



Christmas Eve The Nativity of our Lord

The readings focus on the seemingly ordinary theme of God's coming to us in Christ. However, the key issue in this coming, is in our capacity to see it, to recognise it, to appropriate it and to make it seen. The surprise, perhaps, of this celebration – that should keep us open-minded and open hearted, and constantly mindful and aware – is that it was the most unlikely people who got to see the birth of Christ, and the expected ones who missed it completely.

May our eyes and be opened to see again for the first time (to borrow a phrase from Marcus Borg) the power of the incarnation for us and our world.

INTRODUCTIONS

For use by lectors, in order of service, parish bulletins and magazines

SET I

Isaiah 9 : 2-7

The bible readings in Advent have prepared us to celebrate the coming of the Lord. His people longed for him, and we know the joy of living with him here and now. So, we understand Isaiah's prophecy as greeting the birth of a child whose new kingdom of righteousness will last forever.

The Psalm - Psalm 96

A song of praise for God's greatness and glory, anticipating God's coming as righteous judge.

Titus 2 : 11-14

The new morning of the world has dawned, says this writer. As we learn how to live in this bright new light, in gratitude for the first coming of Jesus who has made us his own, we await the greater glory when Christ will come again.

Luke 2 : 1-14, 15-20

Luke, the master storyteller, gives us pictures we shall never forget, of the humble birth at Bethlehem of the Saviour of the world, and the shining glory which brought shepherds to worship the Lamb of God.

[Click here to view the readings](#)

http://bible.oremus.org/?show_adj=no&passages=%0AIsaiah%209:%202-7%0Acw%20Psalm%2096%0ATitus%202:%2011-14%0ALuke%202:%201-14,%2015-20

COLLECTS OF THE DAY

The Nativity of our Lord (Night)

Collect One

O God,
who madest this most holy night
to shine with the brightness of his coming,
who is the light of the world;
Grant that we who on earth hail the brightness of his appearing
may rejoice hereafter in the light of his heavenly glory;
who with thee and the Holy Spirit,
liveth and reigneth, one God, now and for ever.

Collect Two

Eternal God,
who made this most holy night
to shine with the brightness of your one true light:
Bring us, who have known the revelation
of that light on earth,
to see the radiance of your heavenly glory;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 1

In holy joy, we bow at the manger of the Christ Child and offer our prayers and thanksgivings saying, "Lord, in your mercy," and responding, "Hear our prayer."

Christmas Eve YEAR B December 24th, 2017

Jesus, splendour of the Father, born of the virgin Mary, come in your gentleness and rule your Church. Smile on our bishop _____, and all the clergy and the faithful who are awaiting great and abundant blessing,
Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer!

Jesus, Prince of peace, friend of all, our refuge, grant light to the nations and wisdom to the leaders of the nations that all may live peaceful and secure lives and that your universal Church may prosper.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer!

Jesus, brother of the poor, treasure of the faithful, as we celebrate the feast of your birth, open our hearts to one another. May there be a place at the table of your generosity for all.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer!

Jesus, joy of the angels, light of all witnesses to the truth, crown of the saints, care for those who suffer illness, are facing death and are longing for your face, and

those who mourn _____.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer!

Jesus, Good Shepherd, true light, boundless love, grant us peace to share with one another as sisters and brothers in you, consecrating our lives to your praise and to serving our neighbours.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer!

Jesus, Son of the living God, may all our desires find fulfilment in you, be our strength and our song. **Amen.**

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 2

As we join the angels and celebrate with joy the birth of the Son of God, let us offer prayers to God who gives new birth to sons and daughters in every place.

By the birth of the timeless Son of God in the womb of the Virgin Mary.
Glory and praise to you, O living God.

Christmas Eve YEAR B December 24th, 2017

For *N* our bishop and the presbyters, for the deacons and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For all believers who put their trust in the incarnate Son of God.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For the leaders of the nations and all in authority, and for peace and justice.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For the conversion of the whole human race to our blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For travelers, for the sick and the suffering, for the hungry and the oppressed, for those in prison, and for the dying and the dead.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For our deliverance from all affliction, strife, and need.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

Remembering our most glorious and blessed Virgin Mary, *N*, and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ.

To you, O Lord.

Source of light and gladness, accept the prayers we offer on this joyful feast. May we grow in Jesus Christ who unites our lives to yours and who is Lord for all eternity; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

POST COMMUNION

The Nativity of our Lord (Night)

God our Father,
in this night you have made known to us again
the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:
Confirm our faith and fix our eyes on him
until the day dawns
and Christ the Morning Star rises in our hearts.
To him be glory both now and for ever.

