

# *St Peter's Scottish Episcopal Church, Kirkcaldy*

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## *Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> December 2020, Advent 4, Carol Service*

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Welcome to our Carol Service with a difference, we will listen to the familiar readings and we will hear the familiar carols. Our musician will play one verse of each carol, please do join in by humming, sadly we are not permitted still to sing.

*Advent Wreath:* Blessed are you, Sovereign Lord, merciful and gentle;  
to you be praise and glory for ever!  
Your light has shone in our darkened world  
through the child-bearing of blessed Mary;  
grant that we who have seen your glory  
may daily be renewed in your image  
and prepared like her for the coming of your Son,  
who is the Lord and Saviour of all.  
**Blessed be God for ever.**

The candle is lit.

**Lord Jesus, Light of the world,  
blessed is Gabriel who brought good news;  
blessed is Mary your mother and ours:  
Bless your Church preparing for Christmas;  
and bless us your children who long for your coming. Amen**

*Bidding Prayer:* We have come together to celebrate the great festival of Christmas. In this service we hear and receive the good news of the birth of Christ and we offer to God our thanksgiving in the joyful singing of carols.

As we gather together in the name of Christ, we pray for the world he came to save: for the Church, that it may be enabled in our generation to surrender anew to God's holy

Wisdom, and bear the good news of God's love to a needy world; for the world, which is already Christ's, that all its peoples may recognize their responsibility for its future, and may be inspired by the message of Christmas to work together for the establishment of justice, freedom and peace everywhere; for all in special need, the sick, the anxious, the lonely, the fearful and the bereaved, that the peace and light of the Christ-child may bring hope and healing to all who sit in darkness.

*CRIB Blessing* As we meet to anticipate the birth of Christ, let us pray that God will bless this crib which we have prepared in celebration; may all who see it be strengthened in faith, and receive the fullness of life he came to bring. **Amen.**

*Carol* O come, O come, Emmanuel

*First Lesson* Isaiah 9. 2, 6-7

*Second Lesson* Luke 1. 26-38

*Carol* God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen

*Third Lesson* Luke 2. 1-7

*Carol* Away in a manger

#### *Address*

"Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you." With these words, the Angel Gabriel announces God's call to Mary. Mary is unique in all creation with the young woman from Nazareth being offered a pivotal role in the redemption of all creation. We see in Mary's faithfulness the model for the way the grace of God can and will, albeit in smaller ways, use each of us.

Look at the many ways God had already acted in scripture. God used Miriam's bravery as she kept an eye on her brother Moses, floating in a basket. She would go on to lead her people in praising God after they were brought out of Egypt. God raised up Deborah to free her people from the Canaanite king, Sisera. Esther discovered that she had been placed in King Xerxes' palace in order to rescue her people from death. The prophetess Anna saw the infant Jesus in the Temple and praised God, speaking of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. An unnamed woman at a well in Samaria heard Jesus speaking and became an evangelist, bringing her village to faith. The wealthy businesswoman Lydia heard the Good News from Paul and became the first of her people to follow Jesus, using her means to support the new faith taking root in the Roman Empire.

Mary's call came through the appearance of the Angel Gabriel. Even in biblical times, hearing God speak audibly or having an angel appear with a message from God was a rare event. While her call was singular, Mary's response of "Here am I" is part of a pattern woven into scripture. Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Samuel, and others heard God's call and responded with those words.

Isaiah was in the temple when he had a vision of God on the throne with seraphim, six-winged angels, flying around the throne, calling out, "Holy, Holy, Holy." The voice of the Lord calls to Isaiah and says, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Isaiah responds, "Here am I; send me" (Isaiah 6:1-8).

Then we come to Mary in the reading we have just heard. Gabriel lays out the plan for Mary, explaining how she is to be the mother of the Messiah. Mary's response is the time-tested response of those who answered God's call before her: "Here am I."

The people of faith whose stories we named share the common attribute of making themselves available to God. God calls and they reply, "Here am I," before they even know what God has in mind for them.

In this, Mary is part of an ongoing pattern: God's plan always involves using ordinary people to bring about extraordinary changes.

Mary's call to be the Theotokos—the God-bearer—was unlike any other in all creation, with the exception of the fact that God calls and uses ordinary and flawed me and ordinary and flawed you, fitting the pattern we see working its way through human history. Every Christian shares a common call to use the gifts God has given us toward the reconciliation of all the world.

But how might we hear God's call? What is it like to discern how the Holy Spirit might use us? First, know that this is common. Your own life has been shaped by those who were in some ways responding to how the Holy Spirit was moving in their lives.

But how do we know when it is the Holy Spirit who is guiding us? After all, we know that God can use our own interests and desires to call us, but our own interest and desire alone are not God's call.

Second, know that a call happens in community. If we are being led toward something, test whether or not it is God calling us – with prayer, by surrounding ourselves with godly people who are also praying for our discernment. Then ask God to make a way or close the way. This is not about ordained ministry, certainly not that alone. God may call us to something – a vocation, whether as a teacher or physician or real estate agent, or as a foster parent or scout leader, or even just to reach out to one person on a given day. In fact, the Holy Spirit can use us anywhere to touch the lives of those around us.

It takes some spiritual discernment, though, to determine when it is God and when it is just our own desires at play. When the Holy Spirit is really working to get our attention, God will use others to affirm what one is hearing. God speaks in stereo, using more than one method at once—God will use what we read, hear on television or the radio, and the passing comment of a friend. God will also use those various means to show that it is not the Holy Spirit. If I come up with a great idea, or a terrible idea I think is great, I can try to baptize my idea as God's.

