

Worship at Home – 4th Sunday of Advent, 18 December 2022

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use at home. We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people across the Methodist Connexion are sharing this act of worship with you.

Opening Prayer

Today is the 4th Sunday of Advent. If you are marking each Sunday of Advent in any way, please take a moment to do this. We pray using the words from hymn 165.

Mary's gift, beyond all telling,
Was to give Christ room.
She gave God a human dwelling
in a mother's womb.
Who could guess the final story?
– cross and glory;
empty tomb.

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Hymn StF169: Come, thou long-expected

Jesus Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen here,

www.youtube.com/watch?v=OFApQnaaj18

Come, thou long-expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free,
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.

Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art,
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a king,
born to reign in us for ever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.

By thine own eternal Spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all-sufficient merit
raise us to thy glorious throne.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Let us pray together

Gracious God,
On this last Sunday of Advent, we offer our adoration of the gift of a child, a gift promised and longed for.

We prepare our hearts once again to sing your praises with the angelic host.

We give thanks for the hope of Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us.

Yet even as we prepare with hope and with adoration, praise and thanksgiving on our lips, we recognise with sadness the times when our words and actions have not prepared the way for you.

We are truly sorry and receive with joy the promise of your son in whose name our sins are forgiven.

Praise be to God, who is with us. Amen.

Today's Gospel Reading: Matthew 1:18-25

Time to Reflect

Do not be afraid...

I don't know about you, but telling me not to do something isn't always the best way to make it happen. Don't be clumsy, oops there goes that glass of water. Don't eat cake, but it looked so tasty and I couldn't help it. Don't think of an elephant. I reckon you are thinking of an elephant, I am.

So, I wonder, when the angel told Mary not to be afraid and then when those same words were echoed to Joseph, do I think that meant they weren't afraid at all? I'm not sure I do, if I am going to be really honest with you.

Do not be afraid...

What does that mean if actually, we are very much afraid? If fear is something that we are struggling to switch off from? If even the mention of it brings it rushing to the front of our mind?

I might have my doubts about whether Joseph and Mary were without fear despite being told not to be, but I have no doubt that they took reassurance from those words that gave them the strength to follow God's plan. You see I think we can be afraid and still continue to move forward in faith. I think we can be afraid and find the reassurance in God that does not let fear win. I think we can be afraid and at the same time incredibly courageous.

As we make our final preparations to celebrate God with us, I am not going to tell you not to be afraid. I am going to encourage you to have courage, to be assured of God with you and to follow where God leads. For God is with us, even in the fear-filled shadows of the night and longing of our souls.

Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Take a time to sit quietly.

A time of prayer

God of grace and truth, be with me as I join with others to pray for all those who are living with different fears at this time.

Take a moment to reflect on where you see the impact of fear in the people and places both near to you, in the world and in the communities of faith you connect with.

As you bring each person or situation to mind, you might find it helpful to offer the prayer:

Come, Lord Jesus, Come.

When you are ready, draw your prayers together by saying the Lord's Prayer.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father

Hymn StF173: Into the darkness

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen here www.youtube.com/watch?v=qXKOxub5obc or sing a verse of a hymn that comes to mind

Into the darkness of this world,
into the shadows of the night;
into this loveless place you came,
lightened our burdens, eased our pain,
and made these hearts your home.
Into the darkness once again --
O come, Lord Jesus, come.

Come with your love
to make us whole,
come with your light to lead us on,
driving the darkness far from our souls:
O come, Lord Jesus, come.

Into the longing of our souls,
into these heavy hearts of stone,
shine on us now your piercing light,
order our lives and souls aright,
by grace and love unknown,
until in you our hearts unite --
O come, Lord Jesus, come.

Come with your love
to make us whole,
come with your light to lead us on,
driving the darkness far from our souls:
O come, Lord Jesus, come.

O Holy Child, Emmanuel,
hope of the ages, God with us,
visit again this broken place,
till all the earth declares your praise
and your great mercies own.
Now let your love be born in us,
O come, Lord Jesus, come.

Come in your glory,
take your place,
Jesus, the Name above all names,
we long to see you face to face,
O come, Lord Jesus, come.

Maggi Dawn (b. 1959)

A prayer of blessing

May we walk in and reflect the light of God with courage as we prepare to receive once again the blessing of God with us.

Come, Lord Jesus, come. Amen.

Original Materials by Rev'd Lorna Valentine, North Bedfordshire Methodist Circuit

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Local Churches please insert CCCLi No here

We are grateful to all the Ministers and Local Preachers from around the Connexion who have contributed to Worship at Home. This resource is administrated by Ministries: Vocations and Worship in the Connexional Team and will end at the end of 2022.

For more worship resources see [The Bible \(methodist.org.uk\)](https://www.methodist.org.uk)
[Singing the Faith Plus \(methodist.org.uk\)](https://www.methodist.org.uk)

Matthew 1: 18-25, NRSV

¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' ²² All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

²³ 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel', which means, 'God is with us.' ²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.