

Circuit Service for Christmas Day & Boxing Day

Preparation

While not essential, you might want to have the following available for use in the service

- if you have a candle and capacity to light it, please have it ready for the start of the service.
- A nativity scene- either a nativity set or Christmas card or picture

Greeting

Happy Christmas and welcome to this service of celebration of Christ's birth.

Light your candle

As you light your candle, you'll be joining with folk across the world in lighting a candle to remember the birth of the Light of the world. In churches it will be the central candle in the Advent ring. However, the service probably will move on quickly. You have the opportunity to pause a while and look at the candle, to gaze at the flame and stop and reflect on something simple and yet profound.

Hymn 202 Hark the herald angels sing

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_iLXNSIaYc

<p>1 Hark ! The herald-angels sing glory to the new-born King, peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled. Joyful, all ye nations, rise, join the triumph of the skies ; with the angelic host proclaim : 'Christ is born in Bethlehem.' <i>Hark ! The herald-angels sing glory to the new-born King.</i></p> <p>2 Christ, by highest heaven adored, Christ, the everlasting Lord, late in time behold him come, offspring of a virgin's womb. Veiled in flesh the Godhead see ! Hail, the incarnate Deity ! Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus, our Immanuel :</p>	<p>3 Hail, the heaven-born Prince of Peace ! Hail, the Sun of Righteousness ! Light and life to all he brings, risen with healing in his wings. Mild he lays his glory by, born that man no more may die, born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth :</p> <p>Charles Wesley (1707–1788)</p>
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Prayer — Kate Compston from 'Bread of Tomorrow'

Thank you, scandalous God,
for giving yourself to the world
not in the powerful and extraordinary
but in weakness and the familiar:
in a baby; in bread and wine.

Thank you

for offering, at journey's end, a new beginning;
for setting, in the poverty of a stable,
the richest jewel of your love;
for revealing, in a particular place,
your light for all nations.

Thank you

for bringing us to Bethlehem, House of Bread,
where the empty are filled,
and the filled are emptied;
where the poor find riches,
and the rich recognise their poverty;
where all who kneel and hold out their hands
are unstintingly fed.

Amen

Nativity scene – In Assisi, Italy, there are many pictures of the key scenes in the life of Jesus. In many, St Francis (of Assisi) was painted in too. When we visited as a family some years back this made us chuckle. However, seeing ourselves in these scenes can be revealing. Please look at your nativity set or nativity scene and put yourself in the picture. Where have you put yourself? Are you standing, kneeling or sitting? Who are you looking at? Who else is there? Is there anyone talking? What are they saying? Stay in the scene as long as you want. When you leave the scene offer what you found, thought or felt to God.

Luke 2 v 1 – 7

Hymn 191 Away in a manger

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pbQpEdwGEXo>

<p>1 Away in a manger, no crib for a bed, the little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head ; the stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay, the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.</p> <p>2 The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes, but little Lord Jesus no crying he makes. I love you, Lord Jesus ! Look down from the sky, and stay by my side until morning is nigh.</p>	<p>3 Be near me, Lord Jesus ; I ask you to stay close by me for ever, and love me, I pray. Bless all the dear children in your tender care, and fit us for heaven, to live with you there.</p> <p>v. 1, 2 <i>Little children's book</i>, Philadelphia, 1885 v. 3 <i>Vineyard Songs</i>, C. H. Gabriel, 1892 Anonymous</p>
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Comment

Rose Ayling-Ellis was a face familiar to Eastenders fans for her role as Frankie Lewis. She is now a national star. Her name as well as her face is well known. People have been blown away by her grace as a dancer and in awe of her capacity to dance at all when she can't hear the music. For as you probably know Rose is profoundly deaf. Her success in Strictly is not a sympathy vote. She has gone as far as she has on merit. So many things about Rose have caught the public's attention. I watched an interview with her and her dance partner, Giovanni Pernice. Just off camera was a signer translating what was being said so that Rose could 'hear' and reply. The interview was so smooth and seamless, a tribute to her intelligence and charm. Rose's success in the show and her magnetic personality has driven a rise in interest in BSL (British Sign Language). People are registering for courses like never before. People like me are checking out websites where signing certain words are demonstrated. Incidentally I will be signing on the video version something like (!!) 'Happy Christmas. Baby Jesus was born in a stable.' I will be doing it with apologies to those who watch and to those who can sign properly!!