Ask God to direct our path. Attend to what that might be. When something arises, test it and continue to listen. If something is of God, ask for the Holy Spirit to open doors, even though it seems impossible. And also ask God that if it is not of him, to close the doors, no matter how promising that path seems, and make it impossible, even if it had been a sure thing. It is important when discerning God's will to surround yourself with godly people and to ask them to pray as well.

Praying for God to close doors is hard. After all, the thing we are praying about may be just our own will and desires talking. Still, we should pray for the opportunity to fall through if it is not God's will.

But what if we have never experienced God calling you to do anything – ever? Fear not. Every Christian has been there. The appropriate response is still, "Here am I." Offer our life to God and let the Holy Spirit guide us. While none of us will experience a call as world changing as the one Gabriel announced to Mary, the effect of each follower of Jesus listening and discerning how God will use them is what the Holy Spirit uses to reconcile all creation to God. Amen.

<i>Carol</i>	O little town of Bethlehem
<i>Fourth Lesson</i>	Luke 2. 8-16
<i>Carol</i>	While Shepherds watched their flocks
<i>Fifth Lesson</i>	Matthew 2. 1-11
<i>Carol</i>	As with Gladness
<i>Sixth Lesson</i>	John 1. 1-14

#### *Intercessions*

Throughout Advent we have been looking forward to the celebration of the birth of Jesus; born in a lowly place to raise up the lowly, and are also in joyful expectation of his coming again to gather us all into his kingdom at the end of days. Keep us alert and ready to respond to God's call, which may come from the most unexpected places and take our lives in unexpected directions.

Lord Hear Us

We pray for the Church throughout the world. May all those who confess you as Lord be kept steadfast in their faith, be lifted up when they are weak and be brought together as one body to build your Kingdom here on earth. We pray for Bishop Mark our Primus and Bishop Ian our Diocesan Bishop; for Christine our Rector and all those involved in worship at St Peters. In these times when we are not all able to meet as usual, we pray that all the efforts to keep us in touch with each other will continue to give us strength and community.

Lord Hear Us

We pray for all those who give us support, who encourage us and listen to us. May their lives be blessed and filled with joy. We pray for the leaders of all nations, that their actions be inspired by the perfect example of Jesus. Give them the strength and understanding to see how they can serve all their people, to transform this world to a place where all are free to live their lives free from persecution or tyranny.

Lord Hear Us

We remember in God's presence all those who suffer in any way, and for those who care for them. May the frightened be comforted, the anxious reassured and the sick brought back to wholeness. We call to mind all those known to us who are in need of our prayers in a moment of silence.

We ask for the healing that only God can give for all those in need.

Lord Hear Us

We call to mind all those we know who have died and those who grieve for them. We remember particularly Gerald Dowdall and Robina Hopcroft, whose year's mind falls at this time. We pray that they, and we in our turn, may be received into heaven and live forever in divine light.

Lord Hear Us

Father we ask all of these things, in the name of your Son, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

### *The Confession*

God is love and we are his children.  
There is no room for fear in love.  
We love because he loved us first.  
Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith.

### *Silence*

**God our Father, we confess to you  
and to our fellow members in the Body of Christ  
that we have sinned in thought, word and deed,  
and in what we have failed to do.  
We are truly sorry.  
Forgive us our sins, and deliver us from the power of evil.  
For the sake of your Son who died for us,  
Jesus Christ, our Lord.**

God, who is both power and love,  
forgive us and free us from our sins,  
heal and strengthen us by his Spirit  
and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

### *Peace*

We meet in Christ's name.  
**Let us share his peace.**  
*We share the sign of peace with each other*

## THE LITURGY OF THE SACRAMENT

*The taking of the Bread and the Wine*

*Offering*

Let us present our offerings to the Lord.

*Carol*                      Hark the herald angels sing

*Communion Prayer:* God of infinite mercy. We thank you for Jesus our Saviour who feeds his people and gives them eternal life. Though we cannot consume the gifts of bread and wine we thank you that we do receive Christ's saving presence, the forgiveness of sins and all other benefits of his passion. Grant that we may continue for ever in the risen and ascended life of our Saviour. Amen.

*(This prayer is said during the online Provincial service).*

*The Lord's Prayer*      Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come;  
thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.

*Carol*                      Silent Night

*Blessing*                      May the Father,  
who has loved the eternal Son from before the foundation of the world,  
shed that love upon you his children. **Amen.**

May Christ,  
who by his incarnation gathered into one things earthly and heavenly,  
fill you with joy and peace. **Amen.**

May the Holy Spirit,  
by whose overshadowing Mary became the Godbearer,  
give you grace to carry the good news of Christ. **Amen.**

Dismissal:                      Go in peace to love and serve the Lord  
In the name of Christ. Amen.

*Recessional hymn:*      O come all ye faithful

### **Sunday 7pm Candle Prayer**

**Lord, we are your people who have journeyed in darkness  
And who long to see your light once more.  
We are those who have journeyed through hard times  
And who long to see life and community renewed.  
Lord in your mercy, Hear our prayer.**

**Lord, we give thanks for scientists and researchers  
And for those who have created the vaccines that give hope to the world.  
We pray for the just sharing of these precious gifts  
And for the renewal of life in every nation.  
Lord in your mercy, Hear our prayer.**

**Lord, we are those who journey on  
Towards the horizon where light shall surely break.  
We journey in times where we are distanced  
And trust that in time the distance shall be overcome.  
Lord in your mercy, Hear our prayer.**

**Lord, we pray for those who care for the living  
And for the dying.  
We pray for the bereaved and for the bereft  
And ask that you would draw near to them in your compassion.  
Lord in your mercy, Hear our prayer.**

**Lord, we are those who have heard  
Of the true light that is coming into the world.  
We ask that we might become your messengers  
And bear witness to Jesus Christ, the light of God that is to come.  
Lord in your mercy, Hear our prayer.**