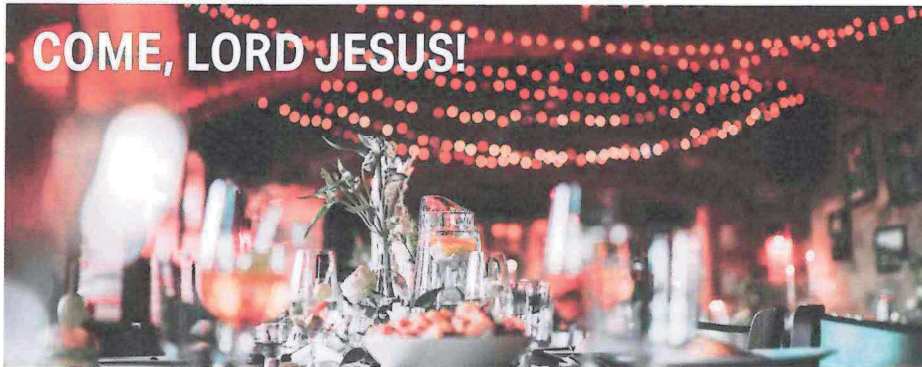


Christmas Message

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

THE WORD

Year C • 25 December 2024 • Psalter Week 4



COME, LORD JESUS!

Several years ago a young American woman called Tamara Fowler was due to get married. Two hundred guests were invited. And then, a few weeks before the big day, Tamara decided to break off her engagement. Her parents were heartbroken. They had been looking forward to the wedding, and had spent thousands of dollars planning a dinner reception at a top restaurant.

The father of the bride thought about the situation, talked it over with his wife, and prayed about it one night before going to bed. The next morning, he later said, he knew what they had to do. They decided to go ahead with the wedding dinner as planned – but not with the original guest list. Instead, they invited a different group: 200 men, women and children who were homeless. The family contacted a local homeless charity. The woman who picked up the phone later said she was so shocked, she thought it was a prank call. The Fowlers explained what they wanted to do, and that they especially wanted to help children.

And so, on the day the wedding was due to take place, buses brought dozens of needy people to one of the top wedding venues in Atlanta. Children had space outside to play. Face painters and jugglers were hired to entertain them.

The children, it transpired, had to be shown how to eat hors' d'oeuvres, how to use the right fork. They weren't used to fine china. At evening's end, the caterer was amazed. For the first time, she said, at the end of a big wedding there were no leftovers. Every plate was clean.

Those special guests were fed, but they received more than a great meal that day – they received love; they felt included; they hadn't been forgotten. That is the message of Christmas.

Christmas is a story of inclusion. Those 200 special guests felt included. Maybe for the first time in their lives, or in a long time, they felt not forgotten. They felt important. The economic and social barriers that would normally exclude them from that top venue had come down – if only for a day. All they had to do was come as they were.

And that's what Christmas tells us. God hasn't forgotten us. God has come among us, to show us how to live, to offer us hope.

It's an open invitation. It doesn't matter who we are, or what we earn, or where we live; whether we're rich or poor, young or old, black or white, gay or straight, religious or secular – the message of Christmas is that God has come for every one of us. All without exception.

Christmas is a story of vulnerability. Those 200 guests were among the most vulnerable in Atlanta – street people, people broken by substance abuse or lives gone awry. People regarded as a burden by those who passed them on the street. But that day, for just a little while, they felt special.

And that's what Christmas tells us too. God came among us as a vulnerable human being – born to an unmarried mother in a shed off a backstreet of an obscure town. A birth announced first to shepherds and goatherds. God chose to be born on the bottom of the social ladder so as to enter fully into our human experience with all its triumphs and disasters. God chose utter vulnerability so as to be able to stand alongside all of humanity, to identify with us whatever our situation. And we can turn to God whatever our situation, because God knows what it's like to be vulnerable.

