
Word of the Father,
Late in flesh appearing;

O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
Christ the Lord.

O come, let us adore him.....

O come, let us adore him.....

O come, let us adore him.....



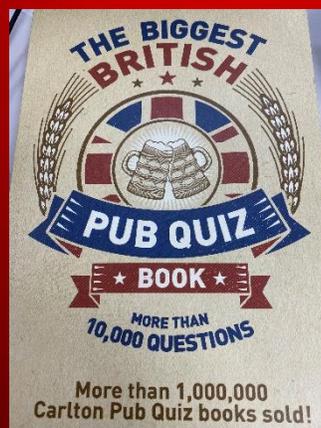
Today we give and receive presents and a custom at Bethel Christmas is for everyone to share something they have been given. This year although we are not physically together in our little church we can still share in the gifts we have been given, either on our zoom service or as we meet up throughout 2021.

At work we had a "Secret Santa" this year, where we all pulled a name out of the bag and had to buy for that person without the person knowing who it was from. For me it was really easy I had someone I knew very well, and in reality I think I know everyone well enough to get them something personal. During the purchasing process a few people asked me what I thought they should purchase for the person they had selected, as they wanted to get a present that would be appreciated.

On the day that we exchanged the gifts it was really interesting, there was a fixed price so each was of equal monetary value. However, some of the gifts a lot of thought had been put in and a real pleasure to people but for others it was clear that the individual hadn't taken time to get to know what the person would like and one person received something that they clearly were not over impressed with.

This small act got me thinking about the amazing gift God gave to each of us on that very first Christmas. One thing that was given and personal to everyone, a gift that was of benefit to every individual on earth from that day forward that chooses to receive it and the most amazing gift of all, Jesus, Gods own son. It's a gift that keeps on giving and continues to save us from all our sins. How great is that.

Now, I hear you asking what did I get from my Secret Santa? Well, I think it was a very thoughtful and personal gift. My team have all year helped with picture rounds and had quizzes for the Bethel/Brigade weekly quiz tested on them. So.... I received:



I LOVE IT

Christmas Blessings

Our second Carol today is “Come and join the celebration” [Come and Join the Celebration \[with lyrics for congregations\] - YouTube](#)

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 ...

Christmas Prayer

Lord and Giver of all good things, the magi travelled for miles to bring the Christ child the first Christmas presents. So may we, too, remember with thankful hearts the love that comes with each present we open. We also thank you for the love you have for each of us, and we thank you for the many gifts that you give us, especially the gift of life itself. Amen.



Christmas Blessings

Our reading today are taken from Luke 2:6-20

[Luke 2: 6-20 NIVUK - While they were there, the time came - Bible Gateway](#)

So far on our journey we have explored the annunciation. Gabriel with Mary. We have looked at Joseph and his reaction to the news of the coming of Christ. We went on the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem only to find that there was no room. The young people helped us explore the angels and today Christ is born. And following that birth he has the most lowly of visitors the Shepherds.

As we think of the shepherds, we often think of a group of men singing sweet songs by a campfire. Our Christmas cards making them look like gentle folk having a nice chat on the hills. However, in the first century, shepherds were generally rough, dishonest people who grazed their flocks on others' lands. They weren't the pleasant people we're used to seeing at this time of year.

It seems very strange then that the angels first went to the shepherds to share the news. I would have thought that the angels would be shouting from the mountain tops and parading the streets of Jerusalem shouting, "Wake up and hear this!" The angels should have gone to the Temple to tell the religious leaders what God was doing. They should have gone to the governor and let him know that something awesome was happening in Bethlehem. They should have gone to Herod. After all, he was the current king of Judea. They should have told him that God was doing a great thing in Bethlehem, and that the King of kings had been born.

When Moses was born, God delivered him straight to the top, right to Pharaoh. But the angels, instead of telling somebody important, announced Jesus' birth to a rag-tag bunch of shepherds. That's not where we would have sent the angels. But that is the way God wanted it.

