

Longest Night Service at St Mary with St Alban, Teddington

We did very low key advertising for this – just a notice in the pew sheet and a short article on the web site. We advertised it as a quiet service for anyone who found it hard to buy into the forced merriment of Christmas, for anyone who wanted space, for anyone for whom this might be a difficult time of year.

As people arrive they are given a service sheet and a tea light. A large, unlit candle provides a focal point at the front of the space. (In our church, this is placed next to the Crib, so that tea lights can be placed in the Nativity scene.) Our pianist played quiet music for 10 minutes before the service, and during the bringing forward of candles, and for a significant time after the service ended.

Acknowledgements for creative works used are given at the end.

WELCOME

Christmas always seems to be accompanied by jolly songs, ringing tills, and the expectation that you will have a good time. But that's not how it feels for many people. Maybe your year has been hard – for whatever reason (bereavement, illness, estrangement, worry) – and Christmas seems to highlight the difficulties. Or maybe in an over busy life, you just want space to reflect, recall, regroup.

Whatever the reason, whatever the need, you are welcome here. We hope that you will find the space and hope which the Christmas story offers.

We remain seated for the whole service, including the singing of carols. If you wish to, please join in the responses in prayers in bold type.

We meet in the name of a loving God

Who knows our needs, Hears our cries
And heals our wounds.

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

We light the Christ candle as a sign that when all seems dark, there is still light, however small or dim it may seem.

Come, God-with-us:

Who braves our rejection and hurt, Who holds us in acceptance and love.

Come God-for-us:

Who whispers in our ears

That each of us are beloved children.

Come God-under-us:

Who cradles us in arms that never grow weary; Whose lap has room for all.

Come, God-over-us:

Who watches in the long silence of the night, That we might rest in peace.

Come, God-beside-us:
Who steadies us when we falter, Who lifts us up when we fall.

Come, God-behind-us:
Who picks up all the faded dreams We drop along the way,
And patchworks them into hope.

O come, O come, Immanuel:

And we will rejoice for ever. CAROL

O come, O come Immanuel, And ransom captive Israel That mourns in lonely exile her
Until the Son of God appear. Rejoice, rejoice, Immanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, thou Key of David, come
And open wide our heavenly home: Make safe the way that leads on high, And close the path to
misery.
Rejoice, rejoice, Immanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, thou Day-spring, come and cheer Our spirits by thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight. Rejoice, rejoice, Immanuel

Shall come to thee, O Israel.

READINGS

(These were read by people from their place in the congregation.)

Isaiah 9:2-7

Luke 2:1-5

As quiet music plays, people are invited to place their unlit candles by the large candle or near the
crib, as a symbol of longing for light in darkness.

CAROL

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.

O morning stars together
Proclaim the holy birth,
And praises sing to God the King# And peace to all on earth.
For Christ is born of Mary;

And, gathered all above,
While mortals sleep the angels keep Their watch of wondering love.

READING

Luke 2:6,7

CAROL

How silently, how silently
The wondrous gift is given.
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessing 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.

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!

REFLECTION

You came as a baby, Lord,
As a helpless little child
Who relied on a human family To care for him.

You cried because you were hungry, Because you were homeless, Because you were a stranger,
Far away from home.

You still cry with hunger, Lord,
In the voices of many that are starving;
Your tears still flow:
For the homeless,
The lonely,
The forgotten.
You still rely on human families to care for you.

And so this Christmas, Lord, we pray:

Help us to be the kind of people
Who look for you in the world,
And joyfully discover you as we care for one another. Amen.

CAROL

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.

The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes;
But little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.
I love thee, Lord Jesus; look down from the sky, And stay by my bedside, till morning is nigh.

Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask thee to stay Close by me forever, and love me, I pray. Bless all the dear children in thy tender care

And fit us for heaven, to lie with thee there.

READING: Luke 2:8-20

CAROL

In the bleak midwinter
Frosty wind made moan.
Earth stood hard as iron,
Water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow, Snow on snow,

In the bleak midwinter, long ago.

Our God, heav'n cannot hold him,
Nor earth sustain;
Heaven and earth shall flee away
When he comes to reign. In the bleak midwinter A stable place sufficed

The Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ.

What can I give him,
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wise man
I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give him, give my heart.

PRAYERS

Let us pray to the Lord. Lord, come to your people In your mercy, set us free.

Unlooked for, Christ comes.
Loving God, we pray for our community. In the midst of our everyday lives, Surprise us with glimpses of your glorious, Humble love
At the heart of existence.

Lord, come to your people
In your mercy, set us free.

Searched for, Christ comes.
Loving God, we pray for the leaders of the world.

Guide them with your light,
To seek wisdom, justice and peace.
Lord, come to your people
In your mercy, set us free.
Longed for, Christ comes.
Loving God, we pray for those whose lives are hard and painful, Or whose existence is sorrowful,
bitter or empty.
In their need,
May they know your healing touch,
Reaching out to comfort, strengthen and restore.
Lord, come to your people
In your mercy, set us free.

Loving God, come to us now,
As you have come to your people in every age,
As we gather our thoughts in the words that the adult Christ taught us:

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.

Invite people to come and light a candle during the last carol as a reminder that in the darkness, in the messiness, in the coldness of life, the Christmas story of God in Christ, breaking into the world, offers hope that light will come with the morning.

CAROL

Silent night, Holy night!
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon Virgin mother and child, Holy infant, so tender and mild, Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, Holy night! Shepherds quail at the sight, Glory streams from heaven afar,

Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia! Christ the Saviour is born. Christ the Saviour is born.

Silent night, Holy night.
Son of God, Love's pure light;

Radiant beams from thy holy face with the dawn of redeeming grace. Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

BLESSING

Lord,
In the beginning
When all was very dark, you said: Let there be light.
And there was light
And life throughout the universe.

And when the human race
Was exhausted, tired and weary,
In the darkness of anxiety,
Confusion and sin,
Into that darkness you came
As light in Jesus Christ.
God became a human being among us all.

Once again it is dark.
Not just dark at midnight
But dark in ourselves:
Dark with doubt,
Dark with fear and uncertainty, Dark with confusing
And conflicting voices in our ears.

Come, Light of Life,
Lighten the darkness in our lives With your mighty word of love. Lighten our hearts with the joy Of
your promised coming. Lighten our world with the hope That faith in you brings.

We travel towards Christmas Day In the peace of Jesus Christ.

May his peace,
That lightens the soul with faith, Lifts the spirit with hope,
And leavens the world with love, Be yours tonight and always.

And the blessing of God,
The Creator, the Redeemer and the Sustainer,
Go with you and remain with you now and always. Amen.

Please feel free to stay in the quiet for as long as you need.

Acknowledgements of creative works:-

- The poem 'Come God-with-us' by Thom Shuman
- 'You came as a baby, Lord, As a helpless little child Who relied on a human family' by Carol Dixon
- 'Unlooked for, Christ comes. Loving God, we pray for our community. In the midst of our everyday lives, Surprise us with glimpses of your glorious' from Common Worship, Times & Seasons
- 'Lord, In the beginning When all was very dark, you said: Let there be light. And there was light And life throughout the universe.' by John Harvey