Christmas is a love story. After the disappointment of the cancelled wedding, the Fowlers could have decided to cancel the reception. Instead, they invited the homeless. It was an extraordinary act of love.

And that's the message of Christmas. God didn't have to take on human form – but God did. God chose to come among us out of love to save us. In the infant in the crib, we can put a face on God. And his coming is proof of how much God loves us.

As they sat in that hotel eating great food off fine china, those homeless people must have said to themselves: "I wish it could be like this all the time." Of course, it couldn't. But they had been given a glimpse of how things could be. Our challenge is to live in such a way as to make God's presence real and tangible, by creating homes, families, and communities that are welcoming and loving.

That's the best Christmas gift any of us could give or receive. ■

REFLECT

Our challenge for this Christmas and always is this: to be Christ to others; to be Christ in our time and place, so that when people look at us, they see Christ. ■

LEARN

Christmas tells us that God hasn't forgotten us. God has come among us, as one like us, to show us the way, to show us how to live, to offer us hope.

Love is the best Christmas present we could give or hope to receive.



SAY

"O come, O come, Emmanuel."

PRAY

Ask the Lord to fill you with joy at his coming.

DO

Jesus is Emmanuel, 'God-with-us.' Make an effort to be aware of God's presence in our world today and every day.

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

*The Lord said to me: You are my Son.
It is I who have begotten you this day.*

Or

*Let us all rejoice in the Lord, for our Saviour has been born
in the world.
Today true peace has come down to us from heaven.*

COLLECT

O God, who have made this most sacred night
radiant with the splendour of the true light,
grant, we pray, that we, who have known the mysteries of his
light on earth,
may also delight in his gladness in heaven.
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING Isaiah 9:2-7

A reading from the Prophet Isaiah.

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shone.
You have multiplied the nation;
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.
For the yoke of his burden,
and the staff for his shoulder,
the rod of his oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.
For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult
and every garment rolled in blood
will be burned as fuel for the fire.
For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and of peace,
there will be no end
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and for evermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 96(95):1-2a, 2b-3, 11-12a,
12b-13b, 13cd. R. Luke 2:11

**R: Today a Saviour has been born to us;
who is Christ the Lord.**

- O sing a new song to the LORD;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.
O sing to the LORD; bless his name. **R.**
- Proclaim his salvation day by day.
Tell among the nations his glory,
and his wonders among all the peoples. **R.**
- Let the heavens rejoice and earth be glad;
let the sea and all within it thunder praise.
Let the field and all it bears rejoice. **R.**

- Then will all the trees of the wood shout for joy
at the presence of the LORD, for he comes,
he comes to judge the earth. **R.**
- He will judge the world with justice;
and the peoples with faithfulness. **R.**

SECOND READING Titus 2:11-14

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to Titus.

Beloved: The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all
people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions,
and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present
age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our
great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to
redeem us from all lawlessness, and to purify for himself a people
for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

The word of the Lord.

THANKS BE TO GOD.

ACCLAMATION BEFORE THE GOSPEL Luke 2:10-11

R: Alleluia, alleluia!

I bring you good news of great joy:
for unto us is born this day a Saviour, Christ the Lord.

R: Alleluia!

GOSPEL Luke 2:1-14

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the
world should be registered. This was the first registration when
Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered,
each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from
the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called
Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David,
to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And
while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And
she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling
cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for
them in the inn.

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field,
keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord
appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them,
and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them,
'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be
for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a
Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you
will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.'
And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly
host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on
earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!'

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

May the oblation of this day's feast
be pleasing to you, O Lord, we pray,
that through this most holy exchange
we may be found in the likeness of Christ,
in whom our nature is united to you.
Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

The Word became flesh, and we have seen his glory.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Grant us, we pray, O Lord our God,
that we, who are gladdened by participation
in the feast of our Redeemer's Nativity,
may through an honourable way of life become worthy of union
with him.
Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
Amen.