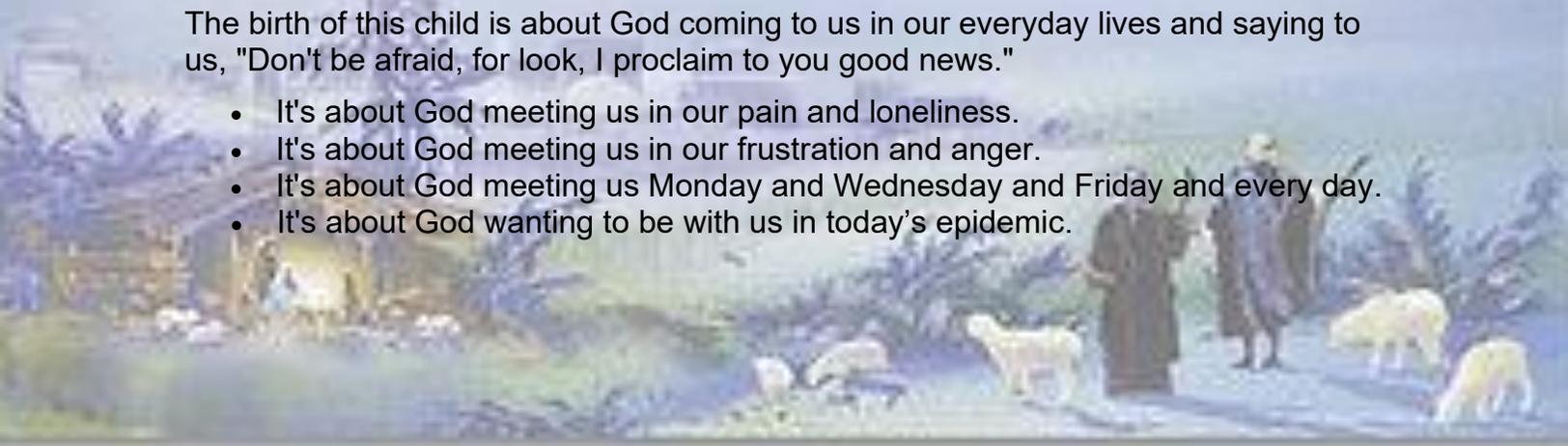
In these verses from Luke, we learn a lot about Jesus. He was sent to the lowly and outcast. We are reminded that Jesus came for people like the shepherds. The shepherds - not the religious elite, the politically savvy, or the rulers of the people - become the metaphor for the kind of people Jesus came to save.

The angels came to shepherds. People who were doing what they did every day and every night. People going through the routines of life. People living their ordinary lives

Isn't that what the birth of Jesus is all about? It's about God meeting us, not on high holy days, but on ordinary days, in ordinary places, in an extraordinary way.

The birth of this child is about God coming to us in our everyday lives and saying to us, "Don't be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news."

- It's about God meeting us in our pain and loneliness.
- It's about God meeting us in our frustration and anger.
- It's about God meeting us Monday and Wednesday and Friday and every day.
- It's about God wanting to be with us in today's epidemic.



Christmas Blessings

That's why God sent the angels to the shepherds - to let us know that this child was for all people, even the most ordinary.

You can only imagine the first reaction of the shepherds. They were scared. Back then the appearance of angels would be seen as an omen, as though God were bringing His wrath upon them. To allay their fears, the angels said, "Don't be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy. Today a Saviour is born!"

With that, the heavens opened with glorious music. In the midst of an ordinary night, ordinary shepherds encountered an extraordinary God. The shepherds must have been surprised that God broke into their ordinary lives. For us, Christ sometimes breaks into our lives when we least expect it, just like he did with those shepherds

What next for the Shepherds? After they received the news from the angels, the shepherds just had to see for themselves, so they ran off to Bethlehem to experience what the angels had told them. When they got to Bethlehem, "they hurried off and found both Mary and Joseph, and the baby who was lying in the manger. After seeing [them], they reported the message they were told about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them".

