

Traditional Home service Sunday 20th December Advent 4

OPENING PRAYER

Blessed are you, Sovereign God of all, to you be praise and glory for ever. In your tender compassion the dawn from on high is breaking upon us to dispel the lingering shadows of night. As we look for your coming among us this day, open our eyes to behold your presence and strengthen our hands to do your will, that the world may rejoice and give you praise.

Amen.

PRAYER OF PENITENCE

When the Lord comes, he will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness, and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Therefore in the light of Christ let us confess our sins.

Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and repent. Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin. Renew a right spirit within us and restore us to the joy of your salvation, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

cf Psalm 51

PRAISE

Let everything be said and done in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God through Jesus Christ. Sing psalms, hymns and sacred songs:

Let us sing to God with thankful hearts. Open our lips, Lord:
and we shall praise your name.

HYMN 1 (Hark the Herald!)

READINGS - Luke 1:26-38

TALK

CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Spend some time praying for our nation, our community and our families.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

HYMN 2 (Mary Did you Know)

CONCLUSION

Christ the Sun of Righteousness shine upon you, scatter the darkness from before your path, and make you ready to meet him when he comes in glory; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. Amen.

HYMNS TO USE

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Hark! the herald angels sing
"Glory to the newborn King
Peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!"
Joyful, all ye nations rise;
Join the triumph of the skies;
With angelic host proclaim
"Christ is born in Bethlehem!"
Hark! the herald angels sing
"Glory to the newborn King!"

Hail! the heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Hail! the Son 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
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King"

Peterborough Cathedral Choir
Recorded live at Peterborough
Cathedral, Autumn 2020

Director of Music: Tansy Castledine
Organist: Christopher Strange
Recording technicians: Chris Pallister
of Service-AV, and Eugene Chan

www.peterborough-cathedral.org.uk

Mary, Did You Know.....

Wynonna Judd, Kenny Rogers

Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Will one day walk on water?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Will save our sons and daughters?
Did you know that your baby boy
Has come to make you new?
This child that you've delivered
Will soon deliver you

Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Will give sight to a blind man?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Will calm a storm with his hand?
Did you know that your baby boy
Has walked where angels trod?
And when you kiss your little baby
You've kissed the face of God

Oh, Mary, did you know
Oh, Mary, did you know

The blind will see, the deaf will hear
The dead will live again
The lame will leap, the dumb will speak
The praises of the lamb

Oh, Mary, did you know that your baby
boy
Is Lord of all creation?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Will one day rule the nations?

Did you know that your Baby Boy
Is Heaven's perfect Lamb?
This sleeping child you're holding
Is the great I am

Mary, Mary, did you know
Mary, did you know that your baby boy

Advent 4:

Luke 1:26-38; Romans 16:25-27
The Incarnation!

Well our reading tells the announcement of the upcoming birth of Jesus.

And Christmas, of course, is fundamentally about God being born into our world as a baby.

The posh word is the Incarnation.

This morning I want ask the question: Why did God choose to do it this way?

Before I was a Christian, one of my arguments against believing in God was this.

I used to say, Why doesn't God just show up. Why doesn't He just come down with a flash of lightening and show himself to the world.

I would believe in him then.

Well the Incarnation answers that question amongst others.

The Incarnation reveals much about God's plan, who He is, and about how He wants to relate to us.

So, in the time I have, I want to look at just 2 reasons as to why God chose to come and be born and live among His creation.

Why did he choose to move into the neighbourhood as the Message Bible translation puts it?

The first reason is this: Jesus came as a Demonstration.

Louise and I have got into Master Chef during lockdown.
For those who know me you will find that surprising.
Because I have no clue how to cook anything.

But if you know the programme, part of it has these expert chef's come in and give a demonstration of how to make a certain dish.

And the contestants, after looking on, then have to go away and replicate that dish,

Likewise, Jesus came as a demonstration.

He became one of us to teach us how to live.

His life was saying, Look at what a life looks like that is full of the Holy Spirit.

This is what a life looks like totally dependent on the Father.

A life living in obedience.

Jesus's life demonstrates:

'This is what it looks like when you've never given in to sin.

and your life has none of the personal craziest that sin creates.'

Or none of the destruction that comes with sin.

A life of saying and doing only what the Father tells and shows you.

He demonstrated, "here's how you deal with a demon."

Get rid of those.

He demonstrated those things that God cares about.

He demonstrated the purposes and heart of God.

How as His followers we are to do forgiveness, how to handle our money, how to interact with the authorities etc.

If you have to make a big strategic decision, then you spend a whole night in prayer about it.

He demonstrated how to deal with friends who regularly squabbled and wanted to be the most important.

He demonstrated how to deal with betrayal, lack of loyalty in relationships.

Supremely he demonstrated how to love people.

So Jesus was born into this world to be a demonstration.

Secondly he came as **Revelation**.

