

St Peter's Scottish Episcopal Church, Kirkcaldy



Friday 25th December 2020, Christmas Day

- Introit Hymn:* O come all ye faithful
- Welcome:* Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**
- Collect for Purity:* **Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.**
- Gloria:* **Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth. Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father, we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory. Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us; you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer. For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.**
- Collect:* God our Father, whose Word has come among us in the Holy Child of Bethlehem, may the light of faith illumine our hearts and shine in our words and deeds; through him who is Christ the Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**
- Collect SPB:* Almighty God, who hast given us thy only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of a Virgin: Grant that we being regenerate, and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and same Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.
- First reading:* Isaiah 52. 7-10 (SPB Hebrews 1.1)
- Second reading:* Hebrews 1. 1-12

Gradual hymn: Hark the herald angels sing

Gospel acclamation: **Alleluia! Alleluia! A hallowed day has dawned upon us. Come, you nations, worship the Lord, for today a great light has shone down upon the earth. Alleluia!**

Gospel: John 1. 1-14 (SPB St John 1.1)

Homily:

Today is a beautiful day in which we celebrate the incarnation of God through the birth of a baby boy by the name of Jesus. In a year that has been beset with unanticipated challenges and the spread of a virus, we still have so much for which to be grateful.

Today, many presents will be exchanged. Some were shipped well in advance of this day in order to ensure timely delivery. Others will be offered in person. Nationwide, spending this year is expected to surpass last year's gift-giving by a wide margin. Dinner may look a little different as we share meals over Zoom instead of large family-style gatherings, and indeed, we are still grateful. Our normal traditions have been greatly altered, and yet the day is just as special.

This is also the time in which we are called to celebrate the magic that is Christmas. We rejoice as we recall the miraculous birth of the baby born in Bethlehem of the Virgin Mary. We retell the story of the incarnation of God – the God the world did not know and who came into the world in the humblest of circumstances. Jesus was born in a barn, wrapped in a blanket, and laid in an animal trough as his bed. His humble start did not begin to reflect the story of his true nature. Gospel singer Mahalia Jackson used to sing a beautiful rendition of the hymn, Sweet Little Jesus Boy:

Sweet little Jesus boy,
They made you be born in a manger.
Sweet little holy child,
We didn't know who you were -
Didn't know you'd come to save us, Lord,
To take our sins away.
Our eyes were blind, we could not see -
We didn't know who you were.

The Gospel of John offers us a profound explanation of who that sweet little Jesus boy was. He writes, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God." We are told from the outset that Jesus was the Word, Son eternal and present before Creation itself. Unlike the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, John does not recount the story of the birth of Jesus. He draws our attention to who Jesus is. Through John's account, it is clear that Jesus is the manifestation of God. He was with God and he was God. Even though the notion of Jesus both being God and being with God may sound confusing, our faith informs our belief. Jesus was sent to deliver a powerful message to God's people, yet he was a different kind of messenger. He was more than a prophet and he was a bigger force than angels.

The Word was God – and yet, people did not understand.

Jesus came into the world to know human suffering and to teach important lessons that would serve humankind forever. Ultimately, Jesus, the light of the world, came to deliver his people from sinful ways and point them toward salvation.

John the Baptist was a messenger from God who came ahead of the Christ to announce the coming of the Messiah. John informed the people that one much greater than he was coming and that the one coming behind him would be the savior of the world. John came to "testify to the light" so that all would believe. The baptizer also offered people an opportunity to repent and to be baptized with water so they would be prepared when the Lord arrived.

The people were filled with expectation, and still, they didn't recognize Jesus when he appeared to them. They did not know the one who had been sent to deliver peace to a fractured world. They could not comprehend the rabbi who preached forgiveness and hope. They would not accept the teachings of the carpenter's son who talked about love as the most important guiding principle for life.

In these tumultuous times, there are those who are still grappling with the incarnational God who calls us all children of the Holy One. We find ourselves struggling with what it means to be God's shining light in the world. On this day when we shower our friends and loved ones with presents, how have we gifted the world? What have we offered those with much less? How have we remembered the poor and the suffering? What is our gift to God?

COVID shuttered many of our small businesses this year. COVID forced major layoffs at many of our larger places of employment. There is a tremendous fear that many will be left homeless in the aftermath of this global pandemic. COVID has left countless widowed and orphaned.

As we wonder how and why God came to earth, let us be reminded of the grace that has been shown to us simply by God's presence. Our gift to God is our response to the human condition. It is personified in the ways we offer grace to our neighbors, near and far. During Jesus' physical time on earth, we were shown how to care for those with the greatest need. Jesus did not spend time dining with nobility, despite his divine status. Jesus was never to be crowned an earthly king, which was very confounding to the people of his day. Jesus dined instead with the marginalized and the outcasts. Like a laser beam, Jesus shined a light on injustice and forced his disciples to look inwardly, examining their hearts and minds to find the true meaning of life.

