

*Pause for thought: As we begin a new year who are the prophets who challenge us and speak truth to power?
What do we not want to hear?*

Prayer:

Maranatha, come Lord Jesus.

Where there is darkness:

Give me courage to shine your Light.

Where there is despair:

May I be the voice of your Hope.

Where there is conflict:

May I be a vessel of your Peace.

Where there is poverty and deprivation:

May I be active in calling for change

that all may live in freedom,
living Life in all your fullness.

Jesus, you came to bring a new Way.

A new year, a new beginning –
may I be brave to follow your Way.

For you are the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Maranatha, come Lord Jesus.

show me the Way.

The Lord's Prayer.

Hymn: StF 476 / H&P 746 **One more step along the world I go**

May the blessing of Christ incarnate illuminate your heart with joy
and your soul with peace. **Amen**

*Our reflections for Advent and Christmas were created by Rev Jean Hudson,
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CHRISTMAS 2021 **24 December – 6 January 2022**

Christmas Eve to Epiphany

We gather in the company of the incarnate God, with angels and shepherds.

Carol: StF 193 / H&P 95 **Born in the night, Mary's Child**

We stand on the threshold.

It is a place of expectation, of hope.

Will we be made welcome, received with joy?

Will we find the door closed,

'no room at the inn'

We stand on the threshold.

The light creeps over the horizon.

Will we, in joy, make Christ welcome?

Will we forget, in our busyness,

why we are here today?

**Maranatha, come Lord Jesus,
bring Light, Hope, Life, Peace in a troubled world**

From Advent to Christmas

From darkness to light.

From uncertainty to hope.

From death to life.

From disquiet to peace.

From pregnancy to birth.

From judgement to forgiveness.

Love is born.

Maranatha, come Lord Jesus.

Prayer:

Loving, generous God, this is the day when you surprised the world, turning its values upside down as you crept in beside us as a baby. Perhaps we are so familiar with the story, that we have ceased to be surprised. Forgive us, we pray, and surprise us again with joy, mercy, and the grace that brought you to us. Through the excitement and wonder of tonight and tomorrow, may we hear the angel-song, making our own hearts sing in love and hope and thanksgiving. And through it all, may we hold in our hearts all those about whom we have heard and thought during this special season. May we be ready, with Jesus, to be changed and changed again to serve and not to count the cost. **Amen**

This a day of hope, the coming of God in Jesus - Immanuel, God with us.

On this day, we need to take time out from busyness, excitement, tiredness and anxiety about getting everything 'right' tomorrow. For on this day we enter into the poverty of Jesus' birth, his poverty that makes us rich in grace but which reflects the poverty of too many today. After a long uncomfortable journey for his mother, Jesus is born in a stable, a space reluctantly given by a busy innkeeper. The family's first visitors

shepherds, men on the edge of respectability, because their job prevents them from worshipping at the 'right' times.

It takes little imagination to match these circumstances to those of refugees and asylum seekers, (never forgetting that Joseph, Mary and Jesus were to become asylum seekers, too). After long, uncomfortable and dangerous journeys, they are detained – many women, some pregnant, and children among them – in spaces reluctantly given

We know so little of these travellers, not how many there were, exactly where they came from or how they travelled. We can guess that they stood out from the crowd.

Perhaps a caravan of travellers moved at night guided by the stars. They came from a different country. Learned men, reading the skies, alert to the signs.

They used their knowledge, gifts and wisdom to search for meaning, to follow their calling. Met with suspicion, concealed hostility, fake welcome, feigned friendship.

Azeem Rafiq moved to the UK from Pakistan. A gifted cricketer he captained Yorkshire youth and adult teams. Superficially welcomed.

Hailed now as a whistle blower, but not before being driven to the brink of suicide by the racist abuse of 'friends' in the squad. A life lived 'dreading every second'.

The magi brought gifts with special meanings. May we also see the important messages carried by unexpected messengers. Challenges to our culture, bias, prejudices. Reminders of God's all encompassing, incarnate love.

could worship, but there was something didn't quite fit. Then we found the child, and that did feel right! The gifts we had brought celebrated him - there was gold because he was a king, frankincense because he was a holy gift of God, and myrrh because we knew there would be suffering ahead. We didn't go back to Herod. Having seen Jesus, we could tell he was the beginning of something new, something very special, something in which Herod would have no place. There were prophecies about a new Kingdom, a new age, a change which would be much bigger than any revolution. We saw the start. That was very special.

