

starters for Sunday

Watchnight Service – 24th December 2012

A gentle but powerful service on the theme of the light that shines in the darkness. In the tradition of ALTERnativity it strips away the sentimentality of Jesus' birth to reveal the promise of justice and peace, and the light that truly shines in the darkness. With thanks to Roddy Hamilton, Vice Convener for the Mission and Discipleship Council's Faith Expression Team and one of the trustees for ALTERnativity.



Readings

[Isaiah 9:2-7](#)



The Church of Scotland

Mission and Discipleship Council

Scottish Charity Number: SC011353

ALTERnativity

Just God simply Christmas

Gathering

When we wait in the night
in the hush that only stars can hold
as they bend towards the coming of the light;

when we wait in the night
labouring with anticipation
of what midnight shall bring;

when we wait in the night
listening to the cadence of minutes
beat in rhythm with the birth of hope;

may we hold our collective breaths
with the angelic host
as they clutch their restless alleluias,

for God is on the way:
the mother is labouring
the father pacing



the stable readying
the word is waiting
the light is sliding
and the promise is breaking through

When we wait in the longing for midnight
in expectation of Good News
may we choose to wait together

and find we have moved to the edge of justice
for in such anticipation
is the only place
for the Word to be born among us.

Hymn: On Christmas night all Christians sing

CH4 294

Reading Isaiah 9:2-7

For two voices standing apart from each other

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



A light beyond light
that shifts the world towards justice:

For those who lived in a land of deep shadows—
light! sunbursts of light!

Light that takes the shape of justice
and is clothed in peace

God, you have repopulated the nation,
you expanded its joy.

Oh, they're so glad in your presence!

Festival joy!

*For they returned from the darkness of exile
you have brought the exiled home*

The joy of a great celebration,
sharing rich gifts and warm greetings.

For a child has been born—for us!

the gift of a son—for us!



In his wake

the world will take on different rules

his rules of love and justice

that all may share in and live in the light

His names will be: Amazing Counsellor,

Strong God,

Everlasting Father,

Prince of Peace.

His influence will grow,

and the wholeness he brings will have no limit

He'll rule from the historic David throne

over that promised kingdom.

He'll put that kingdom on a firm footing

and keep it going

With fair dealing and right living,

beginning now and lasting always.

The renewing power of the God of the universe

will do all of this.



Dialogue Reading

One	The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.
Two	It is not a question you often hear asked, But what is the sound of light?
Three	The yell of joy from a woman holding a plate of food for her hungry children One sound of a key unlocking prison cells The slow crack of ice melting after Winter This is the sound of light
One	Or unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given
Two	It is not a question you often hear asked, But what is the weight of God?
Three	Loaf of bread freshly baked and broken on the table for a hungry family Cross-bar of wood thick enough to carry a man The half dozen ounces of a baby newly born This is the weight of God
One	So the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round them and they were so afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.
Two	It is not a question that you often hear asked, But what does an angel look like?
Three	A shepherd brimming with excitement with a story to tell A father holding a new born in awe of the wonder Our enemies waiting for us to accept their help This is what an angel looks like



Two	It is not a question you often hear asked, How far is it to Bethlehem?
Three	The journey of a lifetime but only takes a second As close as your neighbour and as distant as your enemy The distance between hope and expectation This is how far it is to Bethlehem
One	And his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace
Two	It is not a question you often hear asked, But what is God's first name?
Three	The name of every person we oppress, divide or shun The name that holds your name within it The name that proclaims God with us, in us, around us, Emmanuel This is God's first name
One	She brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.
Two	It is not a question you often hear asked, But why was there no room at the inn?
Three	Because the world was too busy to notice Because we choose to build walls between communities and live in fear Because we do not have room to share what we have And let the promise be born in us

Everyone has questions, especially about the Christmas story: how did that happen, what if Mary said no. Here are some questions, not always the ones we ask, but perhaps ought to ask. They come from the readings we love in this season, and possibly open us to the truth of what is happening and waiting to happen tonight.

