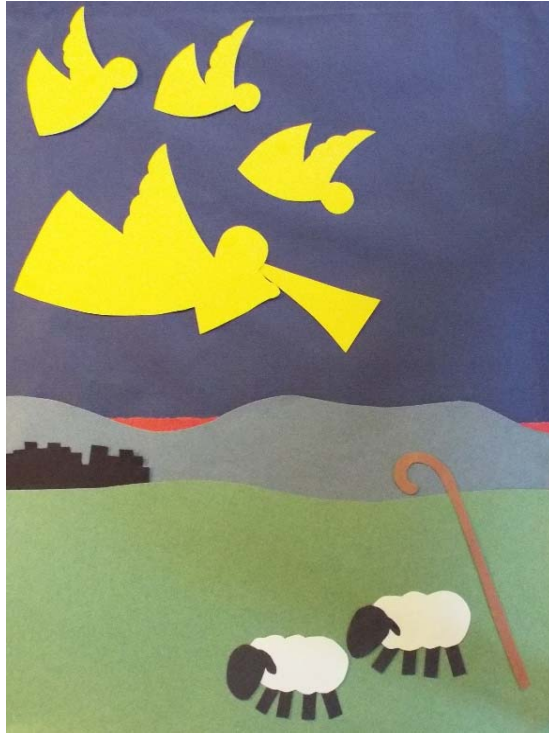


Christmas Morning 2024



Joy

The Advent Wreath and the reminders of Communion are in place.

Two panels of the triptych are open.

The candle, Love, is alight in front of the first picture.

The second candle, Joy, is in the middle of the map of the world at Bethlehem.

Welcome

Let's begin by wishing each other a joyful Christmas.

Last evening some of us were praying for the Mill Grove family and friends as we placed candles on the map of the world during Christmas Eve communion.

The first candle we lit was placed on the map where Bethlehem is located. It was labelled Love. This morning, it is on the mantelpiece in front of the first picture of the Triptych. If you look carefully, you can see a manger and a cross in the fields, under the stars near Bethlehem.

The candle on the map this morning is called Joy, and we will come to that soon.

At exactly this time on Christmas Day we know that some of the churches that have been supporting Mill Grove are celebrating Christmas in their places of worship. We remember each one with thankfulness and join them in acknowledging with joy that all good things come from our Heavenly Father. The most precious of these gifts is Jesus Christ, His dear Son, our Saviour.

A Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Our hearts and home are full of joy and expectancy as we thank you for the very first Christmas present, your gift of Jesus, your own dear Son.

We have come to adore Him. Please bless all we do today in celebration of His coming to us.

We open our lives afresh to You. May Jesus be at home in all that we do or say.

This we ask with our heartfelt thanks and love,

Amen.

A Christmas Carol

We begin our worship with a carol written especially for Christmas Day...

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
O come, let us adore Him...
Christ the Lord!

God of God, Light of Light
Lo, He abhors not the Virgin's womb
Very God
Begotten, not created
O come, let us adore Him...

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!
Glory to God
All glory in the highest
O come, let us adore Him...

Yea, Lord, we greet Thee, born this happy morning
Jesus, to Thee be glory given
Word of the Father
Now in flesh appearing
O come, let us adore Him...

Greetings

We pause to reflect on a selection of Christmas cards and greetings from family and friends, near and far including...

Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, France, India, Malaysia, The Netherlands, New Zealand, The Philippines, Portugal, Scotland, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Uganda, USA, Wales and Zambia.

Two Readings that tell of Joy

Luke 2: 1-20

There were shepherds living out in the fields nearby. It was night, and they were taking care of their sheep. An angel of the Lord appeared to them. And the glory of the Lord shone around them. They were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news. It will bring **great joy** for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord. Here is how you will know I am telling you the truth. You will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger.”

Suddenly a large group of angels from heaven also appeared. They were praising God. They said,

“May glory be given to God in the highest heaven.

And may peace be given to those he is pleased with on earth!”

The angels left and went into heaven. Then the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem. Let’s see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

So, they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby. The baby was lying in the manger. After the shepherds had seen him, they told everyone. They reported what the angel had said about this child. All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

Matthew 2: 9-11

After they had heard the king, [the Wise Men] went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, **they were overjoyed**. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Triptych Two: Joy

A Message for Christmas Day

Last night, during the communion service, we explored the first panel of the triptych, with its depiction of the manger and the cross. Taken together they help us to understand God's love. One of the names given to Jesus (by John the Baptist, in fact), was "The Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world". Following his lead, we saw how remarkable it was that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the place where lambs were reared especially as Passover sacrifices.

As we shared bread and wine together gathered around the map of the world, we remembered that Christmas is all about God's love for the whole world. He loved the world so much that He gave His only begotten Son to be the Lamb taking our sin on himself as He died on the cross. This is amazing love. Once you glimpse it, the wonderful truth takes hold of you so firmly that you can never get over it. Over time, the whole of life becomes a way of thanking God for His love and the gift of Jesus: by loving others as Jesus first loved us. Now, let's look at the second and central part of this year's triptych. (The third part must wait for tomorrow.)