PRAYERS

O Holy One,
heavenly angels spoke to earthly shepherds
and eternity entered time in the child of Bethlehem.
Through the telling of the Christmas story,
let our temporal lives be caught up in the eternal

in that same child,
that we might join shepherds and all the heavenly host
in praising the coming of Jesus Christ, our Saviour. **Amen.**

God of glory,
your splendour shines from a manger in Bethlehem,
where the Light of the world is humbly born
into the darkness of human night.
Open our eyes to Christ's presence in the shadows of our world,
so that we, like him, may become beacons of your justice,
and defenders of all for whom there is no room. **Amen.**

Light of life, you came in flesh,
born into human pain and joy,
and gave us power to be your children.
Grant us faith, O Christ, to see your presence among us,
so that all of creation may sing new songs of gladness
and walk in the way of peace. **Amen.**

We bless you, Abba, Father,
for you have visited your people
in one like us in all things but sin,
and in human fragility you have revealed
the face of divinity.
Gather into your arms
all the peoples of the world,
so that in your embrace
we may find blessing, peace,
and the fullness of our inheritance
as your daughters and sons. **Amen.**

With the angels of heaven we proclaim your glory, O God.
As the radiance of your presence lights up the heavens,
we pray for enlightenment
for your church on behalf of the whole world.
Grant that, through our prayers,
our lives may radiate the presence of Christ
to all who dwell on earth,
for he is our Lord for ever and ever. **Amen.**

God of all ages,
in the birth of Christ

your boundless love for your people
shattered the power of darkness.
Be born in us with that same love and light,
that our song may blend with all the choirs of heaven and earth
to the glory of your holy name. **Amen.**

O God, giver of all good gifts, at this time of the giving and the receiving of
gifts, help us to remember that Jesus said: It is more blessed to give than to
receive. And put into our hearts that love which knows that true happiness
comes from making others happy, and true wealth from sharing all we have:
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

God of shepherds and sheep, thank you for tending us especially when we
stray. Glory be to you and to all people on this earth. **Amen**

Lord God Almighty, Father of every family, against whom no door can be shut:
Enter into the homes of our land, we beseech thee, with the angel of thy
presence, to hallow them in pureness and beauty of love; and by thy dear
Son, born in a stable, move our hearts to hear the cry of the homeless, and to
convert all sordid and bitter dwellings into households of thine: through Jesus
Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Lord Jesus, we remember that you were born into the world on the first
Christmas Day.

Help us to remember, that you were born in a stable and cradled in a manger,
and so keep us from coveting a wealth, a comfort, an ease, and a luxury
which you never enjoyed.

Help us to remember, that there was no room for you in the inn, and grant
that our lives may never become so crowded that there is no room in them for
you.

Help us to remember, that to you there came the Shepherds and the Wise
Men, and grant that learned and simple, high and humble great and small
may be joined together in worshipping and in loving you.

Help us to remember that you grew up in an ordinary home, and went school,
and worked in a carpenter's shop, and so grant that we may think no task too
humble and too common for our hands to touch, when you, the Lord of Glory,
lived amidst the common things.

Help us to remember, that you were obedient to your parents, and that you grew in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man, and so help us to honour our father and mother, to discipline our bodies, and to live in such a way that we will gain the respect of our fellowmen, and gladden the heart of our father in heaven. **Amen.**

The Light Has Come

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. • Isaiah 7:14

The Light Has Come
Lord of the dawn,
where your people live in darkness
let your light sweep in.

Lord of the noon,
where your people are dazzled by evil
let your light sweep in.

Lord of the evening,
where your people fear the night
let your light sweep in.

Lord of the night,
where your people pray for morning
let your light sweep in.

Lord of our lives,
as we grow into a new year of hopes and possibilities
let your light sweep in.

~Melanie Frew

In peace let us pray to the Lord.
Father, in this holy night your Son our Saviour
was born in human flesh.
Renew your Church as the Body of Christ.
Holy God
hear our prayer.

In this holy night there was no room for your Son in the inn.

Protect with your love those who have no home
and all who live in poverty.

Holy God

hear our prayer.

In this holy night Mary, in the pain of labour,
brought your Son to birth.

Hold in your hand [...and] all who are in pain or distress.

Holy God

hear our prayer.

In this holy night your Christ came as a light shining in the darkness.
Bring comfort to [...and] all who suffer in the sadness of our world.

Holy God

hear our prayer.

In this holy night the angels sang, 'Peace to God's people on earth.'
Strengthen those who work for peace and justice
in [...and in] all the world.