How on earth are people with tiny brains, like you and I, how are we ever going to understand God.

This unlimited God, who is without beginning or end, is trying to make himself known to the likes of you and me.

See, one of the great, and I think unique, claims of Christianity is that God is knowable.

But how is he going to do that?

Is not just that He's bigger than us.

He's of a different kind.

He's a different quality of being.

One of the reasons he became flesh was so he could reveal himself more fully to us.

So when we look at this person of Jesus. We see an exact representation of God.

As it says in Hebrews 1.

W look at Jesus and understand God's priorities.

Understand how God thinks.

Understand what God cares about, What God is interested in.

Philip Yancey in his book 'The Jesus I never knew', talks about how keeping fish taught him about the Incarnation.

"I learned about incarnation when I kept a salt-water aquarium. Management of a marine aquarium, I discovered, is no easy task. I had to run a portable chemical laboratory to monitor the nitrate levels and the ammonia content. I pumped in vitamins and antibiotics and sulfa drugs and enough enzymes to make a rock grow. I filtered the water through glass fibers and charcoal, and exposed it to ultraviolet light. You would think, in view of all the energy expended on

their behalf, that my fish would at least be grateful. Not so. Every time my shadow loomed above the tank they dived for cover into the nearest shell. They showed me one 'emotion' only: fear. Although I opened the lid and dropped in food on a regular schedule, three times a day, they responded to each visit as a sure sign of my designs to torture them. I could not convince them of my true concern.

To my fish I was deity. I was too large for them, my actions too incomprehensible. My acts of mercy they saw as cruelty; my attempts at healing they viewed as destruction. To change their perceptions, I began to see, would require a form of incarnation. I would have to become a fish and "speak" to them in a language they could understand.

A human being becoming a fish is nothing compared to God becoming a baby. And yet according to the Gospels that is what happened at Bethlehem. The God who created matter took shape within it, as an artist might become a spot on a painting or a playwright a character within his own play. God wrote a story, only using real characters, on the pages of real history. The Word became flesh."

As humans we have small thoughts. Work, sleep, food, motorbikes etc...

It was a genius plan.

To enable God to communicate with us he would come and live among us as one of us.

In that Philip Yancey, story, its like one of us becoming a fish and starting to talk 'fish'.

We humans can have accurate ideas about God because God wants us to.

Because he has chosen to come close to us and live with us.

He has chosen to come as Revelation.

The incarnation is about **Demonstration**.

Jesus teaching us how to live.

And its about **Revelation**..

So he could reveal himself more fully to us.

Its about other things as well but I haven't got time...

God is supremely powerful.

The Incarnation shows us that God wants what power alone can't win.

God wants what power alone can't win.

Think to yourself a moment.

What's the one thing that power cannot win.

Power alone can't win love.

Power can't win a truly yielded heart.

To go back to my argument, before I was a Christian, against believing in God was this.

That I used to say, Why doesn't God just show up.

Come down with a flash of lightening and show himself to the world.

I would then believe in him.

The thing is I would have to believe in him. I would be left with no choice.

But what God wants above all else, is a freely surrendered heart.

A heart that would choose to love Him.

As J. John cleverly says:

"God couldn't have made himself bigger to impress us so he made himself smaller to attract us."

<Soren Kiekegard, the great Danish theologian of another century tells a story of a prince who wanted to find a maiden suitable to be his queen. One day while running an errand in the local village for his father he passed through a poor section. As he glanced out the windows of the carriage his eyes fell upon a beautiful peasant maiden. During the ensuing days he often passed by the young lady and soon fell in love. But he had a problem. How would he seek her hand?

He could order her to marry him. But even a prince wants his bride to marry him freely and voluntarily and not through coercion. He could put on his most splendid uniform and drive up to her front door in a carriage drawn by six horses. But if he did this he would

never be certain that the maiden loved him or was simply overwhelmed with all of the splendour. The prince came up with another solution. He would give up his kingly robe. He moved, into the village, entering not with a crown but in the garb of a peasant. He lived among the people, shared their interests and concerns, and talked their language. In time the maiden grew to love him for who he was and because he had first loved her.>

I think that is a good illustration to explain some of what the Incarnation is about.

It's like God comes in a bit of disguise, so people could freely choose to love him.

He could have come with power but nobody could have resisted him.

He wanted people to freely choose to love Him as He loves them.

Because this is all about relationship.

He is still the same today...

He is still looking for a people who freely choose to love Him.

A people who come with a yielded heart.

So I pray that this Christmas time, amongst all the restrictions we face.

I pray that you know this all consuming, relentlessly pursuing love He has for you.

Your sin is no barrier, he's dealt with that. He's not disillusioned with your choices, your weaknesses... Because he's never had any illusions about you anyway.

He simply wants the free response of a yielded heart.

That is what the incarnation is ultimately about.

Amen.