Hymn: StF 227 / H&P 123 **Brightest and best of the sons of the morning**

Prayer

God, you call us to follow Jesus, to walk in his footsteps with love, healing and hope to share. Sometimes, as we have seen with Mary and Joseph, John the Baptist and the wise men, this demands radical trust, stepping out into hitherto unforeseen experiences, and we ask ourselves whether we can follow in that way. We know that it will change us, because the wholly unforeseen experience of the pandemic has changed us. Help us, we pray, to trust the love you have for us and your world. Love that has flowed through the centuries, sustaining, transforming and life-giving, will continue to enrich, enable and encourage both us and our companions on the way. May we see a new year opening up to challenges, yes, but also to an adventure shared together with Jesus. **Amen**

If you have a copy of Singing the Faith you might like to consider the words of hymn 231

by a preoccupied government.
Conditions are deplorable and about to get worse if women and children are transferred to a new immigration detention centre at Hassockfield, site of the old Medomsley Detention Centre, where unspeakable abuse was inflicted by some staff on hundreds of young men.

But peaceful protests are being held there – a prophetic sign by people of all faiths and none

**StF 197 / H&P 98 Cradled in a manger meanly*

Jesus is born

Mary and Joseph have travelled from Nazareth, Galilee to Bethlehem in Judea. It was another jurisdiction, and necessitated an arduous journey in days long before internet bookings and Air B&B!

Pause for thought - How would you feel if forced to leave home and travel without a safe place to stay? Who is the stranger who needs a welcome today?

You might like to light a candle or Christingle and watch if for a while, perhaps using the words of a song such as StF 176 Like a candle flame flickering small in our darkness.

of compassion and justice as they hold vigil and say 'No to Hassockfield'.

How we welcome the stranger, nurture the poor, open our hearts to the vulnerable is massively important as we try our best to be God's people. So let us take time out today, and read or sing again 'Cradled in a manger, meanly laid the Son of God his head.' *

**Maranatha,
come, Lord Jesus,
Word made flesh
for all the world.**

Carol: StF 217 / H&P 112 **Silent Night**

Prayer:

In our rushing and our busyness

Spirit of God, help us to listen

In our wistfulness and memories

Spirit of God, help us to smile

With family and friends or alone

Spirit of God, help us to pray

In all our circumstances

May Jesus be born again in our hearts.



CHRISTMAS DAY

Gospel Reading: [Luke 2: 1-14](#) It's a boy!

A shepherd

It had been a busy day: there were so many folk gathering into Bethlehem for the census, we had to be careful where we took the sheep, which lanes we used to get them from field to field. We thought it would get quiet once night fell, and we got settled into the camp. The crowds vanished, the sheep settled down, we settled around the campfire - then it all happened! There was a light in the sky, and music, and angels! Lots of angels! Well, I've heard stories about angels and God and things, and they're great stories, but I really didn't expect to be in the front row when it happened!! I admit, I was scared stiff. But this angel spoke, he really did, and it was such a gentle voice - he said Messiah had been born in Bethlehem. Then they all sang, and it was out of this world (well, it would be, wouldn't it?) - a promise of peace, because God was here among us. Then they went. So did we - we had to see this for ourselves. I always thought of Messiah as some sort of general or king - this baby was born in a stable, they'd got him lying in a feeding trough. Talk about humble beginnings - but I had a feeling this was the start of something big!

Carol: StF 196 / H&P 97 **Come and Join the celebration**

At a time of year when families gather, we pray today for all who find themselves parenting in unexpected circumstances.

Carol: StF 228 / H&P 125 **Hail to the Lord's anointed**

A Prayer for the new year:

At the turn of the year we give thanks for your grace in bringing us through another year of pandemic.

We thank you for the opportunities of this new day.

We look with hope to a new year

knowing that you will be with us each step of the way.

Thank you, God



EPIPHANY (6th January)

They shall bring gold and frankincense,
and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.

Isaiah 60: 6

Carol: StF 224 / H&P 121 **As with gladness men of old**

Gospel Reading: [Matthew 2:1-12](#)

A wise man

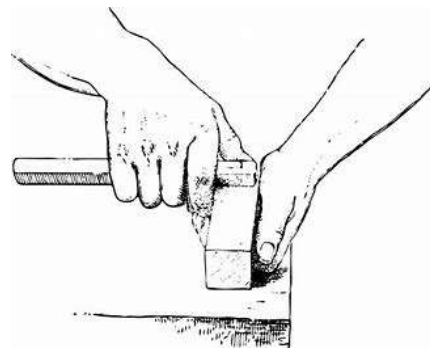
Following the signs can be difficult. There was a special star, we knew the time had come, and we knew what the prophets had said about Bethlehem, but that's an out-of-the-way place to look for a new king, so we went to Jerusalem. That was uncomfortable, to say the least. You'd have thought we were proposing some kind of revolution! Every king has to have a successor - I thought Herod would be pleased to know God had things in hand for when his time came. He said all the right things, about finding the new king so he