Hymn: O come, O come, Emmanuel

CH4 273

Reflection



The Church of Scotland

Mission and Discipleship Council

Scottish Charity Number: SC011353

Hymn: It came upon a midnight clear

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Prayer

in the slow wait for birth O God
dream in us the possibilities
the ancient prophets spoke of
of light coming though the darkness
of the humbling of the powerful
the lifting of the lowly
of the Word set free, alive in the world

in the slow lingering of the minutes
round the turning of midnight
set free in us
the risk of believing it all to be true
that justice will come
that the imprisoned will be set free
that the hungry will be fed
because of this birth



in the slow beauty of this hour
open our eyes
to what you have now set within our grasp
of the birth of a deeper way of living
founded on the one born of light
whose way of love and compassion
sets free the world
from its own bondage

in the slow creep of minutes
tell us again your longings
coming real in these fading minutes
of new life for those silenced
compassion for those the world has left out
welcome for every stranger
and bread for those who hunger for a meal and righteousness

These are your yearnings
for birth
for incarnation
for Jesus Christ born among us



They are ours too

may it be soon

and very soon

So be it

Amen

The Waiting (based on a Wild Goose Resource Group meditation)

When the time was right

God spoke

And the light slipped through

When the time was right

God drew breath

And the word was delivered

When the time was right

God hesitated

As the son fell from heaven to earth

When the time was right

God cried

As the saviour was given to redeem the world



When the time was right

God knew

This was the moment of birth

And when there was no more time

God laboured

and the time was fulfilled

Now

justice is born

be it so

Hymn: Hark the herald

CH4 301

Reading

About that time Caesar Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Empire. This was the first census when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Everyone had to travel to his own ancestral hometown to be accounted for. So Joseph went from the Galilean town of Nazareth up to Bethlehem in Judah, David's town, for the census. As a descendant of David, he had to go there. He went with Mary, his fiancée, who was pregnant.

While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. She gave birth to a son, her firstborn. She wrapped him in a blanket and laid him in a manger, because there was no room in the hostel.

There were shepherders camping in the neighbourhood. They had set night watches over their sheep. Suddenly, God's angel stood among them and God's glory blazed around them. They were terrified. The angel said, "Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Saviour has just been born in David's town, a Saviour who is Messiah and Master. This is what you're to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger."



At once the angel was joined by a huge angelic choir singing God's praises:

Glory to God in the heavenly heights,

Peace to all men and women on earth who please him.

As the angel choir withdrew into heaven, the shepherders talked it over. "Let's get over to Bethlehem as fast as we can and see for ourselves what God has revealed to us." They left, running, and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. Seeing was believing. They told everyone they met what the angels had said about this child. All who heard the shepherders were impressed.

Mary kept all these things to herself, holding them dear, deep within herself. The shepherders returned and let loose, glorifying and praising God for everything they had heard and seen. It turned out exactly the way they'd been told!

Prayer

When will Christmas arrive in Afghanistan, O Saviour?
When will Darfur live in peace?

Will Palestinian and Israeli ever share justice?

When will Washington and Westminster and Brussels
proclaim no more hunger, no more war?

When will governments turn their weapons to ploughshares
and multinationals their profits to pruning hooks

When will Christmas arrive?

So we pray for the world

O newborn saviour

this early morning

in the wake of your birth

when there is still time to believe

that because you are with us



the world can change
So in our 'Merry Christmas's today
may we make peace
in our 'Seasons Greetings'
may we share a welcome
in our 'Joyeux Noel'
may we sow seeds of justice
And may we believe
not in some magic
but in a vision
that isn't a dream
but a way of life
not for someone else
but for us this morning
now you are born.
So be it
Amen

Hymn: O come all ye faithful

CH4 306



Blessing

May the light always reach into you and find a home

May the promise always encourage you to move towards what is yet unknown

May the way of justice guide your feet and call your name

And may the God born in you today be your redeemer, Saviour and companion

Always

We hope you have found these worship resources helpful in preparing for this service. For other resources and ideas for music and preaching please go [here](#) to see our [Preachers Perspectives](#) web page and for *Different Voices Magazine*: To subscribe click [here](#). To see more information and see our free taster copy click [here](#).

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to express its thanks to the Rev Roddy Hamilton, Vice Convener for the Mission and Discipleship's Faith Expression Team and one of the trustees for ALTERNativity for providing us with this Sunday's material.

Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.