I have the highest regard for translators of any language. When in South Africa on an exchange I preached in a coloured church. I preached in English, the translator amazingly heard what was said and translated into Afrikaans. He did it unbelievably quickly, instantaneously. My wife who understands both English and Afrikaans described it as fascinating. What a gift.

God had something to say to humanity. God had much to say. God wanted to tell us how much we are loved. God wanted to point to the way back for human beings. God wanted to share God's vision of the kingdom where justice, love and peace are the watch words. The question for God was 'how do I translate this so that people can 'hear' and understand'? Answer a baby is born in Bethlehem. God's word made flesh. God speaking in the language all can 'hear' and understand no matter what earthly language we speak. As we watch Jesus, as we listen to Jesus, as we meet Jesus, we 'hear' God's word. God's word of love, God's vision of the kingdom, God's way of salvation. Celebrating the birth of the Christ-child is to watch God translate the life of heaven into the language of earth.

God then does a remarkable thing. God says, 'be my translators, sign for me so that world can 'hear' and understand'. It's that moment when at school the French teacher after demonstrating how you ask for the way to the station says to you 'David, would you say that now please?' The French teacher (annoyingly) knew the best way to speak French was practice it, to say it out loud. To know that we've properly heard God and understood God, God invites us to speak out loud. But it's not only words that are expected, it is lives lived God wants. Jesus didn't just speak words, he lived God's love, acted justly and died to speak God's way of salvation. I was going to end the service with this quotation from Howard Thurman, but feel it needs quoting here as well because it fleshes out the actions which will speak God's word:

'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,
And to radiate the Light of Christ,
every day, in every way, in all that we do and all that we say.
Then the work of Christmas begins.'

This work of translation is demanding and costly as the translator born in Bethlehem found out. God asks 'will you translate for me, sign so that the world can 'hear' and understand?'

Hymn 213 O little town of Bethlehem

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LRuXdOb6TrA>

<p>1 O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie ! Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by. Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light ; the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.</p> <p>2 O morning stars, together proclaim the holy birth, and praises sing to God the King, and peace to all the earth ! For Christ is born of Mary ; and, gathered all above, while mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love.</p>	<p>3 How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given ! So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven. No ear may hear his coming ; but in this world of sin, where meek souls will receive him still the dear Christ enters in.</p> <p>4 O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray ; cast out our sin, and enter in ; be born in us today ! We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell ; O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel !</p> <p>Phillips Brooks (1835–1893)</p>
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Prayers for others based on David Blanchflower found in 'Bread of Tomorrow'

Blessed Jesus, Mary and Joseph's son, God's Son
whose parents found no room in the inn;
we pray for all who are homeless and those who work alongside them

Silence

Blessed Jesus, Mary and Joseph's son, God's Son,
born in a stable;
we pray for all who are living in poverty.

Silence

Blessed Jesus, Mary and Joseph's son, God's Son,
whom Herod sought to kill;
we pray for all who live with danger, including children,
all who are persecuted.

Silence

Blessed Jesus, Mary and Joseph's son, God's Son
a refugee in Egypt;
we pray for all migrants and refugees, far from home.

Silence

Blessed Jesus, Mary and Joseph's son, God's Son
in you the Eternal was pleased to dwell,
help us, we pray, to see the divine image
in people everywhere. Amen

Lord's Prayer

Hymn 212 O come all ye faithful

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HErO89bEl8g>

<p>1 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 : <i>O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord !</i></p> <p>2 True God of true God, Light of Light eternal, lo, he abhors not the Virgin's womb ; Son of the Father, begotten, not created :</p> <p>3 See how the shepherds, summoned to his cradle, leaving their flocks, draw nigh to gaze ; we too will thither bend our joyful footsteps :</p>	<p>4 Lo, star-led chieftains, Magi, Christ adoring, offer him incense, gold, and myrrh ; we to the Christ-child bring our hearts' oblations :</p> <p>5 Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation, sing, all ye citizens of heaven above : 'Glory to God in the highest :'</p> <p>* 6 Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning, Jesus, to thee be glory given : Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing :</p> <p>Latin, 18th century, possibly by John Francis Wade (c. 1711–1786) <i>and others</i></p> <p><i>*Christmas Day only</i></p>
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Blessing Howard Thurman adapted

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky has gone
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
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,

And to radiate the Light of Christ,
every day, in every way, in all that we do and all that we say.
Then the work of Christmas begins.