It's a familiar scene with angels sounding news of joy in the night sky above the fields of Bethlehem. But there are no shepherds to be seen: perhaps they have already left to find the baby wrapped up and lying in a manger! What we can see are two sheep and a shepherd's crook or staff. If you've got very good eyesight there is a hint of the dawn, blood-red just behind the hills.

The message of the angels at the first Christmas was "good news of *mega joy*" for all people.

Sometime later, when they arrived guided by a star, the Wise Men were *overjoyed*.

Let's try to understand why there was so much joy around, by imagining what heaven is like. This is the place where everyone would love to be. People living in complete safety, happiness, harmony; never-ending relationships of tenderness and self-giving, where all wounds are healed, there are no more tears, and there is no anxiety or fear, no need to lock doors or protect your belongings, for everything is shared...

If you start to follow this line of thinking, perhaps you can guess what the predominant emotion in heaven might be: a feeling infusing everything. Let me suggest that it is Joy. Yes, a short, single word, without qualification. It was C.S. Lewis who coined the phrase: "Joy is the serious business of Heaven" (*Letters to Malcolm*, page 95).

Why might that be, I wonder? Because everything has come together:

the lost have been found, the dead are alive again, the sick are healed, the captives are free; divisions between people and nations, between rich and poor, male and female, slave and free, have been overcome; humans and animals live in harmony; there is no more war; the environment is pure, the rivers are crystal clear; all speak and sing in harmony.

This is when and where God has achieved His purposes. All are reconciled in Christ, the wounded lamb, Jesus. The One through whom all this has been made possible, is loved and worshipped by all.

It is all we could ever imagine and something we intuitively long for.

Now we have this in mind, let's think again about the angels when they appeared above the sheep near Bethlehem. Could it be that the joy of Heaven was breaking through the dark night sky, and that the shepherds found this joy coursing through their veins? This was what they had always hoped for, but until this moment, it was the stuff of fairy stories, dreams and prophecies. Their first reaction was great fear. (As a matter of interest, we don't know what the sheep made of all this. Perhaps they carried on chewing grass. Perhaps the young lambs skipped for joy.)

It didn't take long for the shepherds to realise that they were being entrusted with an astonishing message: that Heaven had come to earth in the baby Jesus! And the presence of the angels was the sign that, from that very moment on, God had made His home among us.

This was the foretaste, the revealed promise that God's Kingdom had come to earth, and the time was coming that Heaven and Earth would be reunited, and that God's will would be done on earth as in Heaven.

That was joyful news: a revelation beyond belief to the shepherds and their people who were living under the occupation of a foreign power.

And it is joyful news today when the world, if we can bear to listen to what is happening, is in many ways a sad, dark, fearful experience for hundreds of millions of people. Not only those ravaged by war, famine, poverty and disease. But those who are well-off, plagued by loneliness, anxiety and depression.

Christmas is full of joy, because in Jesus, at last we can see exactly what God is like, and His way of doing things.

With the help of the Scriptures, we can see the whole truth of God, His character and nature in this baby. He reveals His greatness in His humility. God has come among us.

Who are we? Ultimately, we are like sheep, with a herd mentality, and prone to wander and get lost. Jesus has come among us as one of us, the Lamb of God.

And God is continuing to guide and lead those sheep who will trust Him, as a shepherd, always taking us to still waters and green pastures. His crook means He can rescue us when we are lost; and can defend us when we are attacked.

Most of all Christmas means that He loves us. We are loved...with an everlasting love. Nothing can separate us from His love in Christ. God so loved the world...that He gave His only Son.

Once we get this, there can be no greater joy, except when we begin the serious business of Heaven: joy that knows neither measure, nor end!

A Poem about Joy by Isaac Watts

Joy to the world; the Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare him room,
And Heav'n and nature sing.

Joy to the earth, the Saviour reigns,
Let us our songs employ,
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains,
Repeat the sounding joy.

Prayers

*A time to share with one another what we would really like to pray on Christmas Day,
followed by two prayers to say together...*

For Ourselves

Thank You, heavenly Father, for loving us so much that you gave us the gift of Jesus your dear Son. We know that we don't deserve your love, so may we know the joy of sins forgiven right now on earth, and the certain hope of unending joy in Heaven. Amen.

For Others

May our home be a place where those who come feel the love and peace that Jesus brings. And in the year ahead, may it reflect the joy of heaven, where Jesus is loved and worshipped by all. Amen.

Advent Wreath

The candles are all lit, with the white candle in the middle representing Christmas Day.

Happy Birthday, Jesus!

A Carol for all

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 You, Lord Jesus
Look down from the sky
And stay by my side
Until morning is nigh

Be near me, Lord Jesus
I ask You to stay
Close by me forever
And love me I pray
Bless all the dear children
In Your tender care
And fit us for heaven
To live with You there

A Blessing

Heavenly Father, please grant that
the perseverance of the wise men,
the obedience of Joseph and Mary,
and the peace of the Christ child
May be ours this Christmas.

All Amen

The Grace (Together)

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all evermore. Amen.

News, Sharing and Refreshments

Please feel free to take this sheet with you as a souvenir of today.
You will find it, and other services from this and previous years,
on the Mill Grove website.
www.millgrove.org.uk