Gospel Readings: [Luke 2: 1-5](#); [Matthew 1: 18-25](#); [2: 13-23](#)

Joseph

I always hoped I'd be a father, and that I'd be a good one. I knew it would be a big responsibility - I didn't realise it would be so full of surprises! The news of the baby was a surprise, coming like that. The birth itself was full of surprises: men don't usually help at the birth, the women do that, but we were away from home, I was there, so I helped. Then the visitors we had were a surprise, too - and what happened afterwards. It was busy enough on the night, but it didn't stop then. Those magi, with their amazing gifts. I knew our boy was special, this was a whole new level of being special! But when they told me Herod was interested... I'm not surprised I had that dream - if it was just a dream; it felt more real than any other dream I've had. I just knew we had to get out of his reach. Egypt was a long way away, especially with a wife and baby, but we made it. We managed. I was getting used to the idea of being a father: now I had to get used to the idea of being a refugee. Thankfully Herod didn't have many years, we could go home after he died - well, Galilee was far enough away from Herod's lot. That's the most important thing for me about being a father: I wanted to find a safe home for my wife and son. So that's what I did.

Pause for thought – what is most important to you as you look ahead to a new year?



How will you shape your response to the opportunities ahead?

Reading: [Titus 2: 11-14](#); [Titus 3: 3-9](#)

None of our deserving, none of our doing;
all of God's choosing and doing, for
all is love,
all is mercy,
all is grace.

In the midst of coercion,
in the midst of noise and tumult,
Mary and Joseph
arrived in Bethlehem,
were offered a stable
outside and away
from the crowded inn,
and Mary
gave birth
to God.

Who could have dreamt it?
Who could have imagined it?
That God would come in such a way
could only have been
of God's choosing.

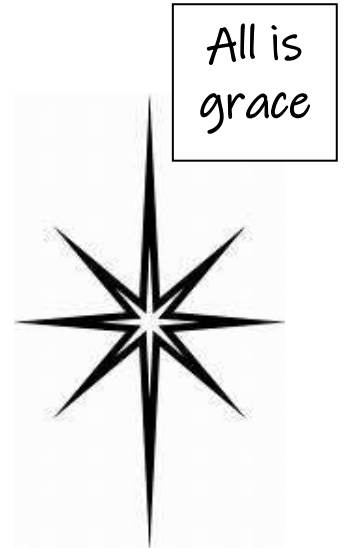
Unheralded, unassuming, unpretentious,
he came to be at one with us,
so that each and every one of us
could be blessed by his love,
however insignificant
we might feel we are.

Immanuel,
God with us – forever.

'... when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared,
he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done,
but because of his mercy.'

All is grace.

Jesus.



Carol: StF 216 / H&P 118
See him lying on a bed of straw

Gospel Reading: [Luke 2:15-21](#)



Mary

Having a first baby, you never know what to expect - especially when the first word about it came from an angel! I didn't expect it to happen away from home, I didn't expect it to happen in a stable, I certainly didn't expect the visitors we had, or the things they said! They talked about angels, and heavenly choirs - looking back on it, I was almost relieved that I wasn't the only one who'd seen angels! I knew my baby was going to be special - every baby is special, and this was my first-born, and a very special gift from God to me. But not just to me. The things those shepherds said, the things the angels had told them - my Jesus was very special. A gift not just to me (although he will always be my boy...) - a gift to the whole world. I treasured those promises, and still remember what it felt like that night. There's a very special peace settles in when you're recovering from the hard work of the birth, and the baby is lying asleep in your arms, or in what passed for a crib. A lot of things have happened since that night, I've told the story a few times. It all came together, not always as I expected - I didn't really know what to expect. Just that God was doing something special, that my Jesus was his special gift to us. All of us.

Pause for thought – what do you want to thank God for today?

CHRISTMAS WEEK

Joseph

I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.

Joel 2: 28

Carol: StF 190 / H&P 92 **Angels from the realms of glory**

This week, between the festival days, we consider Joseph. Before we turn to the gospel record I wonder how you think of him?

Joseph finds himself thrust into a drama that was not of his making or choosing. Does that sound familiar at the end of 2021?

An everyday carpenter who suddenly finds himself part of a much bigger story. Joseph hears God while he sleeps.