Eventually, the whole world would celebrate the coming of this child, but for now, only the shepherds knew what had happened in Bethlehem. The result was the response that should arise from all God's people: The shepherds returned to their flocks "glorifying and praising God"

Reading Luke's account, we should be filled with wonder. We can expect something miraculous. We should expect the amazement to continue. We want the mystery of the moment to continue because - if we're really honest with ourselves - we long for something amazing in our lives and not just now in 2020. Prior to this year most of us lived a life of routines, there was a predictableness, the children went to school, we went shopping at set times we went to church. Our days were so packed with stuff. This year has turned our lives upside down throwing us out of kilter. People have moaned and complained, the news is always negative. Yet when those shepherd lives were turned upside down they found God and were filled with wonder and they spread the news of the birth of Christ.

The challenge for us is always to find ways of celebrating the presence of God in the ordinary moments of everyday life and in our newly found covid lives - the smile of a friend, the sharing of a meal, clapping on a doorstep, a rainbow in a window, the beauty of good music.

When the shepherds had seen Jesus, their world was turned upside down. They spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. As we remember the birth of Christ this year let us be like those ordinary shepherds amazed at the wonder of God and go into 2021 "glorifying and praising God"



Christmas Blessings

A Christmas Prayer for Action

When the song of the angels is stilled, when the star in the sky is gone, when the kings and princes are home, when the shepherds are back with the flocks, then the work of Christmas begins: To find the lost, to heal those broken in spirit, to feed the hungry, to release the oppressed, to rebuild the nations, to bring peace among all peoples, to make a little music with the heart. And to radiate the Light of Christ, every day, in every way, in all that we do and in all that we say. Then the work of Christmas begins.

—Howard Thurman

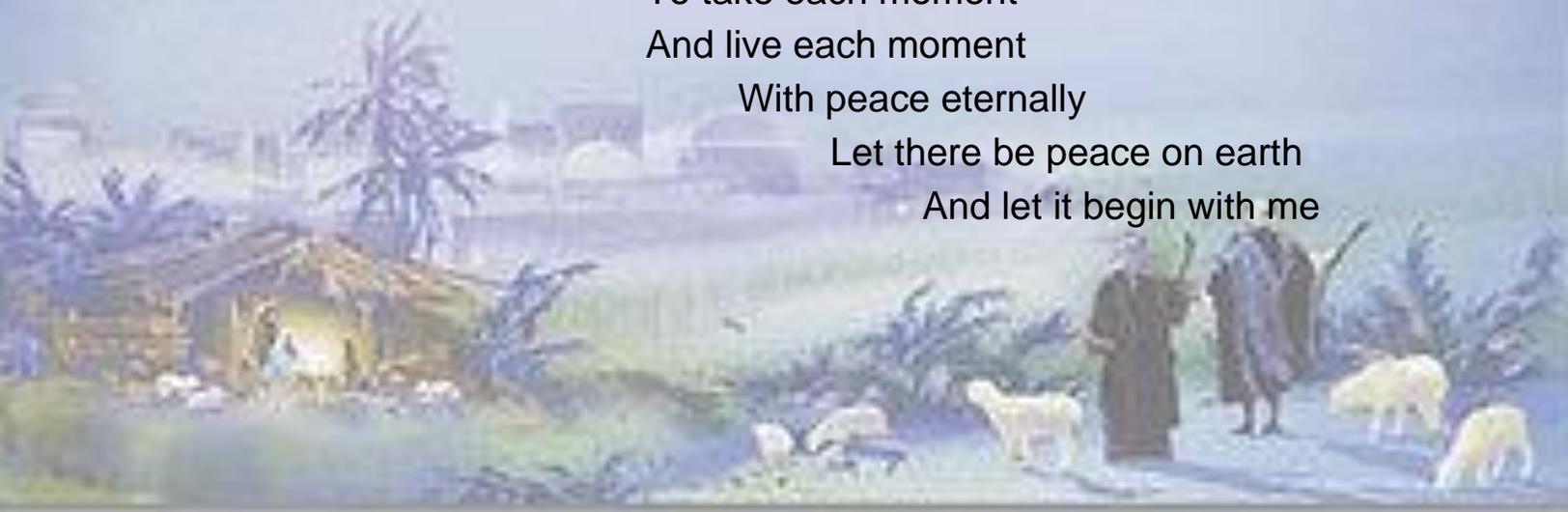
Our final carol today is “Let there be Peace on Earth”