Holy God

hear our prayer.

In this holy night shepherds in the field heard good tidings of joy.
Give us grace to preach the gospel of Christ's redemption.

Holy God

hear our prayer.

In this holy night strangers found the Holy Family,
and saw the baby lying in the manger.

Bless our homes and all whom we love.

Holy God

hear our prayer.

In this holy night heaven is come down to earth,
and earth is raised to heaven.

Hold in your hand [...and] all those who have passed through death
in the hope of your coming kingdom.

Holy God

hear our prayer.

In this holy night Christians the world over celebrate Christ's birth.
Open our hearts that he may be born in us today.

Holy God
hear our prayer.

Father, in this holy night angels and shepherds worshipped at the manger throne. Receive the worship we offer in fellowship with Mary, Joseph and the saints through him who is your Word made flesh, our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Christmas Blessings

May there be harmony in all your relationships. May sharp words, envious thoughts, and hostile feelings be dissolved.

May you give and receive love generously. May this love echo in your heart like the joy of church bells on a clear December day.

May each person who comes into your life be greeted as another Christ. May the honour given the Babe of Bethlehem be that which you extend to every guest who enters your presence.

May the hope of this sacred season settle in your soul. May it be a foundation of courage for you when times of distress occupy your inner land.

May the wonder and awe that fills the eyes of children be awakened within you. May it lead you to renewed awareness and appreciation of whatever you too easily take for granted.

May the bonds of love for one another be strengthened as you gather with your family and friends around the table of festivity and nourishment.

May you daily open the gift of your life and be grateful for the hidden treasures it contains.

May the coming year be one of good health for you. May you have energy and vitality. May you care well for your body, mind and spirit.

May you keep your eye on the Star within you and trust this Luminescent Presence to guide and direct you each day.

May you go often to the Bethlehem of your heart and visit the One who offers you peace. May you bring this peace into our world.

May our lives and our prayers be like lights shining in dark places.
And may the Blessing of God –
Father, Son and Holy Spirit –
fill our hearts and homes
with light this Christmas and in the new year to come.

LECTIONARY NOTES

REFLECTIONS ON THEME:

The message for Christmas is clear and simple: in Christ, God comes to us. There are so many ways this can be – and has been – understood: God's presence is not far off, but close and accessible; those who are first involved in this coming are poor and excluded people – shepherds, women, and foreigners – which demonstrates God's commitment to justice. But, perhaps at the heart of all this is the question of seeing. Isaiah calls Ahaz to 'see' God's work – God's light shining in the darkness – on behalf of God's people. The Psalmist invites all the earth and all peoples to see God's glory and majesty, to recognise God's coming in justice and righteousness and to respond in praise; Paul encourages followers of Christ to see God's grace that has come, and to live it out as we watch for the coming of God's reign in fullness; The shepherds are invited to see the Christ child, and in this event, see God's coming to them and to all humanity. If God comes, but we are not open to the visitation, if we have closed eyes and hearts, the coming can do nothing for us. However, when we allow our eyes to be opened, we discover God's coming in every moment and place.

CONNECTING WITH LIFE:

GLOBAL APPLICATION: A significant part of the work of justice is a commitment to seeing – as clearly and truly as possible – both the realities of our world, and the injustices in it, and the signs of change, progress and God's reign that are emerging. It is only with this seeing that we can encourage, support and strengthen the good that is happening and effectively challenge the darkness. So, in the growing concern about climate change and our dependence on non-renewable sources of energy, there is a light shining in the darkness. In the growing groups within faith communities of those who seek inter-faith dialogue and understanding rather than conflict and dominance, there is a sign of God's coming. In the rise of social entrepreneurship, we see God's grace at work in our world. In the growth of fair trade movements, ethical consumerism, and sustainable and humane farming, there is light in our world. All of these are signs of God's coming – the influence and growth of God's reign – among us. Each offers us the opportunity to cooperate with what God is doing in our world. And each also

Christmas Eve YEAR B December 24th, 2017

offers the challenge to continue to assess our lives against Christ's standard, and to change to embody the Gospel where necessary.