It is God's hope that present-day disciples will take time from the hustle and bustle of a busy holiday season to shine a light on the urgent matters of the day. Just like in ancient times, this world is in need of healing. So many are feeling exhausted after a year of fractured relationships, mistrust, and disruption of normal life. The Word is still with us and the shining light of Christ will guide us out of the wilderness and despair.

God is nudging us, beloved, to take on the mantle of discipleship and serve the world in the name of his loving Son. There are numerous issues demanding our attention and there are many ways to get involved in helping all of God's children get to the Promised Land. You are needed now more than ever. Share the love of Christ with others who have been waiting a lifetime to hear the good news of Christmas that offers love and compassion. Rescue those in need just as you have been delivered by the power of God's everlasting mercy.

Today, we celebrate this holiday, the birth of Jesus, with festivities to whatever extent we deem appropriate. We give thanks for those who gather with us and those whom the Lord received into eternity. Make it a joyous occasion. The God of Creation invites us to recreate the meaning of this wonderful season in which miracles can truly happen. It is possible to live in a world filled with love and peace. As faith followers, you must believe that better days are ahead and then work to make that a reality.

After the celebrations end this season, let us draw our attention once again to creating the world that God intended. Let us commit ourselves to continuing the pilgrimage to the Promised Land with the assurance that God's light will show us the way and all we need to do is follow the directives of the Word.

I came across a stunning poem called The Work of Christmas and it really defines the work before us:

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 their flocks,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among others,
To make music in the heart.

May we all celebrate the joy of the Christmas season and give thanks for the continuing presence of the Creator. May the light of Jesus bring new life into this world and may it shine brightly forever. **Amen.**

Nicene Creed: We believe in one God, the Father, the almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father. With the Father and the Son, he is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Intercessions: *Composed and prayed on behalf of the congregation by a member of the Intercessors Group*

As we celebrate Christmas when the Word of God became flesh, we pray for the Church, the Body of Christ. We pray for Bishop Ian and all in ministry, carrying out their daily work, encouraging us to follow you more nearly and love you more dearly. May we be so filled with God's loving life, that our actions touch the world with hope, which lasts when even the Christmas decorations are put away for another year. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Ever living God, on this Christmas morning we remember that your dear son was born into a dangerous and troubled world. We hold in prayer before you those regions of the world, where diversity of opinion or politics forms an hinderance to peaceful co-existence and where borders and barriers seek to hide injustice, terror and torture. Jesus, just as you were brought gifts by the wise men, help our leaders to use wisely those gifts of forgiveness and reconciliation, which you have given us for the good of all nations. We pray for peace in the Holy Land and for all who now live in the city of Bethlehem. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We give thanks to you God that in Jesus' early childhood you entrusted him to the care of a human family. In Mary and Joseph, you gave us an example of love and devotion to him, and the importance of family life. We are grateful for those members of our family who will gather round the table for Christmas lunch, and remember those who cannot be with us at this time. We ask you to bless us and the food you provide.

In our gratitude, we remember your humble birth and pray for those without enough to eat. We remember the stable in which you were born and pray for those who have no place to live. We remember your challenging message of caring and giving and pray for the lonely and those who are close to despair. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Dear God, Jesus your Son, said 'Suffer the little Children to come unto me and forbid them not, for such is the kingdom of heaven'; the children here today want to thank you for all you have done for them. They thank you for their wonderful parents, brothers, sisters and grandparents, and the rest of their families. Thank you for

their pets, their friends and teachers at school, and for this wonderful Christmas day. Thank you for the presents under the tree and the delicious food their mothers have provided. Above all, they thank you for sending your son, Jesus, to save us all.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Jesus, as Mary cradled you gently in her arms, we pray for all women giving birth today, for all new born babies and for all expectant mothers.

We pray for those who are sick or in need of your help at this time and for all who minister to their needs. In particular, we are thankful and pray for those who will work this Christmas day in the service of others.

We pray for those who have died and for those whose hearts have been saddened by the death of someone close to them. Give to them comfort, sure in the knowledge that they will meet again face to face in heaven.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Thank you Lord for sending us the gift of your Son, so that we may have a very merry Christmas. We thank you for the star that guided the little donkey carrying Mary safely to Bethlehem, where Jesus was born. May we who worship here, know the presence of Jesus in our lives this day and every day.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen**

Confession

and Absolution:

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.**

(May)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.

Offertory hymn:

God rest ye merry gentlemen

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.

Communion hymn: Away in a manger

Prayer after Communion:

Father of all, the child born for us is the Saviour of the world. May he who made us your children welcome us into your kingdom, where he is alive and reigns with you now and for ever. Amen.

Blessing: Christ the Son of God, born of Mary, fill you with his grace to trust his promises and obey his will; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

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

Recessional hymn: Christians awake, salute the happy morn