We have all been unexpected participants in a global pandemic. *How have we heard God speaking to us? How have we responded?*

Prayer:

God-with-us, we will never forget these last 2 years of onset, lockdowns, aftermath, vaccinations. We look back through loss, fear, pain, loneliness – all kinds of disquiet and disruption. How have we heard you? Where have we met you? In quiet reflection and prayer, maybe. In zoom services and Bible study, maybe. But mostly, you have met with us and touched our lives through acts of kindness, that under-stated sign of your presence, of the kingdom. From newly connected neighbours; from people serving in food banks; from community groups, pubs and restaurants who have provided take-away meals; from people who have driven us where we needed to go. We have been thankful for them. A gift from you – such love, shining in our darkness. May we always value kindness, given and received, even as life regains some familiarity. The fruits of the Spirit are, love, joy, peace, kindness...Thank you.

Prayer:

Gracious and loving God, thank that you will stay with us through any feelings of anti-climax now that the big day is over. May your Spirit keep our hearts singing through weariness, loneliness, anxiety, busyness – singing gently and quietly in hope and thankfulness. The passing of Christmas heralds a new beginning for love as we walk and talk and live with Jesus. Please give us grace to listen as he calls us to make changes to our lives that will mirror his humility and his wholesale commitment to our world. Forgive us when we hesitate and keep us trusting in your light.

Amen

Carol: StF 210 / H&P 105 **Love came down at Christmas**

As the future beckons,

Creator God, may we see your love for our planet

As the days grow longer and the sun becomes warmer

Jesus, may we see your light around and ahead of us

As new life stirs in the earth's darkness

Holy Spirit, may we feel your energy lifting us into hope

As we sing and walk towards a new year,

Trinity of community, bind us together in steadfastness

Prayer:

Jesus, Saviour, Word made flesh, we welcome you among us, within us, around us, beside us – as we celebrate, as we sing; as we yearn for lost loved ones, as we sit alone and pray; as we busy ourselves, as we rest. The greatest gift coming into our world with joy, comfort, strength, forgiveness and hope, we welcome you. Our hope for our lives, for our world and for our planet, we welcome you. May we recognise you each and every day, unassuming, unpretentious, unheralded among those who need you – and us – the most. Draw us, we pray into your momentum of grace moment by moment. Thank you, Jesus, for coming and being, dwelling and remaining in the world we share with you. **Amen**

Carol: StF 202 / H&P 106 **Hark the herald-angels sing**

[BOXING DAY](#)

[The heart of Christmas](#)

We offer our praises to the incarnate God:

Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD from the heavens;

praise him in the heights!

Praise him, all his angels;

praise him, all his host!

Psalm 148:1-2

Carol: StF 206 / H&P 107 **In the bleak mid winter**

Readings: Children show the way

[1 Samuel 2: 18-20, 26](#) and [Luke 2: 41-52](#)

Boxing Day is traditionally a children's day and the readings from 1 Samuel and Luke show us how children lead the way, as they are doing across the world in urging us to reclaim our planet. We ignore the prophetic voices of children at our peril.

Children are still
at the heart of Christmas
advertising
even though families
now have many different shapes;
even though many people
are separated from their children;
even though many
have no children
& many live alone.
Christmas songs & publicity
are sentimental,
harking back to a past time
that was simply different.
On this day, however,
maybe with time for deeper
thought,
let's consider how
children can teach us
about living in our world -
with openness & curiosity,
vitality & energy;
passion & commitment
to family & pets,
friends & football;
eager to learn about the world,
wanting the earth to be cared for
by adults who are
not doing enough
to counter climate change.
Samuel was a child
when God called him,
to become a king-maker in Israel.

Jesus was a child when
Mary & Joseph nurtured him
to notice the world around him,
a world of farmers & managers,
Pharisees & tax collectors,
fishermen & rabbis,
fig trees & cornfields,
builders & shepherds,
bakers & merchants.
And it was all stored away
for a future in parables.

What do children learn from us?
Let it not be cruelty,
but kindness,
let it not be pride,
but generosity,
let it not be negligence,
but thoughtfulness
for each other, our communities,
our planet
with all its diversity,
promise & provision.
We need to embrace
how Jesus welcomed children,
made their wellbeing of
primary importance,
and significantly said
that if we do not
become as children,
we will not enter
the kingdom.

So let us listen to them,
not in a patronising way
but open to their wisdom;
not reluctantly
but open to their urging;
not as a desperate measure
but eagerly wanting to provide
for their future.

Maranatha,
come, Lord Jesus.
May we hear your voice
in the children
of the world.

*If you have a copy of Singing the Faith you might like to reflect on
the words of 222 'Who would think, despite derision, that a child
might lead the way?'*

**Maranatha,
come, Lord Jesus.
May we hear your voice
in the children
of the world.**

Carol: StF 214 / H&P 114 **Once in royal David's city**