LOCAL APPLICATION: God's coming into our world, miraculously, is not just to communities, nations and the whole earth, but also to individuals. In each of our lives we have the opportunity to see God's coming, and we have the responsibility to acknowledge the places where we have resisted or ignored God's desire to enter our lives. Where we find ourselves growing more aware of God's presence and purpose in our daily routines, where we discover new capacities for compassion, humility, simplicity and joy, where we find ourselves becoming more whole in spite of the struggles of living in this world, we have seen God's coming to us. Where we remain stuck in destructive attitudes and habits, where we continue to allow our selfishness and fear to break down relationships, where we fail to allow our eyes to be opened to God's image in others, we have failed to welcome the Christ Child into our lives. Ultimately, what the incarnation tells us, dramatically and powerfully, is that Christ came not just to get us into heaven, but to bring heaven to this earth. To the extent that our lives reflect this heaven – to the extent that we become more Christ-like and just in our own daily lives – we are the blessed ones to whom God has, once again, come.

SERMON STARTER - based on the Gospel reading from Luke

She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

We read this story of the birth of Jesus time after time and year after year and still we discover new truths about our God and our faith. Take this simple statement, 'because there was no room for them in the inn.' In one sense it is just a descriptive note, but in another sense it is penetrative comment upon the fact that when Jesus was born nobody made room. There was loads of room in the inn at Bethlehem on the famous night. There were many other people who could have spent the night in the cave or the stable, or wherever it was that Jesus was born. We would expect that a mother about to give birth would take a high priority over most other people. But the point is that nobody would make room. Mary was just not important enough to make people loose their room and go to the inconvenience. You can imagine the comments directed towards the young pregnant teenager, 'it's her own fault', 'she's brought it on herself,' and 'we all have to take responsibility for our own actions.' She was just another example of the undeserving poor. Would we have behaved any differently?

How do we react when we hear of the plight of the other Mary's of this world. The story challenges each one of us to be different. The Christmas challenge to us all is that we have to make room for those in need. Jesus takes his place alongside the rejected and the despised, the weak and the vulnerable. That is the message of the Christmas story, are we prepared to do the same?

People look at the nativity stories and ask 'are they true?' On one level people have raised all sorts of questions as to whether pieces of the nativity events really happened. The truth is that we will never know the exact historical details and we do have to be careful about filling in the gaps with our own ideas - something which perhaps the church has done with the added information about Mary and the Magi. But whatever misgivings we might have about the nativity stories, the truth of the message which they convey should never be in doubt. As Christians these stories are true for us and they remain as a challenge to us for all time.

Children need to be told that we have a Saviour who was God made flesh, who chose to be born in the muck of the stable not the comfort of a royal palace. The Christmas story is a message that Jesus is involved in our ordinary lives and it is also a challenge to each one of us that we have to make room.

In our reading we also read the story of the shepherds. We tend to think of shepherds as decent country sorts, looking after sheep. But these were not valued members of the community. They were unclean in terms of their way of life and also spiritually. They were not able to keep the Jewish laws and they were despised and looked down upon. Yet the nativity stories, tell us that these were the people who were told about Jesus first!

You might not believe in flying angels with wings, but what you cannot get away from is the fact that, right from the start, the stories of Jesus show that God goes out of his way to invite the very ones which society disapproves of. God has a special place for the waifs and strays, God cares most for those we do not make room for.

We are told that the angels told the shepherds, the angels are messengers of God, the point is that God spoke directly to the hearts of ordinary folk, with no religious or community prestige.

Luke knew that God did that when Jesus was born and he wanted the reader of his Gospel to know that this was how God operated.

Luke knew that you didn't have to be rich and famous, his Gospel was full of this teaching that everybody mattered.

So today we have to be God's angels. To us the task is given to proclaim the message of the birth of Jesus in word and deed. The uncomfortable truth is that Jesus has told us that we have an opportunity to do that every day of our lives. When we care for the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, those without the necessities of life, the sick. We care for Jesus. When we show kindness to those in need, or those whom society overlooks or despises. We show kindness to Jesus. The message of Bethlehem and the first Christmas is just as important today as it ever was, the big question is 'what will be our response?'

Out of all the:
beautiful houses
Well-to-do families
Professionals in Bethlehem
Families of the Pharisees
Beautiful girls in Judea
Richest cities in the world
Jesus was born
In a cattle shed
To a poor, insignificant but obedient family
To a carpenter named Joseph
And a young woman, Mary
In Bethlehem

May your Holy Spirit enable us to realise that your birth indicates that our mission involves working with the:

Marginalised
Destitute
Forgotten
Aids victims
Widows and orphans
And untouchables
Whatever we do to the least of his brethren

**[ONLINE SERMON SOURCES &
CHILDRENS' TALKS- see separate Christmas sermons post on this site](#)**

Please commend this resource to colleagues - to obtain passwords and to receive notifications of postings they simply send an email to churchnewsireland@gmail.com with the message 'Passwords' in the title