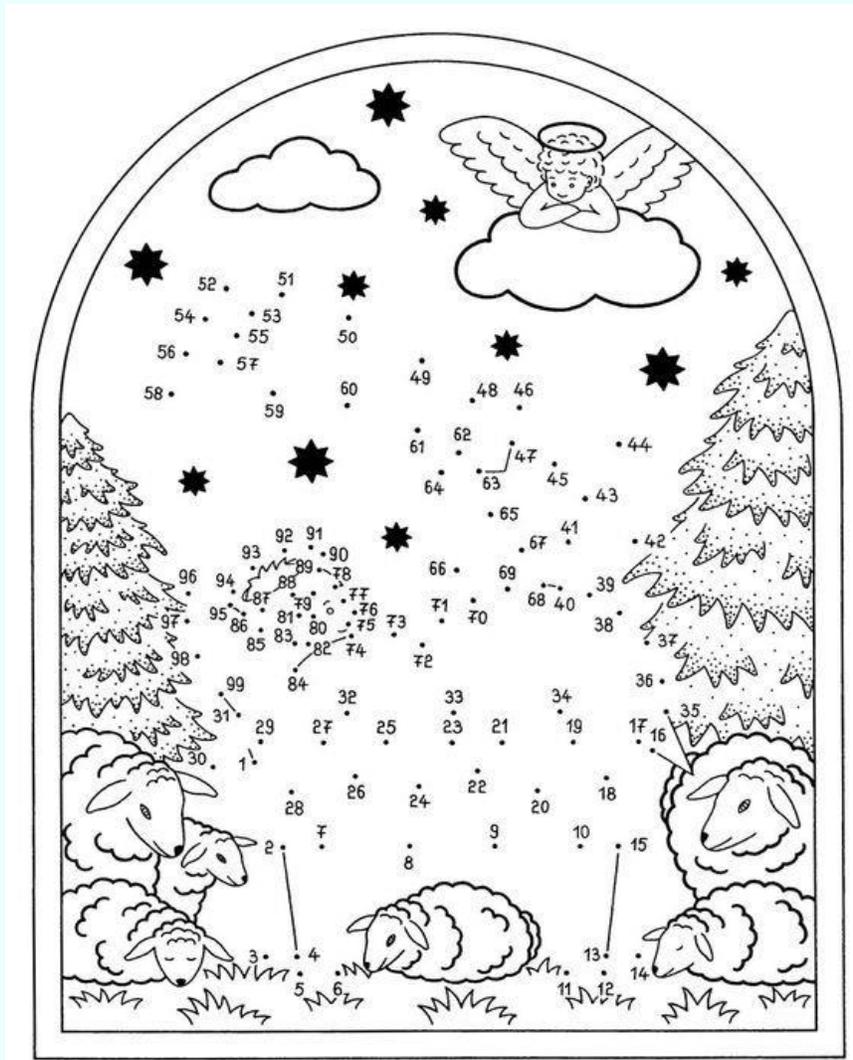
[Let There be Peace on Earth - Sing Along - YouTube](#)

Let there be peace on earth
And let it begin with me
Let there be peace on earth
The peace that was meant to be
With God as our father
Brothers all are we
Let me walk with my brother
In perfect harmony

Let peace begin with me
Let this be the moment now
With every step I take
Let this be my solemn vow
To take each moment
And live each moment
With peace eternally

Let there be peace on earth
And let it begin with me





**MAY GODS BLESSING SURROUND YOU
EACH DAY
AS YOU TRUST HIM AND WALK IN HIS WAY;
MAY HIS PRESENCE WITHIN
GUARD AND KEEP YOU FROM SIN.
GO IN PEACE, GO IN JOY, GO IN LOVE!**

